



Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile

February 2026

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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We are grateful to everyone who has provided updated information and statistics during the production of this edition.

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Introduction

As the 2026 edition of the Bromley Briefings went to press, the government's Sentencing Act was completing its passage through parliament. The act is one of the most significant pieces of criminal justice legislation in the past two decades and takes forward a number of recommendations of the Independent Sentencing Review, chaired by the former justice secretary and PRT trustee David Gauke, to reduce demand on prisons and address the prison capacity crisis.

This edition underlines the urgent need for these measures to ease the pressure on our critically over-burdened prisons. It paints a bleak picture of current treatment and conditions, with indicators on safety, use of force, purposeful activity and overcrowding all deteriorating significantly in the past two years. In 2024–25, almost three-quarters of prisons (72%) in England and Wales were overcrowded—a nine percentage point increase on the previous year. Almost half of prisons (49%) were judged to have concerning or seriously concerning performance by HM Prisons and Probation Service, a notable increase from 42% the previous year.

The Sentencing Act aims to reduce demand by an estimated 7,500 places through measures including increased use of deferred and suspended sentences, the regularisation of release points on standard determinate sentences, and reforms to recall. Alongside the legislation, the government's prison building program aims to deliver an additional 14,000 places by 2031. It is hoped that, as the provisions in the act are introduced and more capacity comes on stream, it will create the bandwidth for the prison service to focus on much needed improvement.

But even with this reduction, the population is still predicted to increase by an additional 2,000 people by 2029.

For while many of the provisions of the act are welcome, it fails to tackle sentence inflation at the serious end of offending as a primary cause of the growing prison population. Homicide law was excluded from the terms of the sentencing review and is currently subject to a separate investigation by the Law Commission. But a particular concern is the exclusion of prisoners serving an Extended Determinate Sentence from the legislation; this group now accounts for over one in seven of the sentenced prison population and is rapidly growing.

Furthermore, while the act includes welcome measures to increase opportunities for people serving IPP sentences in the community to have their licences terminated, it does nothing to address the injustice faced by just under 1,000 IPP prisoners who have never been released.

Proposals to address worrying levels of racial disproportionality in the justice system and provision to tackle the significant problems in the youth estate are also absent from the legislation. A much-needed review of youth sentencing policy is promised in the coming year.

The government has accepted it must turn towards the community rather than solely building more prisons. Measures in the legislation to increase the uptake of effective community alternatives should mean fewer people are sent to prison to serve short sentences, which have among the highest reoffending rates. Most women sent to prison are serving sentences of less than 12 months, and should benefit from the increased emphasis on community solutions. But a significant challenge lies in ensuring the probation service is adequately equipped for the additional numbers under community supervision. After a decade of badly managed reform, the service is dealing with poor performance, staff shortages, and escalating caseloads.

The number of recalls has risen sharply, reaching over 40,000 in the year to June 2025—a 32% rise on the previous year. While recalls can be necessary, they are often the result of support failures or risk-averse reactions from an under-resourced system. The government has committed to recruiting an extra 1,300 probation officers and additional investment of up to £700m in the service by 2028. But, in addition to sustained investment, the service will require a combination of structural reforms and operational changes to reduce caseloads, if it is to improve its performance and rise to the opportunity of a more community-based justice system.

In meeting this challenge, there are positive trends the government can build upon. The past year has seen a significant increase in the number of people receiving a mental health treatment requirement as part of a community order, suggesting that efforts by government to increase the uptake of these effective disposals are starting to bear fruit. The numbers of men and women sent to prison for drug offences has also declined.

The Sentencing Act will not fix all the manifold problems in our prison and probation service. But with sustained political will and investment, it could be the start of a journey towards a more effective and humane justice system.

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.
Extended licence	Certain sentences impose supervision beyond the end of a person’s sentence, with further sanctions imposed for non-compliance.

Community sentences

Community sentences are different to custodial sentences. They impose any number of 16 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 The Sentencing Act 2026 added four new requirements.³

Legend

Suspended sentence	Custodial period of sentence	Part of custodial period spent on licence following discretionary release	Part of custodial period spent on licence following automatic release	Extended licence period
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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—the Sentencing Act 2026 extends this to three years.⁴ 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.⁵

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 Act 2020, schedules 9 and 10.
3 Sentencing Act 2026, s14–17.
4 Sentencing Act 2026, s2.
5 Sentencing Council (n.d.). Imposition of community and custodial sentences. Accessed 27 January 2026.

Custodial sentences: Standard determinate

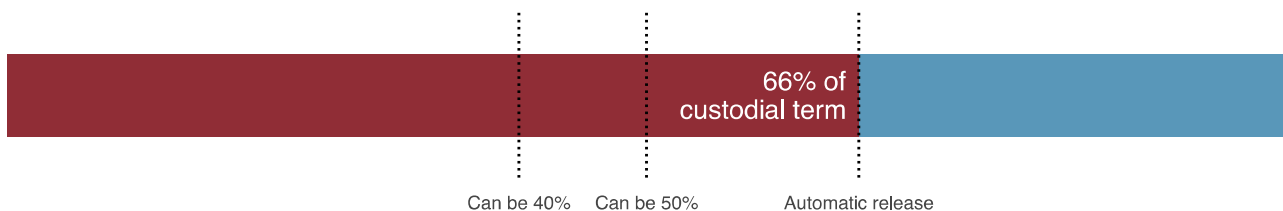
Standard determinate prison sentences have a set length, and an automatic release date in most circumstances. The length is based on the offence and certain personal and offence-related factors. Many people are automatically released after serving 40% of their sentence, except people convicted of certain sexual, violent, domestic abuse, terrorism and national security offences.⁶ All serve the remainder under supervision by the Probation Service. If they breach their licence conditions, they can be recalled to prison for the rest of their sentence.⁷ The Sentencing Act 2026 will amend the release point to 33% in some cases, but on the basis of ‘good behaviour’.⁸

Standard determinate sentences for less serious offences



People serving standard determinate sentences of four years or more are released after serving two-thirds of 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 or 40% point—depending on their offence.⁹

Standard determinate sentences for more serious offences



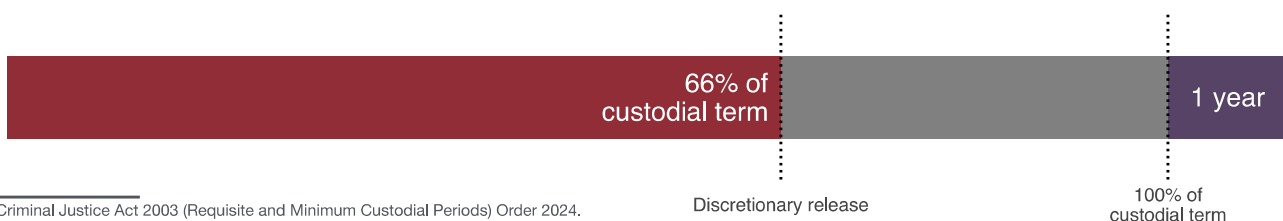
People serving a standard determinate sentence for terror offences are not automatically released. They are assessed by the Parole Board instead, who make a judgement about whether it is safe to release them.¹⁰ As of 2022, anyone serving a standard determinate sentence can have their automatic early release prevented if they become a significant public protection concern. They are instead referred to the Parole Board.¹¹



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’ (SOPC). They prevent automatic early release, with discretionary release considered by the Parole Board at the two-thirds point instead, and an additional year of supervision on licence at the end of the full custodial period is added.¹² The Sentencing Act 2026 extended eligibility for this sentence to include national security offences.¹³

Based on a custodial term of 10 years (the average term of a SOPC in 2024)



⁶ The Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Requisite and Minimum Custodial Periods) Order 2024.

⁷ Sentencing Council (n.d.), Determinate prison sentences. Accessed 13 January 2026.

⁸ Sentencing Act 2026, s23.

⁹ Sentencing Council (n.d.), Determinate prison sentences. Accessed 12 February 2024.

¹⁰ Terrorist Offenders (Restriction of Early Release) Act 2020, s1.

¹¹ Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Act (2022), s132.

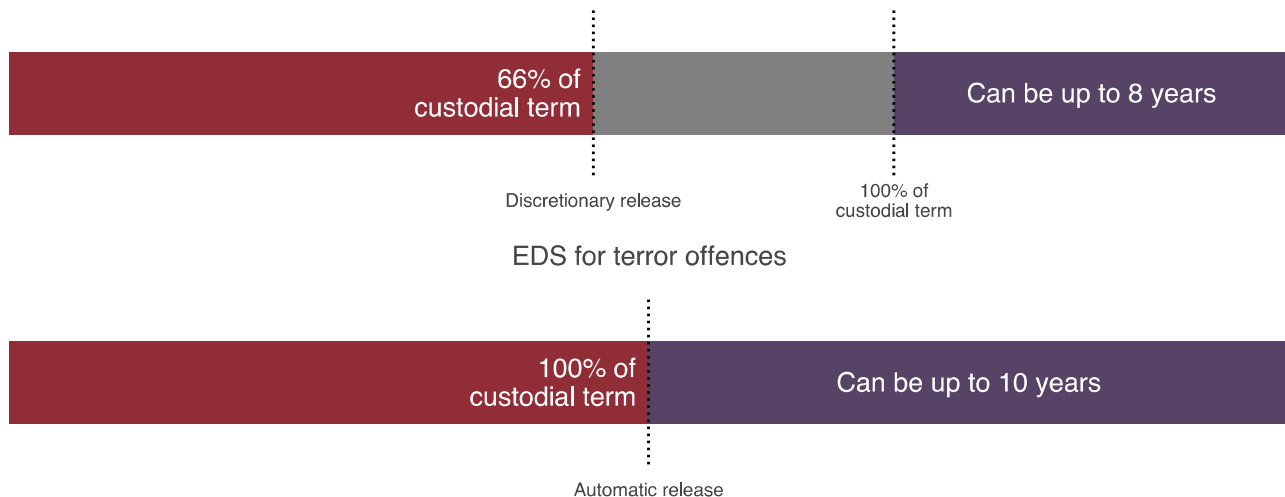
¹² Judicial College (2023), The Crown Court compendium part II: Sentencing.

¹³ Sentencing Act 2026, s7.

Custodial sentences: Extended determinate

Extended determinate sentences (EDS) are longer sentences with additional public protection measures. People serving EDS are 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 concludes it is safe to do so. They serve the rest of their custodial term supervised by the Probation Service, and have an additional period of up to eight years on licence imposed by their judge.^{14,15} People serving an EDS for certain terror offences must now serve their full custodial term in prison and up to 10 years on extended licence.¹⁶

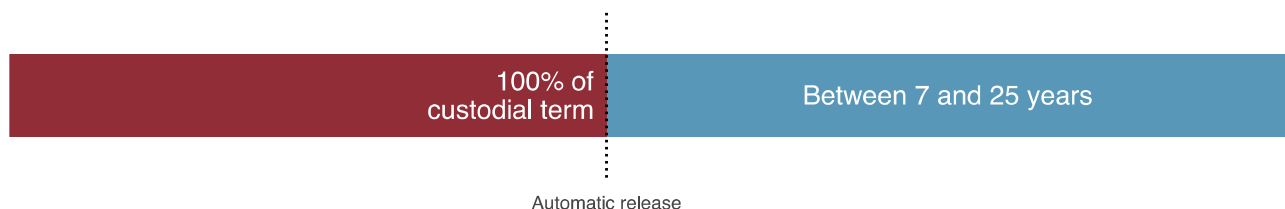
Based on a custodial term of 9 years (the average term in 2024)
and an extended licence period of 4 years (half of the maximum allowable)



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.¹⁷

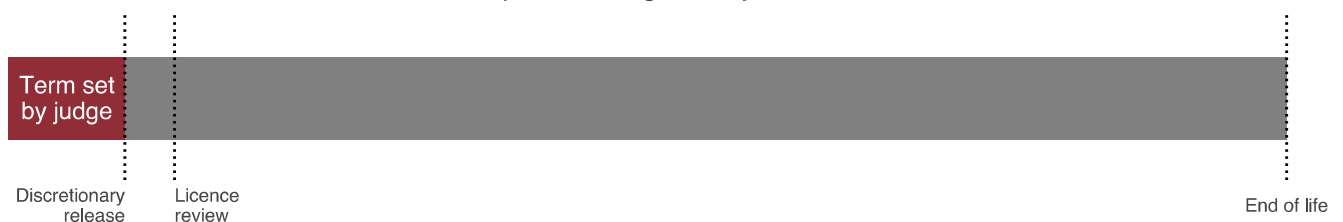
Based on a custodial term of 14 years (the set period)
and an extended licence period of 16 years



Custodial sentences: Imprisonment for public protection (IPP)

People serving an IPP sentence have a minimum term they must spend in prison (a tariff) based on their crime. They are then detained 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, and may be recalled for an indefinite period. The Parole Board may lift their licence two years after release or leave it in place¹⁸ (reduced from three years in 2026).¹⁹ IPP was abolished in 2012, but over 2,400 people are still in prison, despite an inquiry describing the sentence as “irredeemably flawed.”²⁰

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



¹⁴ Sentencing Academy (n.d.). Extended sentences. Accessed 13 January 2026.

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act 2021, s16–18, s20, s27–s28 and s31.

¹⁷ Counter-Terrorism and Sentencing Act 2021, s4–7.

¹⁸ Sentencing Academy (n.d.). Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences. Accessed 13 January 2026.

¹⁹ Sentencing Act 2026, s42.

²⁰ House of Commons Justice Committee (2022). IPP sentences. HC 266. House of Commons.

Custodial sentences: Mandatory life sentences

Mandatory life sentences must always be imposed for murder. All life sentences (except Whole Life Orders) 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 expired they must be detained indefinitely in prison until the Parole Board decides they can be safely managed in the community. Once released, 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.²¹

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 terror offences (discretionary life sentence), and when a person is convicted of a second serious offence (automatic life sentence). Certain other legal provisions also apply, including offence seriousness, dangerousness of the perpetrator, and pattern of previous offending.²²

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

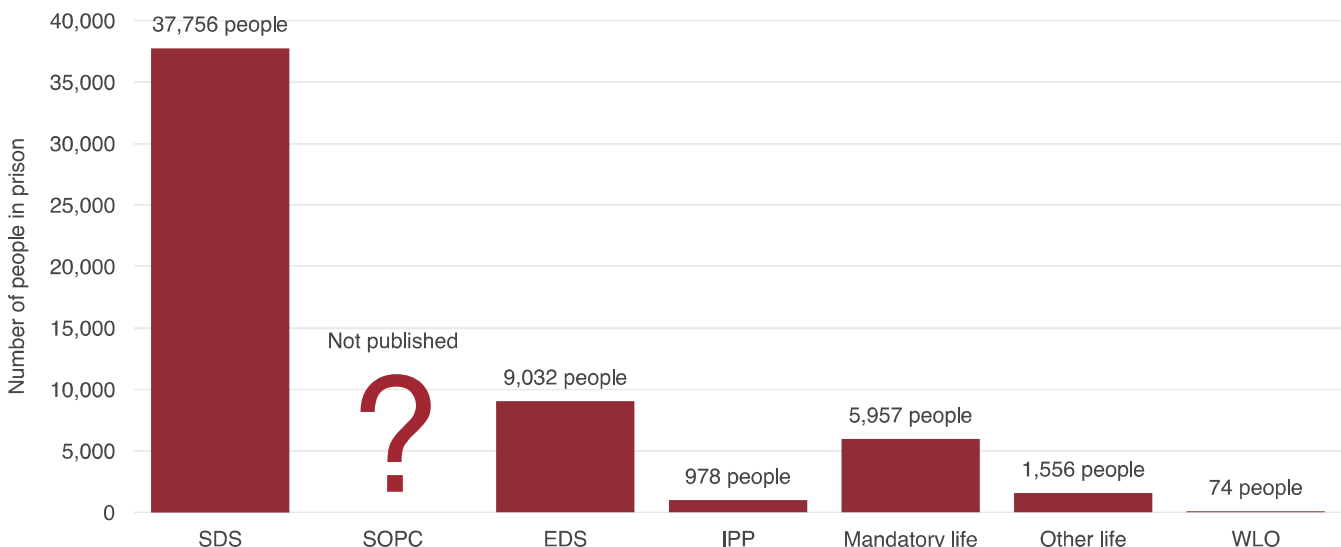


Custodial sentences: Whole Life Orders (WLO)

A judge has the option to impose a Whole Life Order in any instance where a life sentence is passed, which means a person is unlikely to ever 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.²³



What type of prison sentence are people serving?



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.
This excludes the 13,538 people in prison on recall, whose sentence type is not consistently published.

²¹ Sentencing Academy (n.d.). Sentencing explained: Life sentences. Accessed 13 January 2026.

²² Sentencing Academy (n.d.). Sentencing explained: Life sentences. Accessed 13 January 2026.

²³ Sentencing Academy (n.d.). Whole Life Orders: Attorney General's reference. Accessed 13 January 2026.

Recall to prison on a custodial sentence

People in prison on recall have previously been released but were reimprisoned for breaching their licence conditions. Reasons can include further offending, but also missing probation appointments, failing to keep their probation officer informed, breaching curfews or exclusion zones, or substance misuse lapses. Recall thresholds are substantively lower than judicial thresholds for conviction. This means that people can be recalled on the basis of allegation, suspicion, or concern that later proves to be false. Recall decisions are made by the Probation Service in England and Wales for all people subject to licence,²⁴ unlike in other UK jurisdictions 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.^{25,26}

Non-criminal detention: Immigration detainees

Some people are detained in prison after their serving their sentence 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,²⁷ and the disadvantages faced by detainees held in prison.²⁸ 93% of detainees are held in immigration detention, 5% are held in prisons, and the remaining 2% in other short-term holding facilities.²⁹

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

People on remand 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.³⁰ The use of prison as a ‘place of safety’ when suitable bail accommodation is not available has been criticised, especially for women.³¹ The Mental Health Act 2025 prohibited the use of prison as a place of safety.³²

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.³³ 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.³⁴

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. 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 for a person to serve part of their sentence in the community.

²⁴ Ministry of Justice (2023). Recall, review and re-release of recalled prisoners policy framework.

²⁵ Prisoners and Criminal Proceedings (Scotland) Act 1993, s17.

²⁶ The Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008, s28.

²⁷ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Annual report 2024–25. HC 1030. HM Stationery Office.

²⁸ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2022). The experience of immigration detainees in prisons.

²⁹ Home Office (2025). Table Det_D02, Immigration system statistics, year ending September 2025.

³⁰ House of Lords written question HL3408, 25 November 2022

³¹ House of Commons Justice Committee (2022). The role of adult custodial remand in the criminal justice system. HC 264. House of Commons.

³² Mental Health Act 2025, s48.

³³ Sentencing Council (n.d.). Sentencing basics. Accessed 12 February 2024.

³⁴ Bruntton-Smith, I. and 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 foreign nationals at the end of their prison sentence if they are of continuing interest to the Home Office, though this practice has 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 sentence, with reintegration 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 sentence, and subject to a 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).³⁵ 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 15–20 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 a custodial conviction. **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.

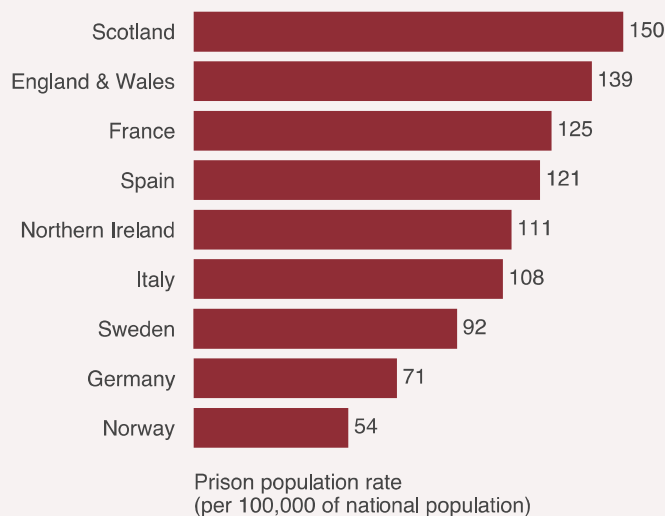
Court custody is used to hold people while they are awaiting their hearing. Individual court facilities are inspected according to a defined set of standards, just like prisons.

³⁵ While this occurs in some Scottish prisons, HMP and YOI Stirling opened in 2023 as a specialist facility for women, and Scotland has two Community Custody Units for women: the first of their kind in the UK.

Sentencing: An overview

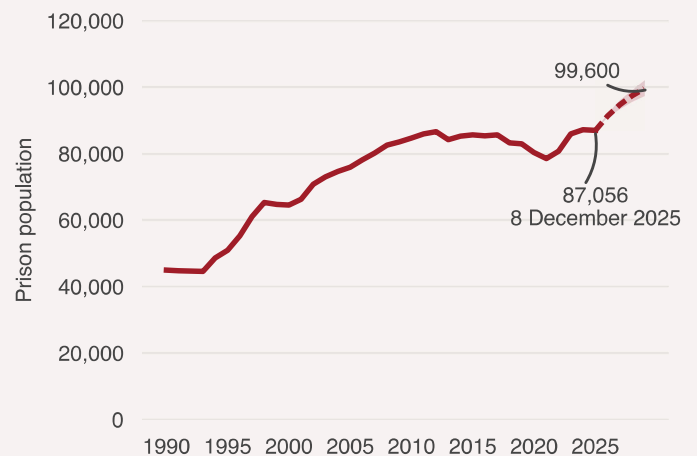
Imprisonment and crime rates

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



Source: Institute for Crime & Justice Policy Research (2025). World Prison Brief.

The prison population has risen by 94% since 1990—it is predicted to rise by around 12,000 people by 2028



Sources (Ministry of Justice, 2025):
Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.
Prison population: Weekly estate figures 2025.
Prison population projections 2025 to 2030.

There is no link between the prison population and levels of crime according to the National Audit Office.³⁶ International comparisons also show there is no consistent link between the two.³⁷

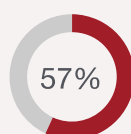


Sources:
Institute for Crime and Justice Policy Research (2023). World Prison Brief. Birkbeck, University of London. <https://www.prisonstudies.org/world-prison-brief-data>
Eurostat (2015). Crimes recorded by the police (1950-2000). https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_hist/default/table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

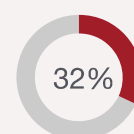
Almost

47,000

people were sent to prison to serve a sentence in the year to June 2025³⁸



The majority had committed a non-violent offence



Almost one third were sentenced to serve six months or less

³⁶ National Audit Office (2012). Comparing international criminal justice systems.

³⁷ Lappi-Seppälä, T. (2015). Why some countries cope with lesser use of imprisonment. University of Helsinki.

³⁸ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.Q.8 and 2.Q.9, Prison receptions: April to June 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

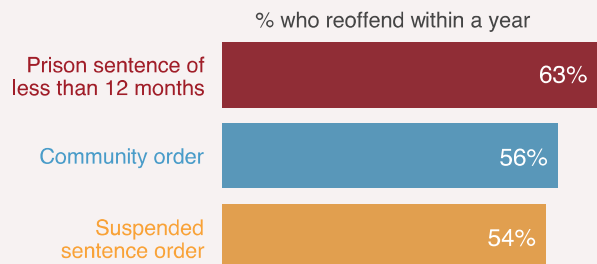
Fewer than one in 10 people surveyed said that having more people in prison was the most effective way to deal with crime. Early intervention, such as better parenting, discipline in schools and better rehabilitation, were all rated as more effective responses.³⁹



In 2025, a Citizens Panel on sentencing concluded that increasing the prison population is unfair, ineffective and too costly. They wanted to see more done to address the root causes of crime, and restrict the use of prison to the most serious offences.⁴⁰

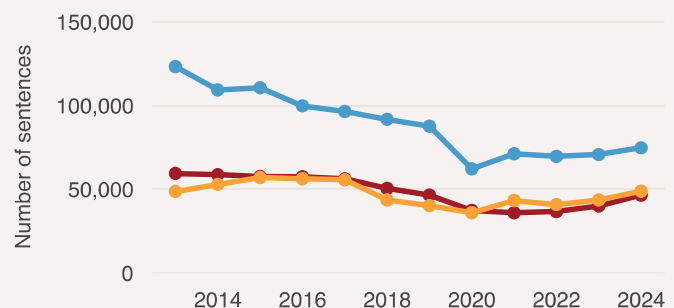
Short prison sentences

Short prison sentences are less effective than community sentences at reducing reoffending.⁴¹ The Independent Sentencing Review recommended restricting their use to exceptional circumstances.⁴² The Sentencing Act 2026 introduces a presumption to suspend custodial sentences of 12 months or less.⁴³



Community sentences are particularly effective for people with many previous offences, aged under 21 or over 50, and with mental health conditions.⁴⁴ Yet, their use has declined by a third in the last decade.⁴⁵ A 2023 inquiry concluded that increasing community sentences was likely to result in a decline in reoffending and cost savings.⁴⁶ The government has committed up to £700m of additional funding for the Probation Service by 2028–29 and 1,300 more probation officers by 2026.⁴⁷

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



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Criminal justice statistics quarterly: December 2024

Suspended sentences account for only 4% of all sentences—and have declined by 8% over the previous decade.⁴⁸

Pre-sentence reports (PSRs) provide an assessment of the context and causes of a person's behaviour, and 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 PSR is conducted by probation staff. The decline in the use of these assessments is strongly linked to the sharp fall in community sentences.⁴⁹

Standard PSRs—the most detailed type of report—fell by 97% in the 2010s. Numbers are slowly recovering, rising from 2,565 reports in 2020 to 5,586 reports in 2024, but still well below the 2010 peak of almost 94,000 reports.⁵⁰

In 2024, probation inspectors found that less than half of PSRs they reviewed (47%) were of sufficient quality, particularly for ethnic minority defendants. Standard PSRs were more likely to meet the quality threshold than shorter versions.⁵¹

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

40 Prison Reform Trust and Hopkins Van Mill (2025). Citizens' panel on sentencing: findings report.

41 Gormley et al. (2022). The effectiveness of sentencing options on reoffending. Sentencing Council.

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

43 Sentencing Act 2026, s1.

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

45 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table Q5.1b and Q5.4, Overview tables 2024. Criminal justice statistics quarterly: December 2024.

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

47 Ministry of Justice (2025, 2 September). Tens of thousands more to be tagged under biggest ever expansion.

48 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table Q5.1b, Overview tables: December 2024. Criminal justice statistics quarterly: December 2024.

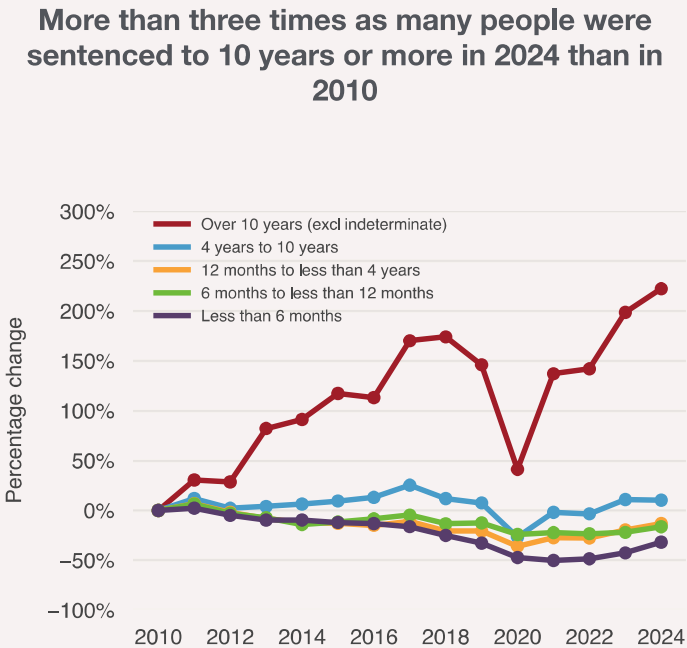
49 Centre for Justice Innovation (2018). The changing use of pre-sentence reports.

50 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table A6.24, Probation 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2024. And previous editions.

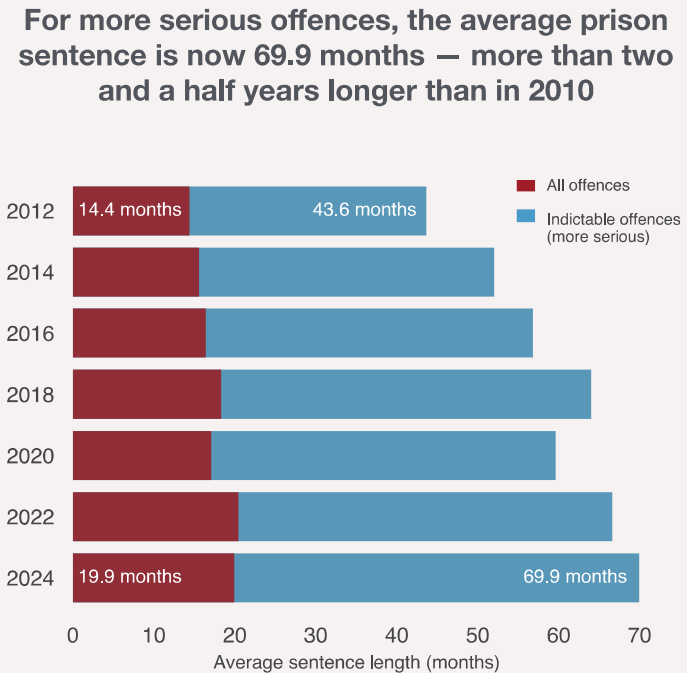
51 HM Inspectorate of Probation (2024). The quality of pre-sentence information and advice provided to the courts—2022 to 2023 inspections. Research and analysis bulletin 2024/04.

Long prison sentences

We choose to send people to prison for a long time—and lengthy sentences are 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."⁵²



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Criminal justice statistics quarterly: Update to December 2024.

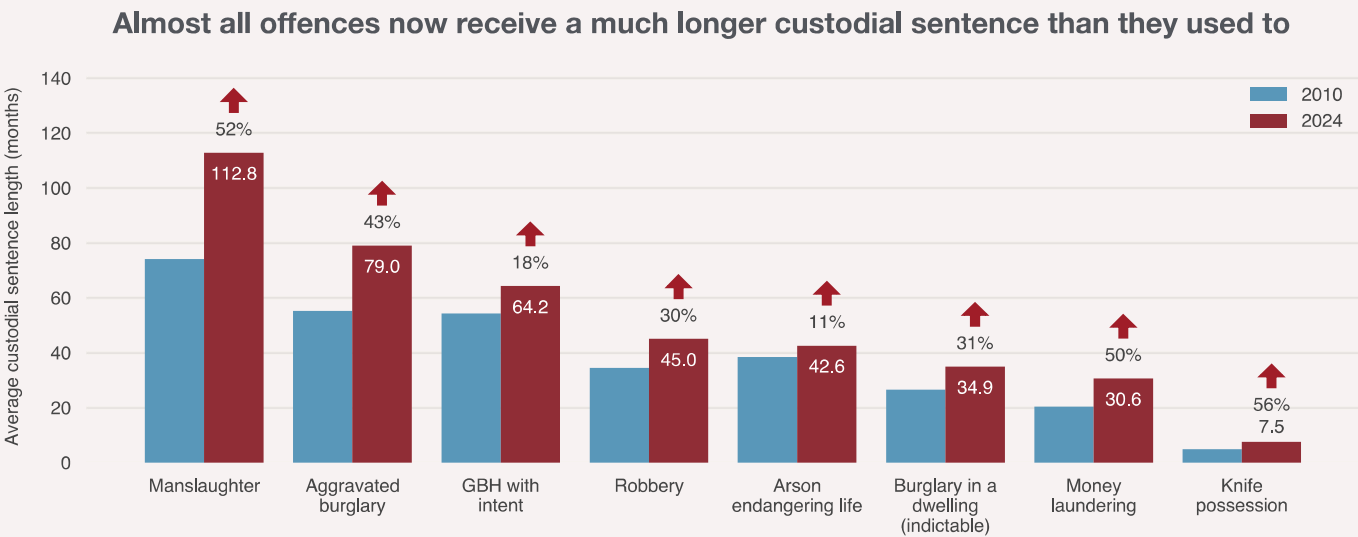


Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Criminal justice statistics quarterly: Update to December 2024.

The Independent Sentencing Review highlighted longer sentences, driven by increasingly punitive legislation, have been a major contributor to the rising prison population over the last 20 years.⁵³

Yet there is no straightforward link between longer sentences and reduced reoffending.⁵⁴

8,622 people are serving a standard determinate sentence of 10 years or more—around one in eight (12%) of sentenced prisoners.⁵⁵



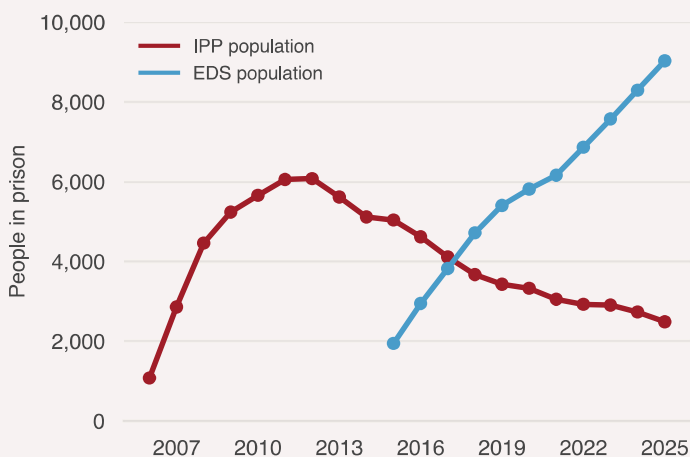
Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Criminal justice statistics: quarterly update to December 2024.

⁵² Howard League for Penal Reform. (2024). Sentence inflation: a judicial critique.
⁵³ Independent Sentencing Review (2025). Independent sentencing review: history and trends in sentencing.
⁵⁴ Gormley, J., et al. (2022). The effectiveness of sentencing options on reoffending. Sentencing Council.
⁵⁵ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.1 and 1.Q.2, Prison population 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

Complex sentences and the decline of automatic release

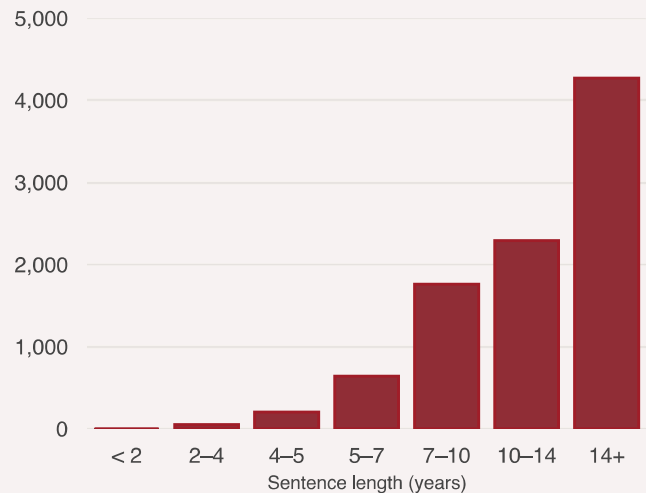
An increasing number of people are serving complex sentences that leave them facing an uncertain length of time in custody. In addition to the complex sentences outlined below, the Sentencing Act 2026 has introduced 'earned release'⁵⁶ for people serving a Standard Determinate Sentence (55% of the prison population),⁵⁷ which ties the proportion of the sentence served to good behaviour. This will make the release date of most serving prisoners uncertain.

EDSs are on the rise
Numbers have now surpassed IPPs



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics: April to June 2025. And previous editions.

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



House of Lords written question HL103098, 5 January 2026

More than one in seven of the sentenced prison population (13%) are serving an Extended Determinate Sentence (EDS) and are not subject to automatic release until the end of their full custodial term.⁵⁸

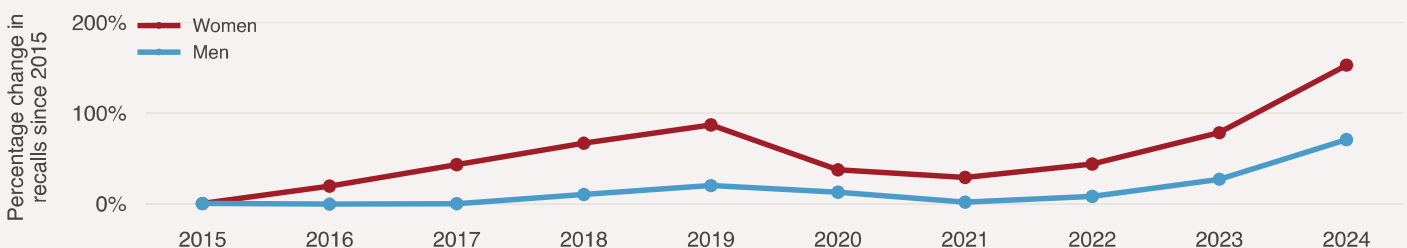
10,881 people are in prison serving an indeterminate sentence—16% of the sentenced prison population,⁵⁹ up from 9% in 1994.⁶⁰ Indeterminate sentences have no automatic release date.

99% of unreleased people serving an IPP sentence have served the minimum term deemed proportionate to their crime, and are held in prison indefinitely on the basis of public protection.⁶¹

More than one in 10 sentenced people in prison (12%) are serving a life sentence.⁶²

Almost one in five (18%) of the sentenced prison population are now held on recall—12,657 people.⁶³ The number is expected to rise approximately 19% by 2029—to around 15,100 people.⁶⁴

The number of recalls initiated per year is increasing



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2024. And previous editions.

⁵⁶ Sentencing Act 2026, s1.

⁵⁷ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.2, Prison population: 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁵⁸ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.2, Prison population: 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁵⁹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.1 and 1.Q.14, Prison population 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁶⁰ Home Office (2001). Table 1.8, Prison statistics England and Wales 2001. Cm 57435.

⁶¹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.17, Prison population: 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁶² Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.2 and 1.Q.14, Prison population 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁶³ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.1 and 1.Q.2, Prison population: 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁶⁴ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.1, Prison population projections: 2025 to 2030.

Imprisonment for public protection

The Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentence was introduced in 2003⁶⁵ and abolished in 2012. It sentenced people to a fixed term 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 in the community, with a licence review by the Parole Board after 10 years (called the qualifying period), and the possibility of indefinite recall to prison if they breached their conditions.

In 2022, a parliamentary inquiry concluded that the IPP sentence was “irredeemably flawed” and called for a resentencing exercise.⁶⁶ The then Secretary of State for Justice, Alex Chalk, called IPP a stain on the justice system, and committed to reforms to the IPP licence.⁶⁷ However, a resentencing exercise was rejected by the government.⁶⁸

The Victims and Prisoners Act 2024 (VAPA) introduced the first significant reform to IPP since its abolition. The qualifying period for licence reviews was cut from 10 years to three, and if the review is unsuccessful, the licence is automatically removed if the person remains continuously in the community for another two years. People recalled may still have their licence terminated—and therefore be released unconditionally—if they have met the qualifying period,⁶⁹ but this is rarely happening in practice.⁷⁰

The changes came into force between November 2024 and February 2025 and were applied retrospectively. 1,742 people had their IPP sentences removed after spending five or more years in the community without recall⁷¹—one in five (20%) of all those ever sentenced to an IPP.⁷²

The government introduced further changes in the Sentencing Act 2026, reducing the qualifying period from three years to two and making provision for individuals to apply for further licence reviews after the expiry of the qualifying period, if unsuccessful at their first one.⁷³ These provisions should further increase the number of people eligible to have their licence terminated.

However, grave concerns remain for people who have served lengthy IPP sentences and never been released. In 2025, the National Preventative Mechanism drew attention to the risk that the IPP sentence could contravene legal prohibitions against torture and inhumane or degrading treatment, either inherently or through poor administration, resulting in “psychological torture” from prolonged uncertainty and despair.⁷⁴

In addition to the retrospective removals, in 2024–25, more than two in five people serving IPP sentences who had a licence review (41%) had their licence terminated—ending their sentence.⁷⁵

Despite its abolition, there are 946 people in prison serving an IPP sentence who have never been released. Nearly all (99.6%) are still in prison despite having already served their tariff.⁷⁶

Almost three-quarters of unreleased IPP prisoners (73%) have spent an additional 10 years or more in prison on top of their tariff. One quarter (25%) have served an additional 15 years or more. The median tariff length is between two and four years.⁷⁷

1,476 people are serving an IPP sentence in prison on recall—they account for more than three in five of the imprisoned IPP population (61%).⁷⁸

But there are promising signs of change. In 2024 recalls were down 6% and releases up 22%—driven by an increase of over a third (34%) in re-releases following a recall.^{79,80,81}

⁶⁵ Criminal Justice Act (2003), s225–226 (as enacted).

⁶⁶ House of Commons Justice Committee (2022). IPP sentences. HC 266. House of Commons.

⁶⁷ Ministry of Justice (2023, 28 November). Reforms bring hope to rehabilitated people still serving abolished indefinite sentences.

⁶⁸ Hansard HC Deb. Vol 731, col 457WH, 27 April 2023. Imprisonment for public protection sentences.

⁶⁹ Victims and Prisoners Act 2024, s66.

⁷⁰ Parole Board for England and Wales (2025). Annual report 2024–25.

⁷¹ HM Prison and Probation Service (2025). HMPPS annual report on the IPP sentence 2024/25. HC 1155. HM Stationery Office.

⁷² Ministry of Justice (2016). Outcomes by offence tool. Criminal justice statistics quarterly: December 2015.

⁷³ Sentencing Act 2026, s42.

⁷⁴ National Preventative Mechanism (2025). NPM landscaping document: indeterminate detention regimes.

⁷⁵ Parole Board for England and Wales (2025). Annual report 2024–25.

⁷⁶ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.15, Prison population: 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁷⁷ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.18, Prison population 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁷⁸ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.14, Prison population 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁷⁹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 3.A.2, Prison recalls: October to December 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2024.

⁸⁰ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 3.A.2, Prison releases: 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2024.

⁸¹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 5.A.2, Licence recalls: 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to 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

946

99% have already served their tariff

940

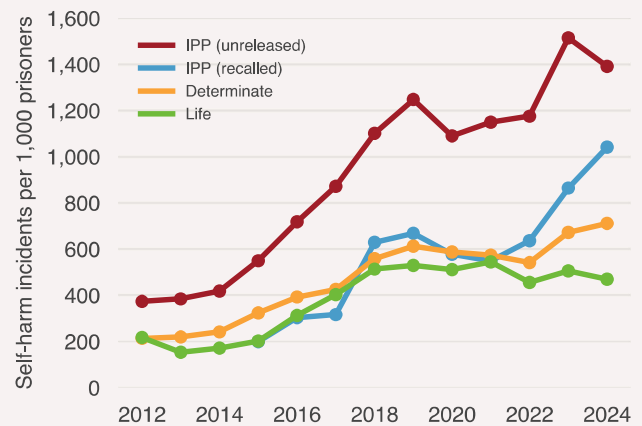
Over 60% of those had a tariff of four years or less



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

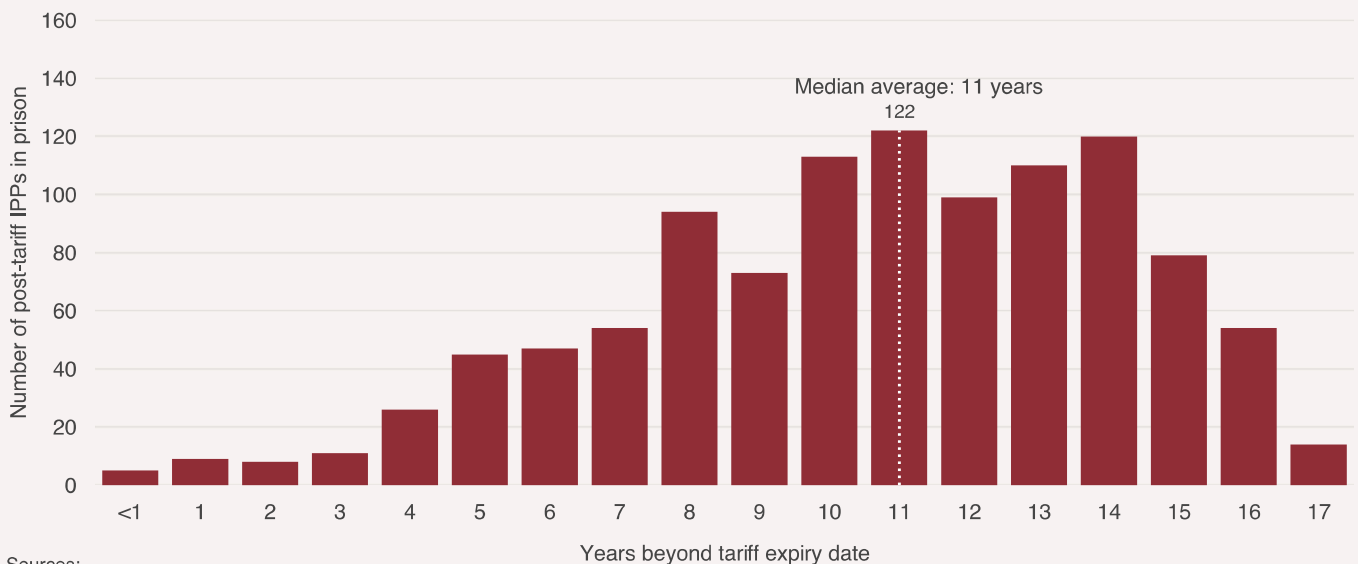
Risk of harm?

Unreleased IPP prisoners have higher rates of self-harm



Sources: Ministry of Justice (2025). Safety in custody: Quarterly update to December 2024. Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: July to September 2024.

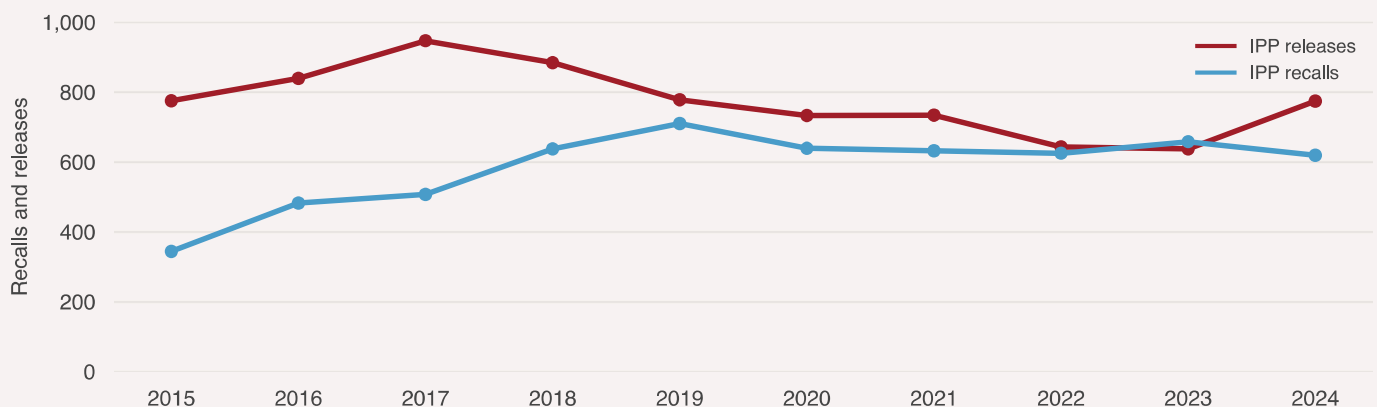
The number of years unreleased people on IPP have served on top of their original tariff



Sources: Ministry of Justice (2024). Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024. House of Lords written question HL3985, 13 January 2025.

A turning tide?

IPP releases have started going up—and recalls down



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2024. 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 if released, and continue to serve their sentence for the rest of their lives on licence. They can be returned to custody if they break their licence conditions.

Life sentences are the most severe sanction since the abolition of the death penalty in 1967. They are mandatory for murder but can also be imposed for other serious offences at the court's discretion. Additionally, a life sentence may be imposed automatically for a second serious offence, even if it would not typically meet the threshold for a life sentence alone.

The 2025 Independent Sentencing Review's terms of reference excluded murder—and therefore most life sentences—citing plans for "wholesale reform" of homicide law following a separate review by the Law Commission, which is currently underway.⁸² The Ministry of Justice also held a consultation on murder sentencing, which closed in March 2024 during the previous Conservative government.⁸³ Both are yet to report.

The average minimum term imposed on people given life sentences for murder rose from 13.5 years in 2003 to 22 years in 2023.⁸⁴ The Criminal Justice Act 2003 significantly increased minimum terms for all,⁸⁵ and the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 further increased them for children.⁸⁶ This has had a knock-on effect, increasing sentence lengths for other offences.⁸⁷

People given a life sentence are facing longer minimum terms at a younger—and older—age. Between 2002 and 2023, the average minimum term for children rose from seven to 14 years. For people aged 70 and over it rose from eight years to 16 years.^{88,89}

7,547 people are currently in prison serving a life sentence who have never been released. Almost one in seven (13%) have a minimum term of 10 years or less, almost half (47%) have a minimum term of over 10 years and up to 20 years, and two in five (40%) over 20 years.⁹⁰ There are an additional 915 people who have been recalled back to prison after they were released.⁹¹

Nearly four in five unreleased life-sentenced prisoners (79%) are serving mandatory life sentences for murder, while the remaining one in five (21%)—or 1,556 people—are serving discretionary or automatic life sentences.⁹²

Over a fifth (21%) of people currently in prison on a life sentence have already served their minimum term.⁹³ In 2021, they had spent an average of nine years and two months extra in prison.⁹⁴

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 2002.⁹⁵

In June 2025 there were 74 people serving a Whole Life Order—they are unlikely to ever be released. The number of whole lifers rose by seven people between 2024 and 2025—the steepest rise in the last 10 years.⁹⁶

The vast majority of life sentenced prisoners are successfully integrated back into the community on release. 1% of those sentenced to a mandatory life sentence and 10% sentenced to another life sentence were reconvicted of any criminal offence within a year of release, compared with 44% of the overall prison population.⁹⁷

⁸² Ministry of Justice (2024). Independent sentencing review 2024 to 2025. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/independent-sentencing-review-2024-to-2025>

⁸³ Ministry of Justice (2023). Murder sentencing.

⁸⁴ House of Lords written question HL7261, 6 April 2022 and House of Lords written question HL3987, 21 January 2025.

⁸⁵ Criminal Justice Act 2003, Schedule 21 (as enacted).

⁸⁶ Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, s127.

⁸⁷ Independent Commission into the Experience of Victims and Long-Term Prisoners (2022). Making sense of sentencing.

⁸⁸ House of Lords written question HL1736, 27 July 2022.

⁸⁹ House of Lords written question HL3871, 22 January 2025.

⁹⁰ Where minimum term length is known, 176 life sentenced prisoners do not have this recorded.

⁹¹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.14 and 1.Q.16, Prison population: 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁹² Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.A.32, Prison population: 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.

⁹³ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.5, Prison population 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁹⁴ House of Commons written question HL3923, 24 November 2021.

⁹⁵ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 3.A.10, Releases: 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2024.

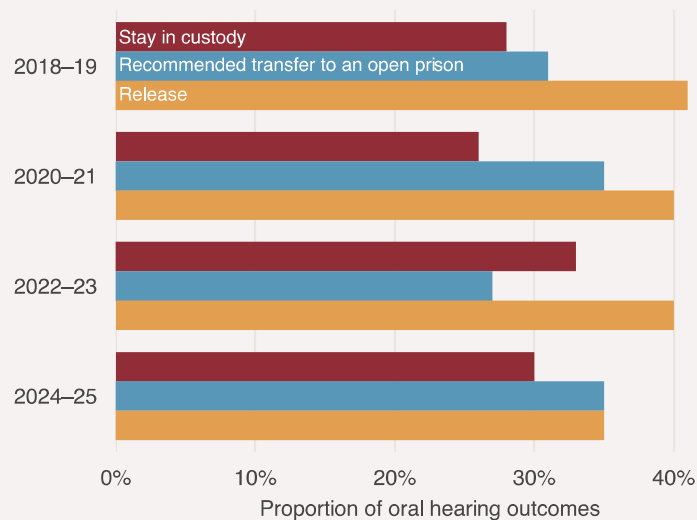
⁹⁶ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.A.30, Prison population 30 June 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁹⁷ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table C2a, Proven reoffending tables (annual average), April 2022 to March 2023. Proven reoffending statistics: January to March 2023.

In 2024–25, just over one third of Parole Board oral hearings for life sentenced prisoners (35%) resulted in a decision to release them. Of the remainder, 30% were refused release, and 35% were recommended for transfer to less secure open prison conditions.⁹⁸

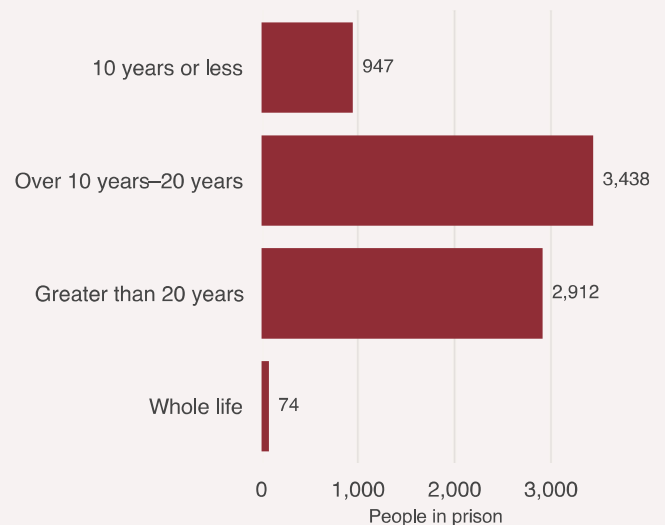
England and Wales holds almost half of all life sentenced prisoners (43%) across the 53 jurisdictions of the Council of Europe, excluding Türkiye. An outlier, Türkiye holds 12,016 life sentenced prisoners, with England and Wales holding 7,202. The other 51 European jurisdictions hold 9,557 lifers between them.⁹⁹

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



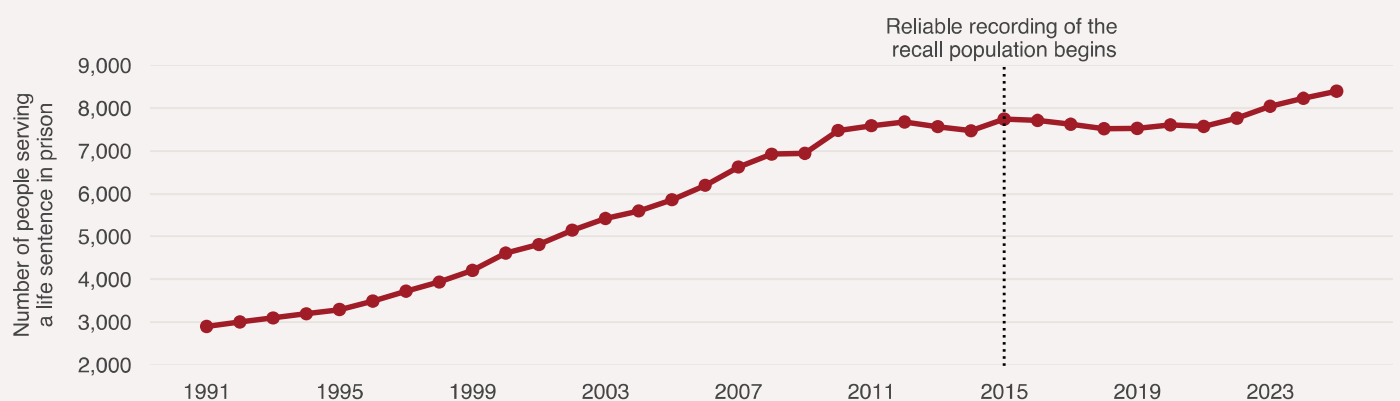
Source: Parole Board (2025). Annual report 2024–25.

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



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

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



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025. And previous editions.

⁹⁸ Parole Board for England and Wales (2025). Paper oral duty member outcomes. Performance data. Annual report 2024–25.

⁹⁹ Aebi, M. and Cocco, E. (2024). Table 10, Prison populations. SPACE I—2024. Council of Europe.

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 on remand receive no financial help from the prison service upon release. Those acquitted receive no compensation.¹⁰⁰ However, in 2024, the government extended its post-release temporary accommodation scheme to people held on remand and then released or acquitted.¹⁰¹

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 because of court capacity constraints. They 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.¹⁰²

While some of these measures have been implemented,¹⁰³ in 2025 both the Public Accounts Committee¹⁰⁴ and the Independent Review of the Criminal Courts¹⁰⁵ highlighted their concerns about the remand population. They noted that the Ministry of Justice remained ill-prepared for the rise in court cases following increased police recruitment, and that police officers' fear of being formally investigated if a suspect offends whilst on bail was leading to unnecessary remand decisions.

In response, the government announced plans to reduce the court backlog, including removing jury trials in thousands of cases, and allowing magistrates to pass custodial sentences of 18 months, with provision to allow this to be extended to up to two years.¹⁰⁶ The Sentencing Act 2026 also introduces measures to reduce the use of remand where a custodial sentence is unlikely, use electronic monitoring as an alternative, and direct the court to consider whether a defendant is pregnant, a primary caregiver or a domestic abuse victim.¹⁰⁷

The number of people on remand stubbornly remains at its highest level in at least 50 years, but saw an especially acute surge during the Covid-19 pandemic, increasing by one quarter between 2019 and 2020. Since then it has continued to grow steadily every year, though yearly growth slowed to 4% in 2025.¹⁰⁸

People on remand account for one in five of the prison population (20%)—almost 18,000 people. The majority are awaiting trial (66%), whilst the rest are awaiting sentencing.¹⁰⁹

In September 2022, almost a third of people (32%) on remand had been held in prison beyond the six-month custody time limit—nearly 4,600 people. One in 20 (5%) had been there for longer than two years—770 people.¹¹⁰ The government has subsequently said that it is too costly to provide this data.¹¹¹

There were 40,356 receptions into prison before trial in the year to June 2025¹¹²—a 7% increase on the previous year.¹¹³ People remanded to custody to await trial are innocent until proven guilty.

25,621 people were remanded into prison awaiting sentence in the year to June 2025¹¹⁴—5% more than the previous year.¹¹⁵

In 2024, 9% of people remanded into custody by magistrates' courts were subsequently acquitted. A further 11% received a non-custodial sentence. In the Crown Court, 14% and 16% respectively were acquitted and given a non-custodial sentence.¹¹⁶

More than a third (34%) of self-inflicted deaths in 2024 were by people held on remand,¹¹⁷ as well as more than a fifth (22%) of self-harm incidents.¹¹⁸

¹⁰⁰ House of Commons Justice Committee (2023). The role of adult custodial remand in the criminal justice system. HC 264. House of Commons.

¹⁰¹ House of Commons written question 15423, 2 December 2024.

¹⁰² House of Commons Justice Committee (2023). The role of adult custodial remand in the criminal justice system. HC 264. House of Commons.

¹⁰³ 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. HC 1244. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁰⁴ Committee of Public Accounts (2025). Crown Court backlogs. HC 348. House of Commons.

¹⁰⁵ Independent Review of the Criminal Courts (2025). Independent review of the criminal courts: part 1. Ministry of Justice.

¹⁰⁶ House of Commons written statement HCWS1123, 2 December 2025.

¹⁰⁷ Ministry of Justice (2025, 27 November). Sentencing bill: remand measures factsheet.

¹⁰⁸ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.A.1, Prison population: 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.

¹⁰⁹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.1 and 1.Q.2, Prison population: 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

¹¹⁰ House of Lords written question HL3408, 25 November 2022.

¹¹¹ House of Commons written question 67859, 23 July 2025.

¹¹² Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.Q.7, Prison receptions: April to June 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

¹¹³ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.Q.7, Prison receptions: April to June 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

¹¹⁴ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.Q.7, Prison receptions: April to June 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

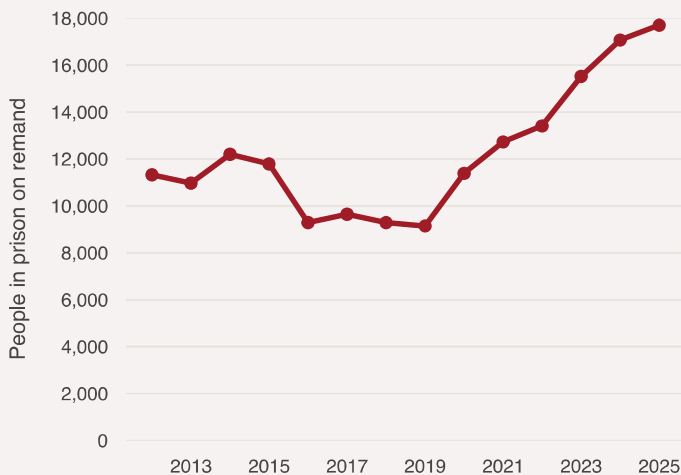
¹¹⁵ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.Q.7, Prison receptions: April to June 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2024.

¹¹⁶ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table Q.4.4, Overview tables: December 2024. Criminal justice statistics quarterly: December 2024.

¹¹⁷ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.7, Deaths in custody 1978 to 2024. Safety in custody: quarterly update to September 2024.

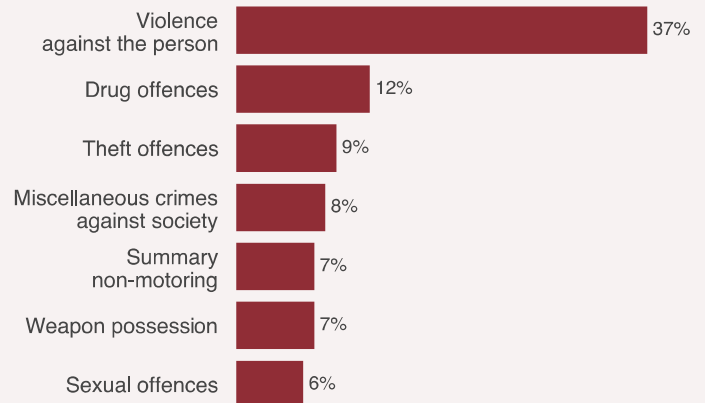
¹¹⁸ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.6, Self-harm in custody 2004 to 2024. Safety in custody: quarterly update to December 2024.

The remand population is on the rise—and a significant driver of overcrowding



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Prison population: 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.

More than two in five people (41%) entering prison on remand awaiting trial were accused of non-violent offences



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Prison receptions: April to June 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025. 6% of admissions were for other offence types, and offences were not recorded for 6% of admissions

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 the 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.¹¹⁹ The government fully or partially accepted all the inspectorate’s recommendations.¹²⁰

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.¹²¹

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.¹²²

On average 185 children were held in prison on remand in the year to March 2024. They currently account for almost half of children in prison (43%)—up from 21% in 2014.¹²³

However, the actual number of children held in prison on remand has fallen in the last decade, declining by 29%.¹²⁴

In the year to March 2024, just under three in five children on remand (59%) were from ethnic minority groups.¹²⁵

One in six children (17%) remanded into custody in the year to March 2024 were subsequently acquitted. Just under half (45%) were given a non-custodial sentence.¹²⁶

¹¹⁹ Criminal justice joint inspection (2023). A joint thematic inspection of work with children subject to remand in youth detention. HM Inspectorate of Probation.

¹²⁰ Ministry of Justice (2024). Action plan response to: A joint thematic inspection of work with children subject to remand in youth detention.

¹²¹ Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, s157.

¹²² Ministry of Justice (2022). Review of custodial remand for children.

¹²³ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 6.3, Chapter 6: Use of remand for children. Youth justice statistics: 2023 to 2024.

¹²⁴ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 6.3, Chapter 6: Use of remand for children. Youth justice statistics: 2023 to 2024.

¹²⁵ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 6.3, Chapter 6: Use of remand for children. Youth justice statistics: 2023 to 2024.

¹²⁶ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 6.6, Chapter 6: Use of remand for children. Youth justice statistics: 2023 to 2024.

THE STATE OF OUR PRISONS

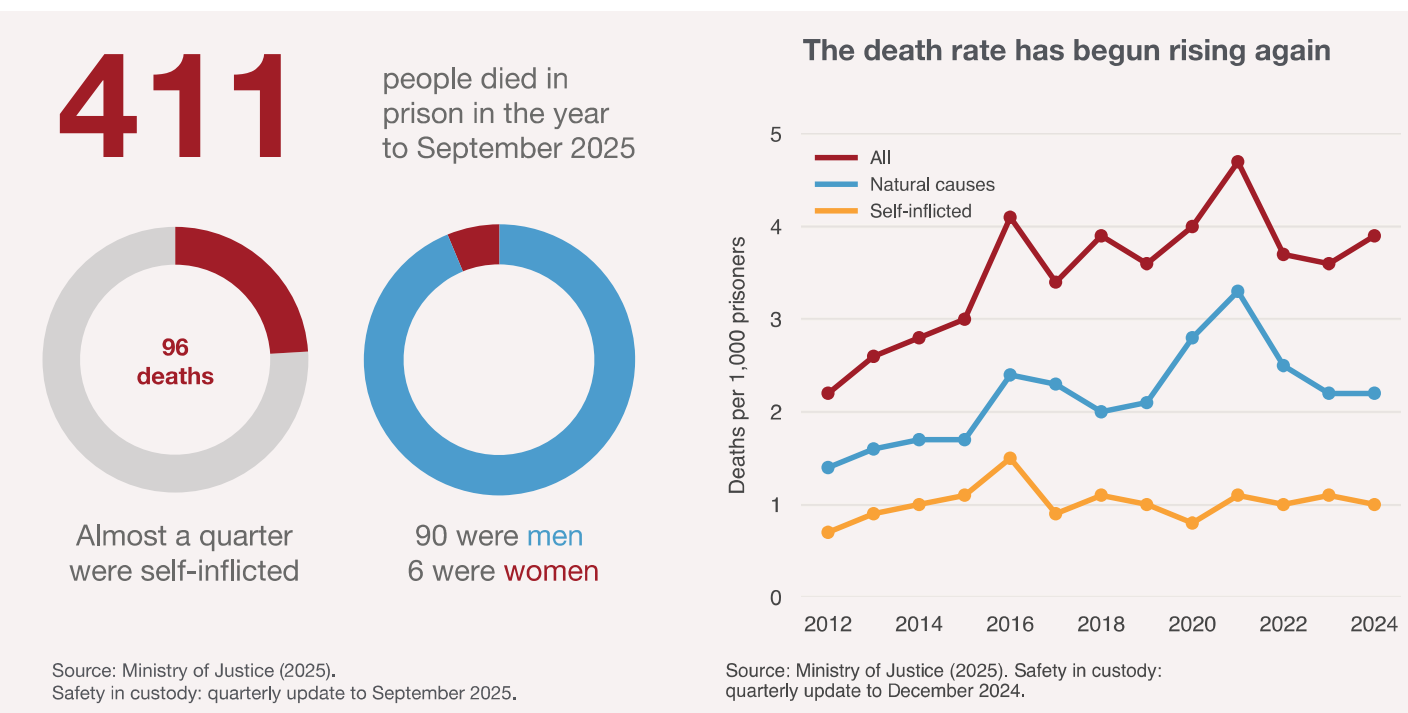
Safety in prisons

Safety in prisons has deteriorated rapidly during the last decade.¹²⁷

Inspectors found that safety was not good enough in almost half (44%) of the 31 men's prisons inspected in 2024–25.¹²⁸ The same proportion of surveyed prisoners (44%), said that they had felt unsafe at some point, as did more than half (52%) of surveyed women in the two prisons inspected.¹²⁹

Deaths in prison

221 people died of natural causes in the year to September 2025. This is down from the peak of 292 deaths in the year to September 2021, but is still 44% higher than a decade ago.¹³⁰ The rate of deaths is higher in detention facilities than in the community.¹³¹



Self-inflicted deaths are nearly four times more likely amongst men in prison than men in the general population.¹³²

In the last five years one in five (20%) self-inflicted deaths occurred in the first 30 days of arrival in prison—more than half (51%) of these deaths were in the first week.¹³³

Inspectors have continued to raise concerns that little is learned from self-inflicted deaths, and Prisons and Probation Ombudsman recommendations are not implemented.¹³⁴

In 2024, there were four self-inflicted deaths of people serving an imprisonment for public protection (IPP) sentence¹³⁵, down from a record high of nine deaths in 2023.¹³⁶

In 2024–25, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman drew attention to the impact of overcrowding on safety and care, noting how more restrictive regimes affect mental health, and increase the risk of suicide and self-harm.¹³⁷

There were seven homicides in prison in 2024 alone—compared with nine in the preceding five years.¹³⁸

¹²⁷ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2, 3 and 4, Safety in custody summary tables to June 2025. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2025.

¹²⁸ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Table 1, HPA and concerns. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

¹²⁹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25.

¹³⁰ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2, Safety in custody summary tables to June 2025. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2025.

¹³¹ Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths in Custody (2024). Statistical analysis of recorded deaths in custody between 2017 and 2021.

¹³² Office for National Statistics (2023). Drug-related deaths and suicide in prison custody in England and Wales: 2008 to 2019.

¹³³ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.3, Deaths in prison custody 1978 to 2024. Safety in custody: quarterly update to September 2024.

¹³⁴ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Annual report 2024–25. HC 1030. HM Stationery Office.

¹³⁵ Find out more about the IPP sentence on page page 16.

¹³⁶ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.7, Deaths in prison custody 1978 to 2024. Safety in custody: quarterly update to September 2024.

¹³⁷ Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (2025). Annual report 2024–25. CP 1332. HM Stationery Office.

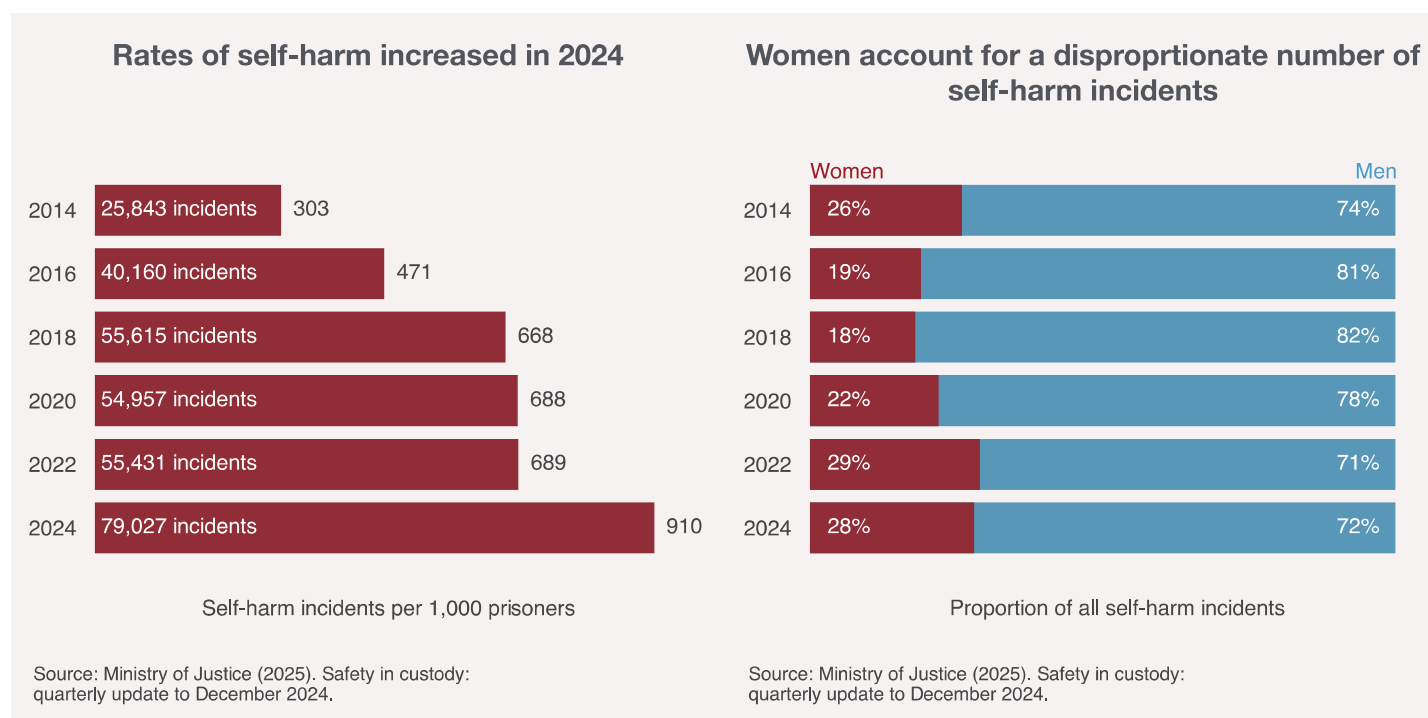
¹³⁸ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.1, Deaths in prison custody 1978 to 2024. Safety in custody: quarterly update to September 2024.

Self-harm in prison

There were 20,174 incidents of self-harm by women in prison last year—around the same as recent record highs. The number of incidents had already nearly doubled (96%) between 2013 and 2022. Between June 2022 and 2023 alone, it increased by another two-thirds (65%).¹³⁹

Ten years ago, there were 1,854 self-harm incidents per 1,000 women in prison. By the year to June 2025, this number had risen to 5,714.¹⁴⁰

There were 55,974 self-harm incidents by men in prison in the year to June 2025—the highest number on record. The rate of self-harm amongst men in prison is now two and a half times higher than a decade ago, with 673 incidents per 1,000 men.¹⁴¹



Assaults in prison

Recorded assaults by men rose by 7% in the year to June 2025 and are approaching record levels. Assaults by women increased by 10%, reaching the highest level ever recorded.¹⁴²

There were 350 assaults per 1,000 men in prison in the year to June 2025—over two-thirds (68%) higher than a decade ago. For women, the rate is 606 incidents per 1,000—more than three and a half times higher over the same period.¹⁴³

A Ministry of Justice study found that prisoners in overcrowded cells are 19% more likely to be involved in an assault over a one-year period than those in cells that are not overcrowded.¹⁴⁴

Consistent application of understandable rules that appear legitimate to people in prison is associated with lower rates of assaults,¹⁴⁵ and a focus on reward rather than formal disciplinary procedures motivates prisoners to change their behaviour.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 3, Safety in custody summary tables to June 2025. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2025.

¹⁴⁰ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 3, Safety in custody summary tables to June 2025. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2025.

¹⁴¹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 3, Safety in custody summary tables to June 2025. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2025.

¹⁴² Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 4, Safety in custody summary tables to June 2025. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2025.

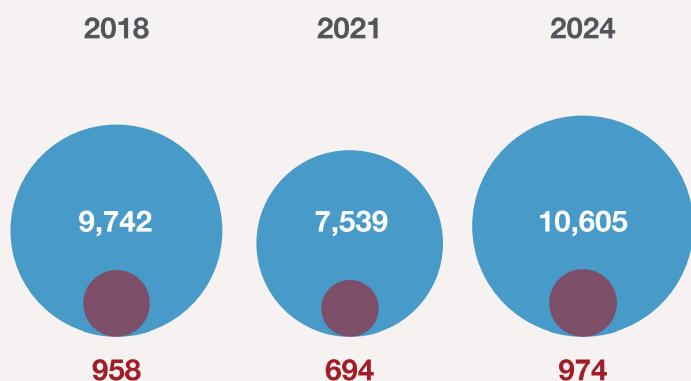
¹⁴³ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 4, Safety in custody summary tables to June 2025. Safety in custody: quarterly update to June 2025.

¹⁴⁴ Ministry of Justice (2025). The impact of overcrowding on assaults in closed adult public prisons.

¹⁴⁵ McGuire, J. (2018). Understanding prison violence: a rapid evidence assessment. HM Prison and Probation Service.

¹⁴⁶ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Improving behaviour in prisons.

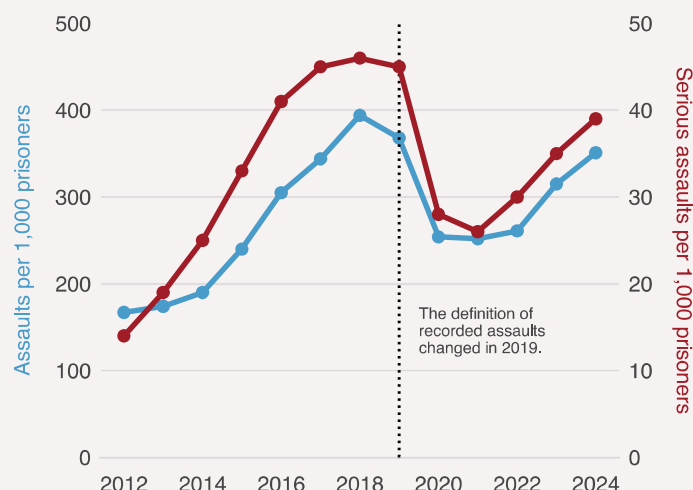
Assaults on staff are at a record high.



Serious assaults on staff are also increasing again.

Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Safety in custody: Quarterly update to December 2024.

Assaults and serious assaults declined during the Covid-19 pandemic—but are rising again



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Safety in custody: quarterly update to December 2024.

Use of force

Inspectors found that the use of force had increased in over 40% of adult men's prisons they inspected last year. They raised concerns about lack of oversight to ensure use of force was justified and proportionate, poor use of body-worn cameras and many incidents where the use of PAVA spray was unjustified.¹⁴⁷

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.¹⁴⁸ Despite clear evidence that this is occurring, in 2025 the government expanded PAVA use to children in young offender institutions.¹⁴⁹ The Youth Justice Board has publicly opposed its introduction.¹⁵⁰

PAVA was drawn¹⁵¹ 1,931 times in 2024—a 47% increase on the previous year. It was deployed¹⁵² in more than two in three (69%) of those instances.^{153,154}

In 2024, almost two in five PAVA deployments (38%) were against Black/Black British prisoners,¹⁵⁵ who consisted of just 12% of the prison population at that time.¹⁵⁶ Almost two in five deployments (38%) were against Muslim prisoners,¹⁵⁷ who consisted of less than one in five (18%) of the prison population.¹⁵⁸

Use of force is generally higher against women in prison. There were 127 incidents of planned force¹⁵⁹ per 1,000 female prisoners, compared with an average rate of 77 incidents per 1,000 prisoners nationally.¹⁶⁰

Women are more likely to have force used for non-compliance, self-harm or threatening an assault, than men.¹⁶¹

The use of force rate is much higher for Black (409 incidents per 1,000 prisoners), Mixed (378 incidents) and Gypsy/Irish Traveller (345 incidents) men in prison than white British or Irish men (209 incidents).¹⁶²

Black prisoners are eight times more likely than white prisoners to have a baton used against them.¹⁶³

¹⁴⁷ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁴⁸ Prison Reform Trust (2023). Equality incapacitated: the disproportionate impact of PAVA spray on Black, Muslim and disabled prisoners.

¹⁴⁹ Ministry of Justice (2025, 24 April). Government action to improve safety in young offender institutions.

¹⁵⁰ Youth Justice Board (2025, 24 April). YJB response to government's PAVA announcement.

¹⁵¹ PAVA is unclipped from the belt and physically presented at a prisoner.

¹⁵² PAVA has been physically presented and squirted at a prisoner.

¹⁵³ House of Lords written question HL13020, 22 December 2025.

¹⁵⁴ House of Commons written question 17267, 15 March 2024.

¹⁵⁵ House of Lords written question HL13020, 22 December 2025.

¹⁵⁶ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.A.20, Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.

¹⁵⁷ House of Lords written question HL13020, 22 December 2025.

¹⁵⁸ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.A.22, Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.

¹⁵⁹ Planned incidents allow for incident management strategies to be implemented, where the risk is not immediate, and utilising negotiators to resolve the situation without the need for force. A Use of Force supervisor will assess the situation, preparing staff and ensuring that appropriate personal protective equipment can be used.

¹⁶⁰ Bosworth, G. et al. (2025). Use of force: an exploratory analysis of use of force in prisons. 2018–2023. HM Prison and Probation Service.

¹⁶¹ Bosworth, G. et al. (2025). Use of force: an exploratory analysis of use of force in prisons. 2018–2023. HM Prison and Probation Service.

¹⁶² Bosworth, G. et al. (2025). Use of force: an exploratory analysis of use of force in prisons. 2018–2023. HM Prison and Probation Service.

¹⁶³ Bosworth, G. et al. (2025). Use of force: an exploratory analysis of use of force in prisons. 2018–2023. HM Prison and Probation Service.

Treatment and conditions

Half of prisons (50%) were judged to have concerning or seriously concerning performance in 2024–25 by HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS), compared with 42% in the previous year. Those most likely to be of concern were reception prisons (87%, or 27 of 31), and Category C resettlement prisons (86%, or six of seven). Open, women's and foreign national prisons performed relatively better.¹⁶⁴ Inspectors raised concerns about the sharp rise of drugs being delivered by drones having a destabilising effect on prisons, and continued to call attention to overcrowding and cramped conditions.¹⁶⁵

In their 2023–24 annual report, the UK National Preventative Mechanism raised serious concerns about chronic overcrowding, poor living conditions, and lack of meaningful activity in prisons.¹⁶⁶

The lack of purposeful activity has been a major shortfall in prisons in recent years. In 2024–25, inspectors judged that purposeful activity was poor or not sufficiently good at around three in four inspected prisons (74%). The majority that scored well were open prisons, which are intended to prepare people for release.¹⁶⁷

Almost half of inspected prisons were judged as poor or not sufficiently good on safety, and also on respect (45%), compared with less than a quarter last year (28%).¹⁶⁸

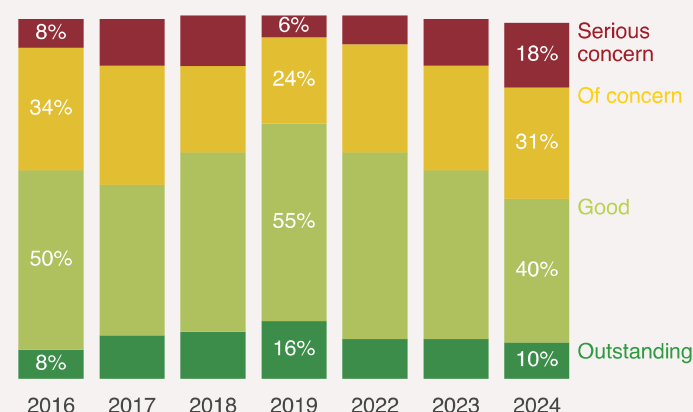
Inspectors were concerned about poor staff-prisoner relationships, often due to lack of experience, confidence and capability, leading to failures to address behaviour, basic queries going unresolved, and a rise in violence.¹⁶⁹

15 prisons have received an Urgent Notification flagging serious concerns by the chief inspector since their introduction in 2017—and three have received a second notification.¹⁷⁰

Two Category B prisons received an Urgent Notification from inspectors in 2025—HMP Pentonville and HMP Swaleside, as well as Oakhill Secure Training Centre.^{171,172,173} At the time of writing, nine establishments were subject to enhanced oversight following an Urgent Notification; seven are Category B prisons.¹⁷⁴

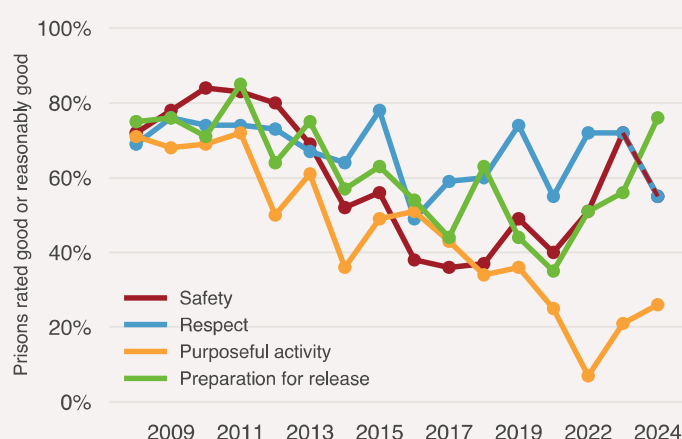
Prison standards — in long-term decline?

Almost half of prisons are “of concern” or “serious concern”



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Annual prison performance ratings 2024–25. And previous editions.
Note that ratings were suspended in 2020–21 and reduced in 2021–22.

Standards are inconsistent



Source: HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. Annual report 2024–25. And previous editions.
Note: 2020 not included due to low number of prisons inspected during Covid-19.

¹⁶⁴ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1, Annual prison performance ratings supplementary tables. Prison performance ratings: 2024 to 2025.

¹⁶⁵ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Annual report 2024–25. HC 1030. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁶⁶ UK National Preventative Mechanism (2025). 15th annual report of the United Kingdom's National Preventative Mechanism 2023/24. CP 1209. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁶⁷ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 1, HPA and concerns, Annual report 2024–25. HC 1030. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁶⁸ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 1, HPA and concerns, Annual report 2024–25. HC 1030. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁶⁹ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Annual report 2024–25. HC 1030. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁷⁰ HM Chief Inspectorate of Prisons (2025, n.d.). Our reports. Accessed 9 January 2026.

¹⁷¹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025, 16 July). HMP Pentonville urgent notification.

¹⁷² HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025, 15 December). HMP Swaleside urgent notification.

¹⁷³ Ofsted (2025, 30 July). Oakhill STC urgent notification.

¹⁷⁴ Ministry of Justice (2023, 25 April). Urgent Notification process.

The physical conditions of prisons

Around a quarter of people in prison are housed in prisons with Victorian-era accommodation.¹⁷⁵ Compact spaces originally built on the outskirts of cities, they have now become enclosed by urban expansion, making further improvements difficult and exacerbating the problems of overcrowding. Green space is limited, and both damp/coldness and overheating problems are caused by thick walls and poor ventilation. Narrow landings and steep staircases cause accessibility problems for an ageing prison population.¹⁷⁶

Inspectors raised concerns about living conditions in 24 of the 38 adult prisons inspected in 2024–25. Overcrowding persisted, with cramped cells and insufficient screening around toilets. Vermin infestations were not uncommon. Much of the prison estate is ageing and lacks sufficient capital investment.¹⁷⁷

Just over one in five women (21%) and over a quarter of men (29%) surveyed by inspectors said they spent less than 2 hours a day out of their cells during weekdays. This rose to 39% and 34% respectively during the weekend.¹⁷⁸

But there was a sharp divide between prison types. More than half (54%) of men in local prisons reported being unlocked for less than two hours a day, compared with just 2% of open prisons.¹⁷⁹

In 2024–25, more than a third (35%) of complaints made to the Prison and Probation Ombudsman concerned mishandling of prisoner property—three times higher than the next highest category.¹⁸⁰

Segregation

Inspectors reported that conditions in many segregation units remained severely restricted—with most people locked up for 23 hours a day.¹⁸¹

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.¹⁸² However, inspectors have praised the work of Close Supervision Centres (CSCs)—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.¹⁸³

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.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁵ Ministry of Justice (2025). Population bulletin: monthly November 2025. Prison population: monthly figures 2025.

¹⁷⁶ 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.

¹⁷⁷ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Annual report 2024–25. HC 1030. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁷⁸ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women’s comparator workbook, Annual report 2024–25. HC 1030. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁷⁹ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Men’s comparator workbook, Annual report 2024–25. HC 1030. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁸⁰ Prison and Probation Ombudsman (2025). Annual report 2024 to 2025. CP 1332. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁸¹ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Annual report 2024–25. HC 1030 HM Stationery Office.

¹⁸² Shalev, S. and Edgar, K. (2015). Deep custody: Segregation units and close supervision centres in England and Wales. Prison Reform Trust.

¹⁸³ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Report on an inspection of close supervision centres 18 March –17 April 2024.

¹⁸⁴ Shalev, S. and Edgar, K. (2015). Deep custody: Segregation units and close supervision centres in England and Wales. Prison Reform Trust.

Prison capacity and condition of the estate

The prison estate had a critically urgent shortage of capacity in 2024, triggering a host of emergency measures, including early releases. The government has estimated that the prison population will continue to grow by around 3,000 people a year—the equivalent of two large prisons—without measures to reduce demand.¹⁸⁵ There were fewer than 1,500 places left across the prison estate for seven months during 2024. In 2025, the picture remained largely the same: with fewer than 1,500 places left during half the year. In the last two years, overall operational capacity has increased by just 460 places.¹⁸⁶

Before the publication of the Labour government's 10-year prison capacity strategy, the National Audit Office had assessed that the Conservative government's prison building plans would leave a shortfall of 12,400 prison places by 2027.¹⁸⁷ The strategy was published in 2024, and estimated that even with additional plans to increase the supply of prison places, there would still be a shortfall of around 5,000 places by the end of 2027, persisting until at least 2032.¹⁸⁸

The Labour government set out plans to add around 14,000 prison places by 2031, with 47% being fulfilled by new prisons, 46% from new houseblocks at existing prisons, and 8% by adding further Rapid Deployment Cells. Another 1,150 places are planned through refurbishment of current cells, though 800 of these are still in use.¹⁸⁹

In the meantime, the system continues to grapple with ways to reduce demand on prisons. SDS40, the early release scheme introduced in 2024, continues to operate. Operation Safeguard was reactivated in March to June 2025, which permits adult male prisoners to be held in police custody instead of prison. Eligibility for open prisons has been greatly extended (they are less overcrowded than closed prisons), as has eligibility for Home Detention Curfew. Periods of recall were made shorter for people serving less than four years.^{190,191}

In 2025, the Independent Review of Prison Capacity concluded that both chronic and acute capacity issues had been caused by “irresistible pressure for more and longer prison sentences”, which undermined prisons’ ability to operate effectively.¹⁹²

The Independent Sentencing Review recommended a range of demand reduction measures, to ease the pressure on prison capacity. These included use of short custodial sentences of less than 12 months; only in exceptional circumstances; widening eligibility for fixed-term recalls; earlier release points from custody based on an ‘earned progression’ model; and greater use of electronic monitoring in the community. The review estimated that these changes would reduce the need for around 9,800 prison places.¹⁹³

The government accepted many of the Independent Sentencing Review's recommendations, but excluded people serving Extended Determinate Sentences from ‘earned progression’.¹⁹⁴ As a result, the Sentencing Act 2026 is estimated to reduce demand by around 7,500 places,¹⁹⁵ rather than the almost 10,000 places estimated in review.¹⁹⁶

Emergency measures

13,395 people were released early under the End of Custody Supervised Licence Scheme (ECSL) between October 2023 and September 2024.¹⁹⁷

38,042 people have been released so far under the SDS40 early release scheme, having served 40% of their sentence in prison, rather than the usual 50%, with the remainder to be served in the community on licence. Although people serving longer sentences are eligible, more than a quarter were serving sentences of less than six months (29%)—meaning they were released up to 18 days earlier. Just 3% were serving sentences of 10 years or more—meaning they were released at least 12 months earlier.¹⁹⁸

¹⁸⁵ Ministry of Justice (2024). 10-year prison capacity strategy. CP 1219. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁸⁶ Ministry of Justice (2025). Prison population figures: 2025. Population bulletin: monthly December 2025. And previous editions.

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

¹⁸⁸ Ministry of Justice (2024). Annual statement on prison capacity: 2024. CP 1220. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁸⁹ Ministry of Justice (2024). 10-year prison capacity strategy. CP 1219. HM Stationery Office.

¹⁹⁰ HM Prison and Probation Service (2025). Annual report and accounts 2024 to 2025. HC1371. House of Commons

¹⁹¹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.2, Chapter 2—Crowding. HMPPS annual performance digest 2024–25.

¹⁹² Owers, A. (2025). Independent review of prison capacity.

¹⁹³ Independent Sentencing Review (2025). Independent sentencing review: final report and proposals for reform.

¹⁹⁴ House of Commons written statement, 22 May 2025. Hansard vol 767, col 56WS.

¹⁹⁵ Ministry of Justice (2025). Sentencing bill impact assessment.

¹⁹⁶ Independent Sentencing Review (2025). Independent sentencing review: final report and proposals for reform.

¹⁹⁷ Ministry of Justice (2024). End of Custody Supervised Licence (ECSL) detailed data, England and Wales.

¹⁹⁸ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1 and 8, Standard determinate sentence 40 (SDS40): September 2024 to June 2025.

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.^{199,200}

Releases in error have risen steadily since the Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Act 2022, and the introduction of other legislation which has complicated the calculation of release dates. There were 87 releases in error in the year to March 2024—almost double the number in year to March 2021 (46 releases in error). In the year to March 2025 there were 262 releases in error,²⁰¹ and another 91 in the following seven months.²⁰² An independent review on the issue is due to report by the end of February 2026.²⁰³

Overcrowding

The prison system has been overcrowded in every year since 1994.^{204,205} Almost three-quarters of prisons (72%) in England and Wales were overcrowded in 2024–25—a nine percentage point increase on the previous year (11 additional prisons).²⁰⁶

Over 21,600 people are held in overcrowded accommodation—a quarter of the prison population (25%). This is a 5% increase on the year before.²⁰⁷

Private prisons saw a 17% increase in their numbers of prisoners held in overcrowded accommodation, while public sector prisons saw a 2% increase.²⁰⁸

The current level of overcrowding has remained broadly unchanged for the last 20 years. Court closures during the Covid-19 pandemic and a consequently reduced prison population meant that the level of overcrowding reduced slightly in 2021 and 2022. However, it has now returned to pre-pandemic levels.²⁰⁹

But the prison estate is not uniformly overcrowded. 93% of men's reception prisons are overcrowded, 84% of Category C prisons and just four of the 13 open prisons (27%).²¹⁰

New build prisons

HMP Millsike opened in March 2025,²¹¹ joining HMPs Fosse Way and Five Wells, which opened in 2023 and 2022 respectively.

The newest prisons are among the largest in England and Wales, along with HMP Berwyn which opened in 2017, and HMP Oakwood in 2012. They can hold between 1,500 and 1,700 prisoners without crowding, whilst Berwyn can hold 2,000.²¹²

One of three planned new prisons, HMP Welland Oaks, began construction in 2025,²¹³ and the others have secured planning permission.²¹⁴ The government has highlighted previous difficulties in securing planning permission for new prisons, leading to delays and increased costs.²¹⁵ In response, it has designated prisons as nationally important infrastructure, and created new powers that allow the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to decide whether to grant planning permission in England.²¹⁶

Unlike the other new sites, which are privately run Category C resettlement prisons, Welland Oaks will be a Category B training prison run by the public sector. It will hold around 1,700 prisoners.²¹⁷ An existing prison, HMP Highpoint, is on track to become the biggest public sector prison in England and Wales, adding 700 places²¹⁸ and taking its capacity to over 2,000 prisoners.²¹⁹

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

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

201 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.1, Chapter 1 tables—Escapes, absconds, failure to return from ROTL, releases in error. HMPPS annual digest 2024–25.

202 Ministry of Justice (2025). Transparency data: releases in error, England and Wales. Releases in error from 1 April 2025 to 31 October 2025.

203 House of Commons written question 103509, 13 January 2026.

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

205 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.2, Chapter 2: Prison crowding. HMPPS Annual digest: April 2024 to March 2025.

206 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.2, Chapter 2: Prison crowding. HMPPS Annual digest: April 2024 to March 2025.

207 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.2 and 2.3, Chapter 2 tables: Prison crowding. HMPPS Annual digest: April 2024 to March 2025.

208 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.3, Chapter 2: Prison crowding. HMPPS Annual digest: April 2024 to March 2025.

209 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.2, Chapter 2 tables: Prison crowding. HMPPS Annual digest: April 2024 to March 2025.

210 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.2, Chapter 2 tables: Prison crowding. HMPPS Annual digest: April 2024 to March 2025.

211 Ministry of Justice (2025, 28 March). New 1,500 place prison opens as government grips crisis.

212 Ministry of Justice (2025). Prison population figures: 2025. Population bulletin: monthly December 2025.

213 Ministry of Justice (2025, 9 December). Prison building boom to make streets safer.

214 National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (2025). Data. NISTA annual report 2024–25.

215 Ministry of Justice (2024). 10-year prison capacity strategy. CP 1219. HM Stationery Office.

216 The Town and Country Planning (Crown Development) (Urgent Applications) (Procedure) (England) Order 2025.

217 Timpson, J. (2025, 5 November). Letter to Andy Slaughter MP, Chair of the House of Commons Justice Committee.

218 Ministry of Justice (2025, 7 March). Prison expanded to make UK's largest public sector jail and make streets safer.

219 Ministry of Justice (2025). Prison population figures 2025. Prison population bulletin: monthly March 2025.

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 with larger prisons. They were also five times more likely to receive ‘good’ ratings in respect and purposeful activity.²²⁰

The government’s prison building progress

The Conservative government committed to 20,000 new prison places by the mid-2020s to meet rising demand, at a cost of £3.8 billion.²²¹ **Both the previous and current governments say around 6,000 places were delivered,** mainly from HMPs 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),²²² and installing around 730 Rapid Deployment Cells: modular units with a 15-year lifespan.²²³

The Labour government has promised to deliver another 14,000 places by 2031.²²⁴ So far, it has delivered 1,468 places at HMP Millsike,²²⁵ around 1,037 places in new houseblocks at existing prisons,^{226,227,228} around 183 usable places from re-rolling Cookham Wood to an adult prison,²²⁹ and around 200 Rapid Deployment Cells.^{230,231} It forecast that it would deliver 3,150 of these places by the end of 2025,²³² and has therefore met 92% of this target.

Further permanent expansion to currently operational prisons has been delayed by a major supplier entering administration.²³³ **Replacement contractors have been secured, however at the time of writing delivery had not yet recommenced.**²³⁴ One expansion programme will also complete later than planned due to rising costs,²³⁵ and planned expansions at two prisons (HMP Brinsford and HMP Morton Hall) have been cut.^{236,237,238} Owing to these issues, in August 2025, the arm of government that oversees large capital projects reported that the successful delivery of three of the eight prison estate expansion programmes “[appeared] to be unachievable...with major issues which...do not appear to be manageable or resolvable”.²³⁹

There are currently six separate programmes for expanding the existing prison estate: Houseblocks and Refurbishments; the Accelerated Houseblocks Programme; the Small Secure Houseblocks Programme; Category D Expansion; the Rapid Deployment Cells Project; and plans to build a new houseblock at privately run HMP & YOI Parc.²⁴⁰

Clear data on each programme is not published, but construction appears to be underway at all six Small Secure Houseblocks sites (1,080 places).^{241,242} Five of seven Accelerated Houseblock Delivery sites are also underway (1,976 places).^{243,244,245,246}

The expansion of the Category D estate (1,140 places), planned refurbishments of HMPs Liverpool and Birmingham (651 places) and a houseblock at HMP Guys Marsh (180 places) appear to be the programmes affected by supplier issues.^{247,248} HMP Parc’s outline business case was approved to progress to a full case in June 2025 (258 places).²⁴⁹

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

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

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

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

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

225 Ministry of Justice (2025). Prison population figures: 2025. Population bulletin: monthly December 2025.

226 Ministry of Justice (2025, 9 December). Prison building boom to make streets safer.

227 House of Commons written question 77258, 13 October 2025.

228 House of Commons written question 19627, 27 March 2024.

229 Ministry of Justice (2025). Prison population figures: 2025. Population bulletin: monthly December 2025.

230 Ministry of Justice (2025, 9 December). Prison building boom to make streets safer.

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

232 Ministry of Justice (2024). 10-year prison capacity strategy. CP 1219. HM Stationery Office.

233 National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (2025). Data. NISTA annual report 2024–25.

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235 National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (2025). Data. NISTA annual report 2024–25.

236 Ministry of Justice (2022). Small secure houseblocks programme—outline business case.

237 Ministry of Justice (2025). Small secure houseblocks programme—full business case (OBC).

238 House of Commons written question 19627, 27 March 2024.

239 National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (2025). Data. NISTA annual report 2024–25.

240 National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (2025). Data. NISTA annual report 2024–25.

241 Ministry of Justice (2025, 9 December). Prison building boom to make streets safer.

242 Ministry of Justice (2025). Small secure houseblocks programme—full business case.

243 Ministry of Justice (2025, 29 August). New prison houseblocks to make streets safer.

244 Ministry of Justice (2025, 9 December). Prison building boom to make streets safer.

245 Kier (2025, 13 Oct). Kier secures HMP Northumberland and HMP Lancaster Farms in latest additions to justice portfolio.

246 House of Commons written question 19627, 27 March 2024.

247 National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (2025). Data. NISTA annual report 2024–25.

248 House of Commons written question 89776, 11 November 2025.

249 Ministry of Justice (2025). HMP & YOI Parc houseblock expansion - outline business case (OBC).

Plans for Rapid Deployment Cells have changed regularly, but at present 1,050 installations appear to be planned,²⁵⁰ with this underway at four prisons.²⁵¹

The government intends to acquire more land for building prisons, despite but acknowledging that at the current rate of growth in the prison population it cannot build its way out of the prison crisis.²⁵²

The upfront capital cost of providing just one prison place is £500,000 for more secure closed conditions. For less secure open conditions or temporary accommodation it is £400,000 per place.²⁵³

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.²⁵⁴

The Conservative government completed refurbishments at seven prisons²⁵⁵ **but also delayed cell maintenance as a way of “creating” prison places.**²⁵⁶

The Labour government committed to investing £300 million in prison refurbishment in 2025–26.²⁵⁷

In a survey of prison estate conditions by the Ministry of Justice, just 2% of public sector prison buildings received a rating of ‘good’ for fabric, mechanical and electrical. 13% were rated ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ on fabric, and 18% on mechanical and electrical. The estimated cost to bring buildings up to ‘fair’ condition and maintaining it until the end of this decade is £1.4bn.²⁵⁸

The Ministry of Justice estimates it will cost a further £1.4bn to make prison cells legally fire safety compliant.²⁵⁹ The annual number of prison fires has more than doubled in the past five years. In 2024–25, two-thirds of fires (67%) were caused by vapes.²⁶⁰

In July 2025, the government acknowledged that 21,000 prison places (around 24% of all operational places) did not meet current fire safety standards, and that 6,000 places may still be non-compliant by 2027—the deadline set by the Crown Premises Fire Safety Inspectorate.²⁶¹

Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) has been found at eight prisons, affecting 183 prison places.²⁶² RAAC is a building material often used in public buildings between the 1950s and 1990s. It can deteriorate over time and may be at increased risk of collapse with little or no warning, particularly after exposure to water.²⁶³

Following the detection of elevated radon gas readings, prisoners and staff at HMP Dartmoor were transferred to other prisons in July 2024, and work to understand the impact of exposure is underway.²⁶⁴ 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.²⁶⁵

HMP Dartmoor opened in 1809, and HMPPS has said that the closure is temporary.²⁶⁶ In 2025, the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee criticised the prison service for renewing Dartmoor’s 10-year lease in 2022 without negotiating a financial safeguard in the event that it needed to close or partially close the prison due to radon levels at the site.²⁶⁷

250 Ministry of Justice (2024). 10-year prison capacity strategy. CP 1219. HM Stationery Office.

251 Ministry of Justice (2025, 9 December). Prison building boom to make streets safer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

260 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2025). Crown premises fire safety inspectorate annual report. 2024/25.

261 Copple, P. (2024, 21 July). Letter to Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP, Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts.

262 HM Prison and Probation Service (2025). Annual report and accounts 2024–2025. HC1371. HM Stationery Office.

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

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

265 Health and Safety Executive (n.d). Radon in the workplace. Accessed 19 January 2026.

266 HM Prison and Probation Service (2025). Annual report and accounts 2024–2025. HC1371. HM Stationery Office.

267 Committee of Public Accounts (2026). Ministry of Justice follow-up: Autumn 2025. HC1240. House of Commons.

Prison service resources and staffing

Resources

HM Prison 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%.^{268,269,270} Despite increases in recent years, including an 11% rise in 2025–26, its resource budget still remains only 8% higher in real terms than in 2010–11.^{271,272}

The cost of a prison place in 2023–24 was 3% higher in real terms than 2010–11. The average annual overall cost of a prison place in England and Wales is now £56,987.^{273,274,275}

Staffing

The number of frontline operational prison staff (bands 3–5) was cut by 26% between 2010–2017.²⁷⁶

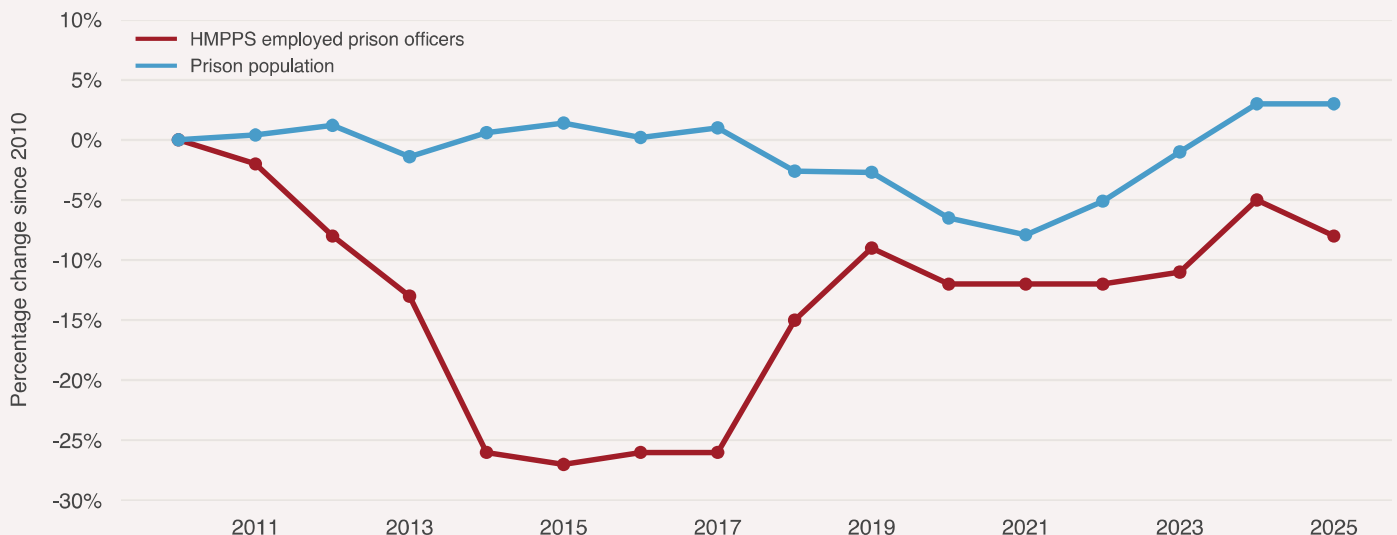
In 2017 the Conservative government announced £100m to partially reverse the decline²⁷⁷, committing to recruit a further 2,500 officers by the end of 2018.²⁷⁸ This target was achieved. It then committed to recruiting 5,000 officers by the mid 2020s.²⁷⁹

However, there are just 378 more officers than there were in 2021—8% of the staffing target,²⁸⁰ and 9% fewer than in 2010.²⁸¹

Officer numbers have been steadily declining in the last year, and have fallen by 4%.²⁸²

In 2025, changes to the skilled worker visa salary threshold risked a staffing crisis, as the threshold was set above many prison officers' salaries. In December 2025, a 12 month exemption was secured. The Prison Officer Association estimated that the change risked the loss of 2,500 recruits.²⁸³

Public sector prison officer numbers remain down on 2010



Sources: Ministry of Justice (2025). HMPPS workforce quarterly: March 2025. And previous editions. Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.

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

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

270 HM Treasury (2025). GDP deflators at market prices, and money GDP November 2025 (Autumn Statement).

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272 HM Treasury (2025). GDP deflators at market prices, and money GDP November 2025 (Autumn Statement).

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274 Ministry of Justice (2025). Costs per prison place and prisoner. Prison performance data 2023 to 2024.

275 HM Treasury (2025). GDP deflators at market prices, and money GDP November 2025 (Autumn Statement).

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

277 Ministry of Justice (2017, 8 February). Justice Secretary launches new prison and probation service to reform offenders.

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

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

280 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 4, HMPPS workforce statistics bulletin: September 2025 tables. HMPPS workforce quarterly: September 2025.

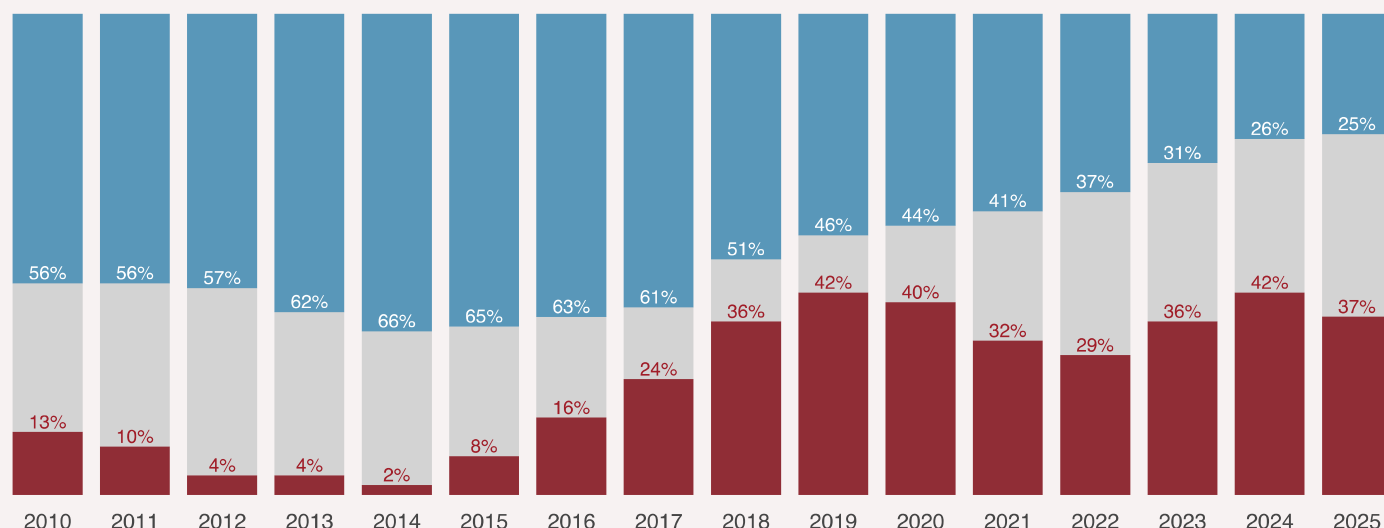
281 Ministry of Justice (2018). Table 3, HMPPS workforce statistics bulletin: September 2018 tables. HMPPS workforce quarterly: September 2018.

282 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 4, HMPPS workforce statistics bulletin: September 2025 tables. HMPPS workforce quarterly: September 2025.

283 Morton, B. and Grammaticas, D. (2025, 19 December). Foreign prison officers exempted from stricter visa rules. BBC News.

Growing inexperience

The number of staff with **less than three years service** is high and those with **10 or more years** is declining



Sources: Ministry of Justice (2025). HMPPS workforce quarterly: March 2025. And previous editions.

Retention is a significant problem. In the year to September 2025, just over one in 10 (11%) employed officers left the prison service.²⁸⁴

More than half of officers who left the service in the last year (54%) had stayed in the role for less than three years. One in five (20%) left after less than a year.²⁸⁵

Inspectors have found that staff shortages in other grades are also having an impact. Shortages in education, probation and mental health staff affect the quality of provision and support available to prisoners.^{286,287}

Since 2019, the starting salary for a prison officer has risen from £23,529 to £35,875.^{288,289}

But a 2024 inquiry found that many new staff do not receive adequate support, and suggested that morale was at an all-time low.²⁹⁰

Inspectors have 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.²⁹¹

In 2025, a parliamentary inquiry into prison leadership and staffing concluded that prison governors need more autonomy, and that a thorough overhaul of measures to recruit, assess and train prison officers was needed.²⁹²

²⁸⁴ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 11, HMPPS workforce statistics bulletin: September 2025 tables HMPPS workforce quarterly: September 2025.
²⁸⁵ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 13, HMPPS workforce statistics bulletin: September 2025 tables HMPPS workforce quarterly: September 2025.
²⁸⁶ Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2024). Efficiency spotlight report: The impact of recruitment and retention on the justice system.
²⁸⁷ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Annual report 2024–25. HC 1030. HM Stationery Office.
²⁸⁸ House of Commons written question 11803, 6 February 2024.
²⁸⁹ House of Commons written question 71317, 9 September 2025.
²⁹⁰ Neill, R. (2024, 23 May). Letter to Edward Argar MP, Minister for Prisons, Parole and Probation.
²⁹¹ Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2024). Efficiency spotlight report: The impact of recruitment and retention on the justice system.
²⁹² House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee (2025). Better prisons: less crime. HL paper 153. House of Lords.

Private prisons

In England and Wales there are 18,541 people held in private prisons (21% of the imprisoned population).²⁹³

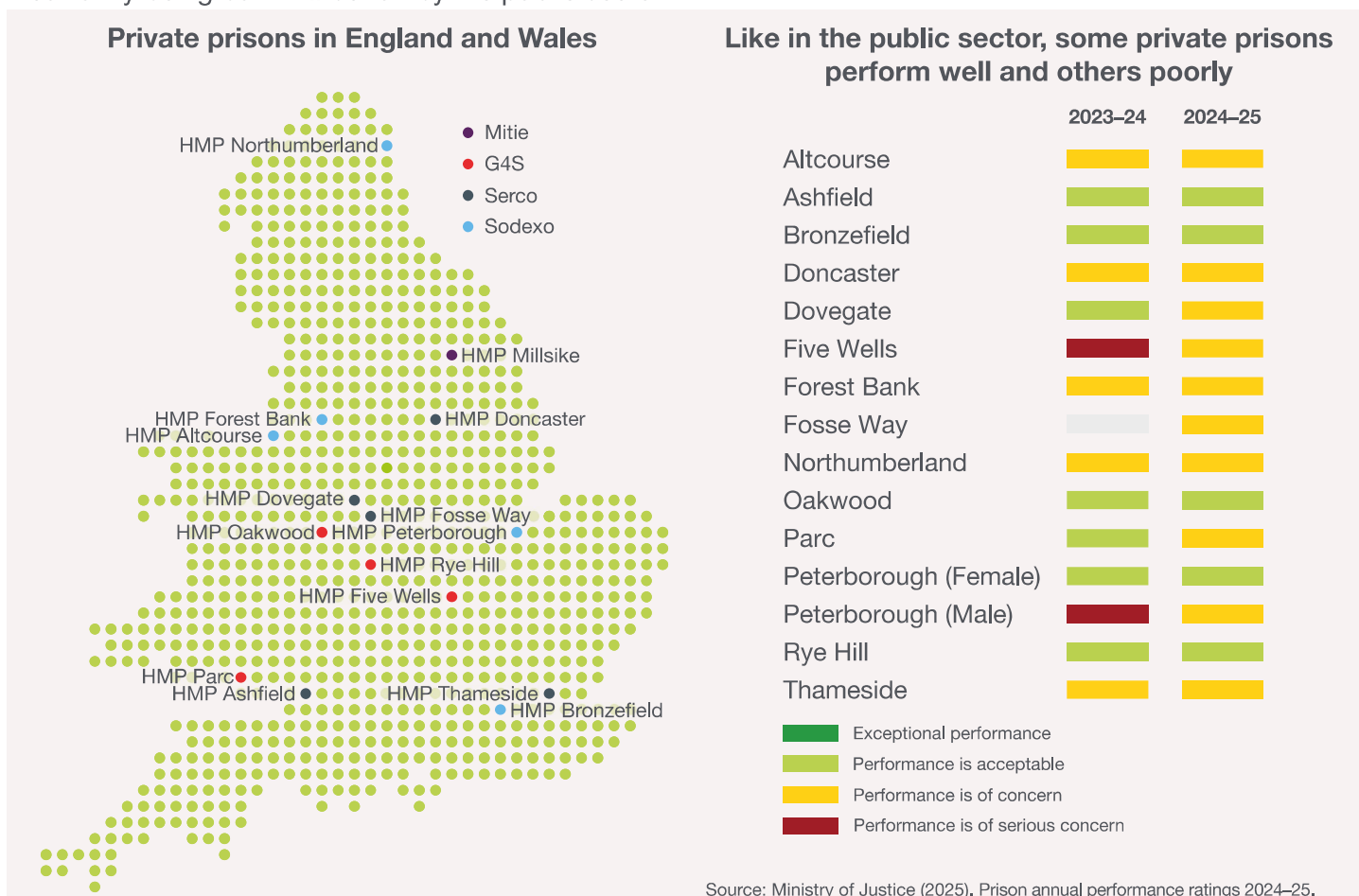
There are 15 private prisons in England and Wales. Private prisons cost a total of £762.9m in 2023–24.²⁹⁴ The newest privately run prison, HMP Millsike, opened in 2025.²⁹⁵ The contract was awarded to Mitey Care & Custody,²⁹⁶ the first new provider to be awarded a prison contract since the 1990s.

In 2025, Sodexo's contract to run HMP Forest Bank was extended for a further 10 years,²⁹⁷ following expiry of the previous 25-year term. Four more long-term contracts are due to expire by April 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.²⁹⁸

Contract expiry can seriously destabilise prisons, even if the operator remains the same. In 2024, HMP Lowdham Grange was taken back into public ownership²⁹⁹ following serious deterioration after the transfer of contract from one provider to another.³⁰⁰ In 2025, inspectors raised concerns that HMP Parc, previously a high performing prison, had deteriorated following transfer to a new contract and departure of senior leaders.³⁰¹

Oasis Restore secure school opened in June 2024, but has been temporarily closed since September 2025 because of safety concerns about heavily damaged doors being unable to be locked.³⁰² It is currently the only secure institution operated by a charity.

The current government has not clarified its stance on private contracting.³⁰³ However, the prison currently being built will be run by the public sector.



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Prison annual performance ratings 2024–25.

²⁹³ Ministry of Justice (2025). Prison population: Monthly figures 2025. Population bulletin: Monthly November 2025.

²⁹⁴ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table T1, Costs per place and costs per prisoner 2023–24 supplementary information. HM Prison and Probation Service annual report and accounts 2023–24 management information addendum. Prison performance data 2024–25. Note: The unit costs of private and public prisons are not directly comparable because of different methods of financing and scope.

²⁹⁵ Ministry of Justice (2025, 28 March). New 1,500 place prison opens as government grips crisis.

²⁹⁶ Ministry of Justice (2024, 23 April). Contract awarded to UK's first all-electric 'green' prison.

²⁹⁷ Timpson, J. (2025, 30 April). Letter to Andy Slaughter MP, Chair of the Justice Committee.

²⁹⁸ House of Lords written question HL3981, 27 January 2025.

²⁹⁹ Ministry of Justice (2024, 22 May). HMP Lowdham Grange contract to transition to public sector control.

³⁰⁰ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Report on an independent review of progress at HMP Lowdham Grange. 8–10 January 2024.

³⁰¹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Parc. 6–17 January 2025.

³⁰² Ofsted (2025). Oasis Restore Trust monitoring visit.

³⁰³ 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	29% 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	50% of women 47% 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:

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 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.
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 Ministry of Justice (2012). Accommodation, homelessness and reoffending of prisoners.
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 Ministry of Justice (2012). Estimating the prevalence of disability amongst prisoners.
 Ministry of Justice (2012). Prisoners' childhood and family backgrounds.
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 Table KS611EW, Office for National Statistics (2012). 2011 Census.
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 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 (ex)prisoners and their families who want to share their experiences and ideas with policy makers. Our Building Futures programme, ran from 2020 to 2025, working with men serving at least 10 years in custody, and women serving at least eight years. In 2024, we launched our Next Generation Leaders programme, which gives aspiring prison governors a safe, independent and inspiring space to drive reform. PRT aims to provide innovative policy solutions informed by people in prison, and shape a custodial environment that is safe, humane, encourages accountability and fosters hope.

In 2025, we heard again from long-serving prisoners, as well as their families and loved ones, in England, Wales and Scotland. We heard from young people with a parent in prison and their support workers, and we gained insight into the emerging digital culture of prisons from those who live and work there. Our Next Generation Leaders told us about a year where prisons have been rarely out of the public eye, and what that means for them, their staff, and the prisoners in their care.

Prisoners

Release from long-term imprisonment: understanding the experiences of people released from the longest sentences.³⁰⁴

Release from a long-term prison sentence can be a daunting and difficult experience. 20 people living on licence in the community told us about early anxiety, practical difficulties through to tough probation requirements, social shame, fear of recall, and gradual readjustment to the world. People told us about hope for the future yet feeling permanently, irreversibly changed.

“I was very scared. Suddenly you’ve got responsibility and suddenly you’re on your own. And not only that, because obviously I was away for well over 20 years and everything had changed. Absolutely everything!”

“Regardless of what I do, I’m always going to be known as somebody that served a life sentence. What I did back then defined my life and will continue to define my life going forward...that’s a sad fact that will never change.”

“At least I, unlike my victim, can experience freedom, so there is that counterbalance.”

“[The prospect of recall] is kind of a very permanent sort of quiet presence in the background, it’s not particularly burdensome...[but] the conversation is still going on in your mind.”

“So I was linking up with people outside, saying, ‘I’m interested in a job.’ ‘Well, where are you going to live on release?’ ‘I don’t know. I could be on the streets.’ ‘Oh, God, well, I can’t give you a job here then.’ So it just all points towards potential failure.”

“My mind stopped the day I got sentenced. It hasn’t grown. It hasn’t adjusted as the world’s adjusted outside. That’s a barrier, immaturity.”

“Bells, keys, radios, doors slamming, if I hear something slamming, I have PTSD.”

“There’s lots of hurdles and if you let them overwhelm you, it’s a problem and you start sinking very quickly. You can’t just get in a mood or a grump. You just have to get on with it.”

304 Rennie, A. (2025). Release from long-term imprisonment: understanding the experiences of people released from the longest sentences and returning to the community. Prison Reform Trust.

The pains of progression: the pathway through a very long-term sentence in a Scottish prison.³⁰⁵

Building on the voices we have heard from the English and Welsh system, we asked long-term prisoners in Scotland about their experiences of sentence progression. They told us about the importance of personal change, and how this could be impeded by loss of hope, lengthy imprisonment compounded by bureaucratic delays, and a focus on risk at the expense of support, all of which fostered a lack of trust in those who work with them.

“I need to be able to tell my stories, what happened to me, what I need to do.”

“It is all risk focus. There is no prisoner focus. There is no human being focus. There is no mental health focus. And there’s no accountability.”

“They’re supposed to meet the critical dates, but the critical dates are never met.”

“They say ‘what’s your plans for the future Mr Y?’ And I just straight away shut them down by saying ‘it’s not like I’m getting out next week is it?’”

“You can’t say to a guy ‘I’m putting you in there and we’re coming back to see you in 16 years’ time for your window to open up’. That guy’s got to say in five years I go there, and four years after that I go there. He’s got to have hope to get through that.”

Update and restart: post-pandemic prison digitalisation in England and Wales.³⁰⁶

Prisons have made great strides in digitalisation since the Covid-19 pandemic. We spoke to prisoners and staff at a highly digitalised prison, as well as a range of stakeholders contributing to the digitalisation effort. We found an emerging digital culture in prisons that is in many ways welcomed, but is also creating a divide between tech and non-tech enabled prisons.

“The difference between my last prison where there was two phones on the landing and the tablets here is like the difference between a pedal car and a spaceship.” (Prisoner)

“That’s the one thing that keeps me going. Every day my mum texts me saying she loves me.” (Prisoner)

“When the queen died, the news app made you feel a bit more part of the national mourning process.” (Prisoner)

“The prisoner has a record, so things like complaint processes should be more robust because you can’t stick it in a bin, and you can’t say you’ve sent that when you haven’t. It protects everyone.” (Staff)

“Our self-harm and violence really reduced when we introduced the in-cell phones.” (Staff)

“We’re now condemned in the prison service to working in two modes: working in one mode with prisoners who’ve got in-cell tech and working in another way with the others. How can you reasonably move people across the estate when you’re taking away a good thing?” (Staff)

³⁰⁵ Cross, D. (2025). The pains of progression: the pathway through a very long-term sentence in a Scottish prison. Prison Reform Trust

³⁰⁶ Prison Reform Trust (2025). Update and restart: post-pandemic prison digitalisation in England and Wales.

What families and loved ones of people in prison say

Child impact assessments for children with a parent in the justice system.³⁰⁷

Children can be deeply affected by a parent going to prison, but their voices often go unheard. As part of improving assessment of their needs, PRT Associate Sarah Beresford OBE engaged in ongoing conversations with children and young people about what it means to them to be heard, and how it helps the practitioners who support them.

“This has made things better for me. I was able to say how I felt and what I needed.” (Young person)

“I liked speaking to my teacher about dad.” (Young person)

“This was a really helpful tool for me in supporting a 14-year-old boy whose mother is in prison. It is an area I knew very little about. [It gave] me an understanding of how he might be feeling.” (Practitioner)

The long stretch 2: the emotional impact of long-term imprisonment on loved ones.³⁰⁸

Families and loved ones can serve a long sentence too. 24 of them told us about their experiences, from the difficulties of visits to the deep emotional pain of separation, and how it changed their perceptions of the justice system.

“When he comes out in 19/20 years’ time...we might not even be here.”

“You have to grieve for them—for that part of their—the life that you thought you were going to have with them...it’s horrible. It’s a horrible feeling.”

“I can’t listen to music...because music was his life. He loved music—he’d come out the shower dancing. It’s silly things like that that people don’t understand how much it kind of gets to your heart and knowing that he’s not there anymore.”

“I’ve changed a lot of my friends’ opinions by sharing my story...showing them...The worst thing in the world could easily happen to them.”

“The papers put our address in there...I thought, we’re innocent, we’ve not done anything wrong, we didn’t know anything...I felt scared for me, my kids.”

‘The lang whang’ (the long journey): the hidden impact of Scotland’s toughest prison sentences.³⁰⁹

10 loved ones of people serving long sentences in Scotland also told us about their experiences.

“There’s absolutely no support for the family and the child in these situations, which I feel is a massive issue.”

“My house was on the front page of [a newspaper]. I had two cars firebombed, the house caught fire.”

“It wasn’t easy for the first four years she was out. It was strange to have her out [after 18 years]. It was an adjustment for us getting to know her outside of prison. We were very wary.”

³⁰⁷ Beresford, S. (2025). Child impact assessments for children with a parent in the justice system. Phase two report: dissemination and implementation. Prison Reform Trust.

³⁰⁸ Woolsey, R. (2025). The long stretch 2: the emotional impact of long-term imprisonment on loved ones. Prison Reform Trust

³⁰⁹ Hampton, C. et al. (2025). ‘The lang whang’ (the longest journey): the hidden impact of Scotland’s toughest prison sentences. Prison Reform Trust.

What prison governors say

We asked our Next Generation Leaders what their highs and lows were of this year in prison, and what it's like for them and their jail when the 'lows' hit the headlines. Their responses show the pressures, sorrows, and shared humanity of those who live and work in prison.

“Our society appears to enjoy prison scandal. For myself and colleagues, it undermines the compassion and courage taken every day to get the best outcomes for the people in our care.”

“There is something about being closed away from our communities that prevents positive stories hitting the headlines, or society developing curiosity about the good.”

“The high and low was the same: we lost a long serving member of the team to a tragic accident. Staff and prisoners grieved the loss; prisoners spontaneously started to write messages of remembrance on his office door. Those messages mattered to his loved ones and to the staff.”

“Dealing with the changes driven by ministers who do not understand what we do, in order to mitigate media pressure can affect things, and places unnecessary pressure and anxiety into the service.”

“It's been another difficult year. Acute mental illness in custody has been heartbreaking, but how staff have dealt with these individuals—with care, compassion, and doing things that are absolutely not within a prison officer role—reminds me just how incredible our staff are.”

“The public perception of prisons and probation is getting worse—this is having a huge impact on staff morale and likely to be impacting our future recruitment.”

“2025 has been another tough year. The pressures of prison capacity have been relentless.”

“We know the media often portray the negative elements of life in prison. What they fail to capture is the amazing work that takes place day in, day out by our committed staff who simply want to make a difference and change someone's life.”

People from an ethnic minority background in prison

Over a quarter (27%) of the prison population, 24,041 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.³¹⁰ If our prison population reflected the ethnic make-up of England and Wales, we would have around 9,000 fewer men and boys in prison³¹¹—the equivalent of 12 average-sized male prisons.³¹²

A 2016 study found that people from ethnic minority backgrounds 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 with white people, even after accounting for higher not guilty plea rates.³¹³

Despite this evidence, in 2025 the government introduced legislation to block Sentencing Council guidelines directing sentencers to request pre-sentence reports (PSRs) for people from minority ethnic and cultural backgrounds.³¹⁴ PSRs are widely understood to enhance judicial understanding of defendants' circumstances, what would be the most effective sentences, and social backgrounds unfamiliar to the judge.³¹⁵

Defendants from an ethnic minority group are more likely to be remanded in custody than white defendants. In 2024, Black defendants were 29% more likely, defendants of mixed ethnicities 22% more likely, and Asian defendants 19% more likely to receive this outcome.³¹⁶

People from ethnic minority backgrounds serve a greater proportion of their determinate sentence in prison than people from a white background. In 2024, Black people spent the highest proportion of their sentence in prison (62%), followed by those from a mixed ethnic background (58%), white (56%), other ethnic background (54%), and Asian (53%) prisoners.³¹⁷

3% of surveyed men, 1% of women and 8% of children in custody said that they identify as Gypsy, Roma or Traveller (GRT),³¹⁸ compared with an estimated 0.1% of the general population in England and Wales.³¹⁹ Children from a GRT background are more likely to report that they feel unsafe, have a disability, and have health problems.³²⁰

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.³²¹

Fewer Black, Asian and minority ethnic men in prison 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.³²²

A 2022 inspectorate review found that many Black prisoners felt that uneasy relationships with staff partly stemmed from underlying prejudice and racism, while few staff acknowledged the possibility of racism in their establishments.³²³ People in prison from an ethnic minority background are more likely to report being recently restrained or segregated.³²⁴

Prison officers remain less ethnically diverse than prisoners. In March 2025, 10% of public sector prison officers (bands 3–5) identified as Black, 3% as Asian, and 83% as white, whereas 12% of prisoners identify as Black, 8% as Asian, and 72% as white. But 13% of officers did not have their ethnicity recorded or did not disclose it, compared with only 1% of prisoners.^{325,326}

In youth custody, 59% of children in custody were from an ethnic minority background,³²⁷ compared with 16% of band 3–5 staff.³²⁸

310 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.7, Prison population: 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

311 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.

312 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.13, Prison population: 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

313 Hopkins, K., Uhrig, N. and 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.

314 Ministry of Justice (2025, 1 April). Government to introduce legislation to block new sentencing guidelines.

315 The Lammy Review (2017). An independent review into the treatment of, and outcomes for, Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals in the criminal justice system.

316 Ministry of Justice (2025). Ethnicity and the criminal justice system 2024.

317 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 6.02, Chapter 6: Offender management tables. Ethnicity and the criminal justice system 2024.

318 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook, Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

319 Office for National Statistics (2025). Gypsy or Irish Traveller populations, England and Wales: Census 2021.

320 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 1 and 8, Children's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

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

322 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 6, Men's comparator workbooks, Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

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

324 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 6, Women's and men's comparator workbooks, Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

325 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.Q.7, Prison population: 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

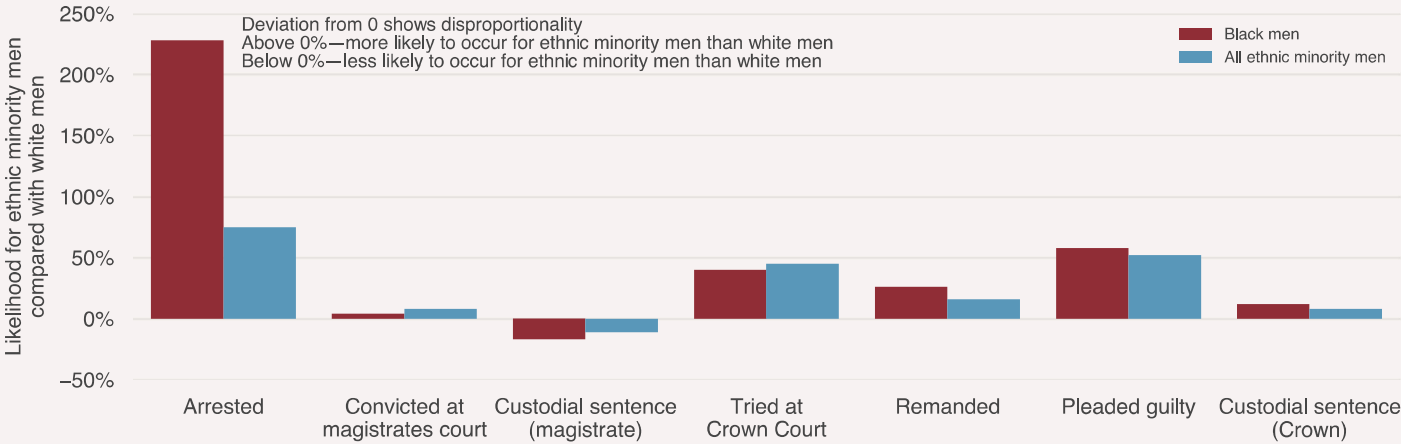
326 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1b, HMPPS annual staff equalities 20234 to 2025 tables. HMPPS staff equalities report: 2024 to 2025.

327 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.2, Youth custody report: November 2025.

328 House of Commons written question 2642, 23 November 2023.

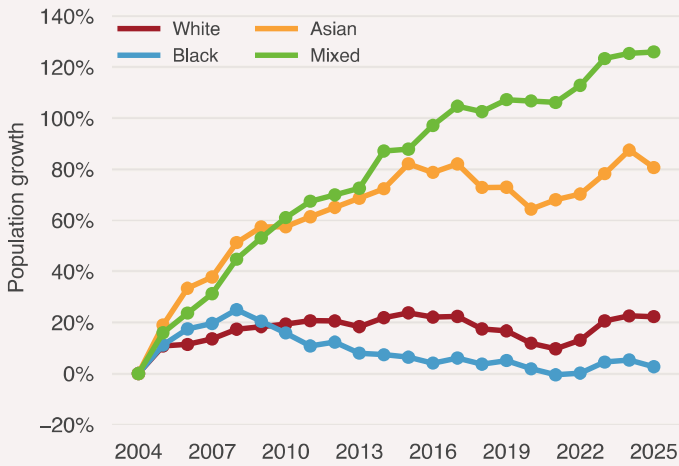
Equal justice?

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



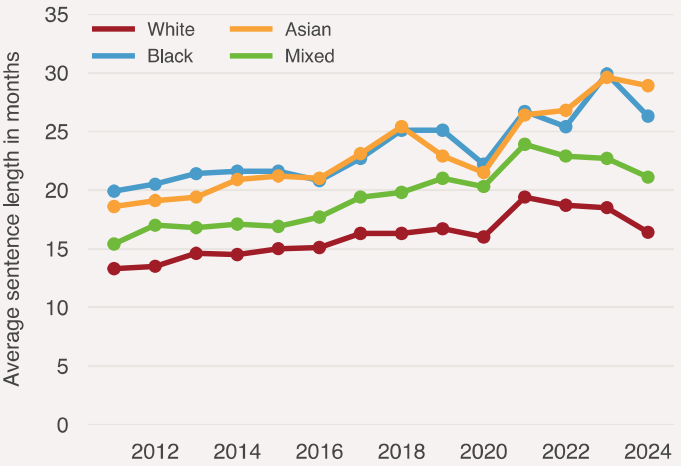
Source: Ministry of Justice (2016). Black, Asian and minority ethnic disproportionality in the criminal justice system in England and Wales.

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



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

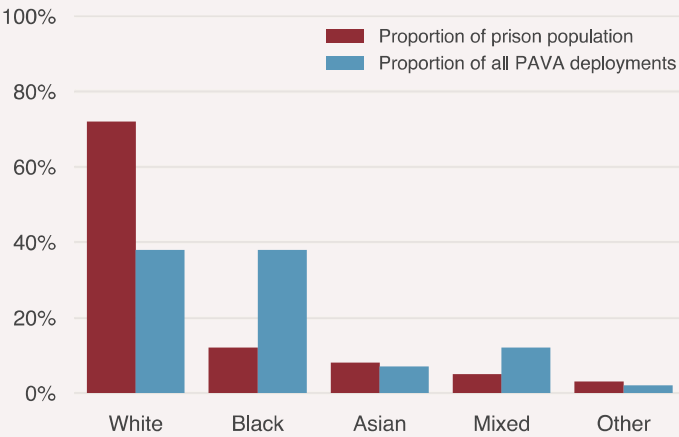
Average custodial sentence lengths are higher for people from Black, Asian and mixed ethnic backgrounds



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Criminal justice statistics quarterly: update to December 2024.

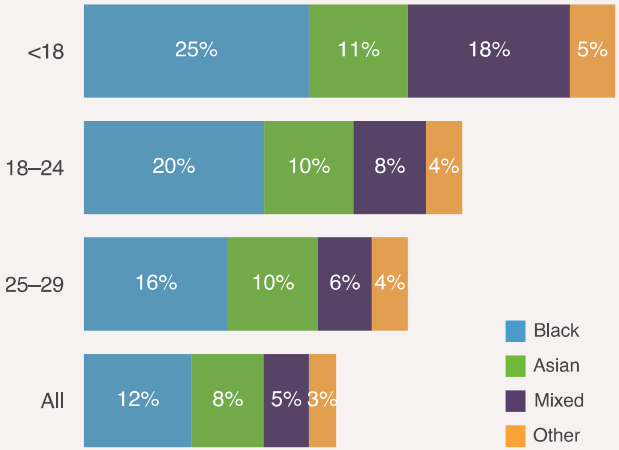
PAVA spray

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



Sources:
Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.
House of Lords written question HL13020, 22 December 2025.

Ethnic minority representation is even greater amongst younger prisoners



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Chapter 6: Offender management tables. Ethnicity and the criminal justice system 2024.

Faith and belief in prison

45% 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. Three in 10 (30%) state they have no religion.³²⁹

In youth custody around a quarter of children (27%) identify their religion as Christian, and Muslim (26%), with 6% reporting another faith. One in seven (15%) state they have no religion.³³⁰

The number of Muslims in adult prisons has nearly tripled since 2002, rising from 5,502 to 16,051 by 2025. They make up 18% of the prison population,³³¹ compared with 6% of the general population.³³²

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.³³³

Muslim prisoners are less likely to say they feel safe, treated respectfully by staff, or that they could turn to a staff member for help.³³⁴

The ideology of people in prison for terrorist offences is recorded. 151 people were in prison for offences related to Islamist extremism in 2025—six fewer than in the previous year. The number peaked at 187 in 2017, and has declined since.³³⁵

The number of people in prison in 2025 for right-wing extremism has risen to 71, up from 69 the year before, and just five people 10 years ago. A further 22 people are in prison for terror offences for another or no specific ideology.³³⁶

LGBT people in prison

One in 15 surveyed men (6%) and almost three in 10 women in prison (30%) identify as gay/lesbian or bisexual.³³⁷ This is a broadly similar proportion to the proportion of men in the general population who identify as gay or bisexual (4%), and considerably higher than the number of women who do so (3%).³³⁸

Nine people in prison have a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC).³³⁹ There were 339 transgender people in prison without a GRC, as of March 2025. 247 identified as trans women and 64 as trans men; 18 identified as non-binary and 10 self-identified in a different way or their identified gender was unrecorded/stated. 276 reported their biological sex as male and 63 reported their biological sex as female.³⁴⁰

Five or fewer trans women are housed in a women's prison. Five or fewer trans men are housed in a men's prison.³⁴¹ Most transgender women do not request to be held in the women's estate.³⁴²

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.³⁴³

In 2024, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment recommended that, as a matter of principle, transgender people should be housed in prisons corresponding to their self-identified gender, subject to individualised risk assessments which should guide the location of both trans- and cisgender prisoners, considering both their own and others' safety.³⁴⁴

Allocation of transgender prisoners is managed through individual case boards that consider risk, safety, care, and wellbeing of all involved.³⁴⁵ This policy is under review following the Supreme Court judgement on the definition of biological sex and its implications for the management of single-sex spaces.³⁴⁶

³²⁹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.A.22, Prison population: 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.

³³⁰ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.5. Youth custody report: November 2025.

³³¹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.A.22, Prison population: 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025. And previous editions.

³³² Office for National Statistics (2022). Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021.

³³³ House of Commons written question 8447, 16 January 2024.

³³⁴ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 7, Women & men's comparator workbooks, Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

³³⁵ Home Office (2025). Table P.01b, Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000: quarterly update to September 2025.

³³⁶ Home Office (2025). Table P.01b, Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000: quarterly update to September 2025.

³³⁷ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook, Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

³³⁸ Office for National Statistics (2025). Sexual orientation, UK: 2023.

³³⁹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.1, Chapter 2 tables: transgender prisoners. HM Prison and Probation Service Offender Equalities Annual Report 2024 to 2025.

³⁴⁰ Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 2.1, Chapter 2 tables: transgender prisoners. HM Prison and Probation Service Offender Equalities Annual Report 2024 to 2025.

³⁴¹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.1, Chapter 2 tables: transgender prisoners. HM Prison and Probation Service Offender Equalities Annual Report 2024 to 2025.

³⁴² House of Commons written question 19488, 18 December 2024.

³⁴³ United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (2009). Handbook on prisoners with special needs. United Nations.

³⁴⁴ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (2024). 33rd general report. Activities 2023. Council of Europe.

³⁴⁵ Ministry of Justice (2024). The care and management of individuals who are transgender.

³⁴⁶ House of Commons written question 91829, 20 November 2025.

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 often because 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, including regimes that are ill-suited to older prisoners, and poor living conditions.³⁴⁷

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.³⁴⁸ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons,³⁴⁹ the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman,³⁵⁰ Age UK³⁵¹ and other organisations³⁵² 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.”³⁵³ The government later accepted the committee’s recommendation to publish a strategy³⁵⁴ and publication was initially scheduled for summer 2021, then early 2023.³⁵⁵ 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 more than four times the number there were in 2002.³⁵⁶

Almost one in five (18%) of the prison population are aged 50 or over – 16,163 people. Of these 4,559 are in their 60s and a further 2,109 people are 70 or older.³⁵⁷

The government projects a 14% rise in the prison population by 2029, including a significant increase in older prisoners. Those aged 50 and over are expected to grow by 15% and those aged 70 and over by 23%.³⁵⁸

More than two in five men in prison aged over 50 (42%) are there for alleged or convicted sexual offences. The next highest offence category is violence against the person (31%) followed by drug, and theft offences (5% each). For women aged over 50 in prison, almost half (49%) are there for alleged or convicted offences of violence against the person, followed by drug offences (10%), then miscellaneous offences (7%).³⁵⁹

474 people in prison were aged 80 or over as of 30 September 2025. All are men.³⁶⁰

A third (33%) of unreleased people serving an indeterminate sentence are aged 50 or over. 2,424 people are serving life sentences and a further 405 are serving an Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentence.³⁶¹

³⁴⁷ Davies, M. et al. (2023). Living (and dying) as an older person in prison. Nuffield Trust.

³⁴⁸ Pryce, J. (2024). Growing old and dying inside: improving the experiences of older people serving long prison sentences. Prison Reform Trust.

³⁴⁹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons and Care Quality Commission (2018). Social care in prisons in England and Wales.

³⁵⁰ Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (2017). Learning lessons from PPO investigations: Older prisoners.

³⁵¹ Age UK (2019). Older prisoners (England and Wales).

³⁵² Clinks (2021). Understanding the needs and experiences of older people in prison.

³⁵³ House of Commons Justice Committee (2012). Older prisoners. HM Stationery Office.

³⁵⁴ House of Commons Justice Committee (2020). Ageing prison population: Government Response to the Committee’s Fifth Report. HM Stationery Office.

³⁵⁵ Rob Butler MP (2022, 19 October). Letter to Sir Bob Neill, Chair of Justice Select Committee.

³⁵⁶ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.A.18, Prison population: 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.

³⁵⁷ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.6, Prison population: 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

³⁵⁸ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 4.1, Prison population projections: 2025 to 2030: Statistical tables. Prison population projections: 2025 to 2030.

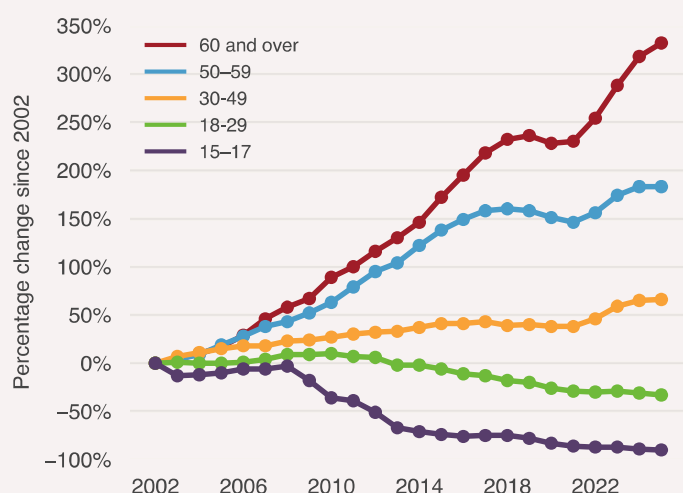
³⁵⁹ House of Lords written question HL12965, 19 December 2025.

³⁶⁰ House of Lords written question HL12965, 19 December 2025.

³⁶¹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.A.33, Prison population: 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025

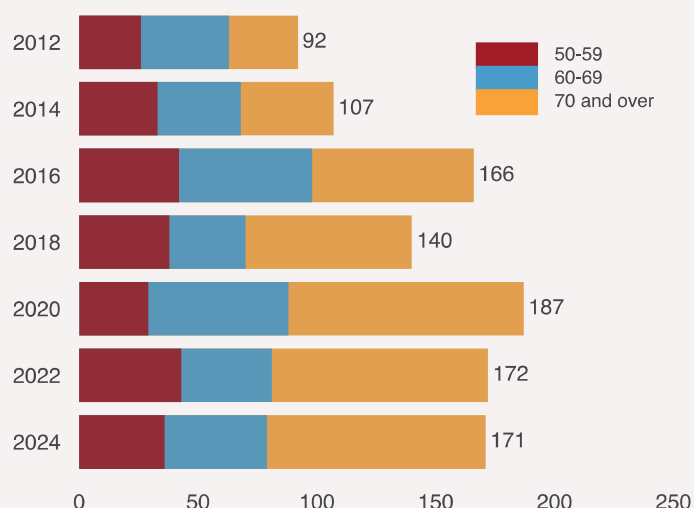
Growing old behind bars

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



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.

Deaths by natural causes



Sources: Ministry of Justice (2025). Safety in custody: Quarterly update to September 2024.

Treatment, conditions and release planning

The Care Act 2014 introduced a duty for local authorities 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.³⁶²

171 people aged 50 or over died of natural causes whilst in prison in 2024—almost two and a half times the number that died 20 years ago.³⁶³

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 people in prison over 60 may have some form of major illness.³⁶⁴

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.³⁶⁵

Men in prison aged over 50 generally report more positively on many aspects of prison life compared with younger men. However, they are more likely to report physical health issues, difficulties accessing healthcare upon arrival, fewer visits, and more limited access to work on temporary release. They are also less likely to believe that educational and work activities in prison will benefit them after release.³⁶⁶

A 2024 Prison Reform Trust consultation found that maintaining relationships is challenging for people serving long sentences as they age. They feared for the future as their relationships were stretched to breaking point, became more detached, as visits dwindled, families changed, loved ones died and children grew up.³⁶⁷

Older prisoners consistently emphasise the importance of meaningful self-development to maintain mental health as they age. However, the prison service’s focus on rehabilitation and resettlement often fails to address their unique circumstances, particularly for those who are likely to spend the rest of their lives in prison.^{368,369}

A 2024 consultation with prisoners at HMP Rye Hill highlighted ways to better support aging prisoners. Recommendations included greater flexibility in addressing rule breaking by individuals with dementia, more opportunities to acknowledge significant milestones such as births, deaths and anniversaries, and allowing prisoners to continue paying National Insurance contributions.³⁷⁰

³⁶² Care Act 2014, s76.

³⁶³ Ministry of Justice (2025). Deaths data tool. Safety in custody: quarterly update to September 2024.

³⁶⁴ House of Commons Justice Committee (2020). Ageing prison population. HM Stationery Office.

³⁶⁵ 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.

³⁶⁶ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 5, Men’s comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25.

³⁶⁷ Hutton, M. and O’Brien, R. (2024). A long stretch: The challenge of maintaining relationships for people serving long prison sentences. Prison Reform Trust.

³⁶⁸ 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.

³⁶⁹ Jarman, B. and Vince, C. (2022). Making progress? What progression means for people serving the longest sentences. Prison Reform Trust.

³⁷⁰ 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. It is generally now used to refer to natural variations in the human brain, and the term neurodivergent is used to describe conditions that are associated with particular differences in learning, attention, communication, sensory processing and mood regulation.³⁷¹ People with neurodivergent 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.³⁷²

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. 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.³⁷³

The last four years have seen some encouraging progress. The Ministry of Justice published a neurodiversity action plan in 2022,³⁷⁴ with commitments to review screening processes, trial Neurodiversity Support Managers (NSMs), and improve staff training. However, it admitted that the physical environment of prison often limited reasonable adjustments that could be provided. In 2025, basic screening is in place upon entry to prison, 116 NSMs are in post, as well as 99 peer mentor schemes,³⁷⁵ a staff toolkit has been developed,³⁷⁶ and core competencies now include awareness of and skills in working with neurodiversity.³⁷⁷ However, it is not yet clear whether or how these developments are improving prison life for people with neurodivergent conditions, nor how effectively they are being implemented.

Prevalence of neurodivergent conditions in prisoners

The lack of diagnostic 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 with professionals’ estimate of 15–20% of the general population.³⁷⁸

Of prisoners screened through educational assessments in England in 2024–25, over half (57%) were identified as having a learning difficulty or disability.³⁷⁹

In 2022–23, basic screening upon entry to custody suggested that nearly a third of arriving prisoners (31%) had a neurodivergent need.³⁸⁰ 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%³⁸¹ to 26% for ADHD³⁸², over half (52%) for having suffered a traumatic brain injury,^{383, 384} and 3–13% for autism, with continued uncertainty over autism³⁸⁵ and ADHD.³⁸⁶

371 Neurodivergence in Criminal Justice Network (2025). Working with neurodivergent people in contact with the criminal justice system. Clinks.

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

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

374 Ministry of Justice (2022). A response to the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection: neurodiversity in the criminal justice system, a review of the evidence.

375 House of Commons written question 94342, 3 December 2025.

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

377 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.

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

379 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.4, Prison education tables 2024–25. Prison education and accredited programme statistics 2024 to 2025.

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

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

382 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.

383 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.

384 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.

385 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.

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

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.³⁸⁷

Inspectors found that people with neurodivergent conditions may struggle to show the evidence of improved behaviour required to progress through sentences. They also highlighted additional challenges in understanding and complying with licence conditions, increasing the risk of breaches and recall to custody.³⁸⁸

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.³⁸⁹ Three out of four criminal justice professionals in England and Wales believe that impairments are sometimes missed.³⁹⁰

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 2020,³⁹¹ and the services appear to increase diversion from custodial sentences.³⁹²

In 2026, three prisons had Autism Accreditation from the National Autistic Society and eight were working towards it,³⁹³ but progress appears inconsistent. In June 2023, three prisons had accreditation and 15 were working towards it.³⁹⁴ In 2025, a scheme was introduced to accredit individual units as well as whole prisons.

In 2024–25, 394 people completed an accredited offending behaviour programme that was adapted for people with learning disabilities and difficulties—23% more than the previous year and almost three times as many as a decade ago.³⁹⁵ In recent years HM Prison and Probation Service has expanded its suite of adapted programmes.

At least four specialised units have opened since 2021, to support neurodiverse prisoners.³⁹⁷ 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”.³⁹⁸

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

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

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

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

391 NHS England (undated). About liaison and diversion. Accessed 10 November 2022, available at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/health-just/liaison-and-diversion/about/>

392 Disley, E. et al. (2021). Findings from the national evaluation of Liaison and Diversion services in England. RAND.

393 Personal communication from the National Autistic Society, 23 January 2026.

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

395 Personal communication from the National Autistic Society, 23 January 2026.

396 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 3.2, Prison accredited programmes 2024–25. Prison education and accredited programme statistics 2024 to 2025.

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

398 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 the 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.

However, legislation over the last two decades has expanded deportation of foreign national prisoners during their sentence. The Early Removal Scheme (ERS) allows for the removal of determinate sentenced foreign nationals from prison before the end of their sentence. Previously, such prisoners could only be considered for deportation after serving 50% of their sentence, and up to 18 months left to serve. From September 2025 the government reduced the point of deportation to 30%, with up to four years left to serve.³⁹⁹ The Sentencing Act 2026 removed these limits altogether, and allows for immediate deportation at any time after sentencing.⁴⁰⁰

The Tariff Expired Removal Scheme (TERS) for foreign nationals serving an indeterminate sentence, allows their removal on or after their tariff expiry date without reference to the Parole Board. The United Kingdom has prisoner transfer arrangements (PTAs) with over 110 countries and territories,⁴⁰¹ but most deported prisoners do not finish their sentence at their destination.⁴⁰²

In 2022, prison inspectors found that immigration detainees held in prisons are “substantially disadvantaged” compared with those held in immigration removal centres, and that detention adversely affects their welfare. The inspectorate concluded that this group has distinct needs which are often not met, including 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.⁴⁰³

Foreign nationals (non-UK passport holders) currently make up one in eight people in prison in England and Wales (12%). On 30 September 2025 there were 10,737 foreign nationals in prison.⁴⁰⁴

Foreign national prisoners come from 175 countries—but over half are from 11 countries (Albania, Poland, Ireland, Romania, India, Jamaica, Lithuania, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, and Portugal).⁴⁰⁵

Between 2002 and 2008, the number of foreign nationals in prison increased by nearly 50%, compared with a 13% rise among British nationals. However, numbers steadily declined over the following decade, though have slightly risen over the past four years. Today, there are 6% fewer foreign nationals in prison than at their 2008 peak, while the number of British nationals has increased by 8%.⁴⁰⁶

Almost one in 10 women in prison (9%) are foreign nationals.⁴⁰⁷ A research study found that in a sample of migrant women in prison, over half (56%) had been coerced or trafficked into offending.⁴⁰⁸

A lower proportion of foreign nationals are in prison for violent (30%) and sexual offences (16%), compared with the overall prison population—36% and 19% respectively. However, they are more likely to be in prison for a drug offence (20%) or miscellaneous crimes against society (9%), compared with 13% and 5% for the overall prison population.⁴⁰⁹

³⁹⁹ Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Removal of Prisoners for Deportation) Order 2025.

⁴⁰⁰ Sentencing Act 2026, s35.

⁴⁰¹ House of Commons written question 100711, 23 December 2025.

⁴⁰² House of Commons written question 20757, 23 December 2024.

⁴⁰³ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2022). The experience of immigration detainees in prisons.

⁴⁰⁴ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.9, Prison population 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁴⁰⁵ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.12, Prison population 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁴⁰⁶ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.A.20, Prison population: 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.

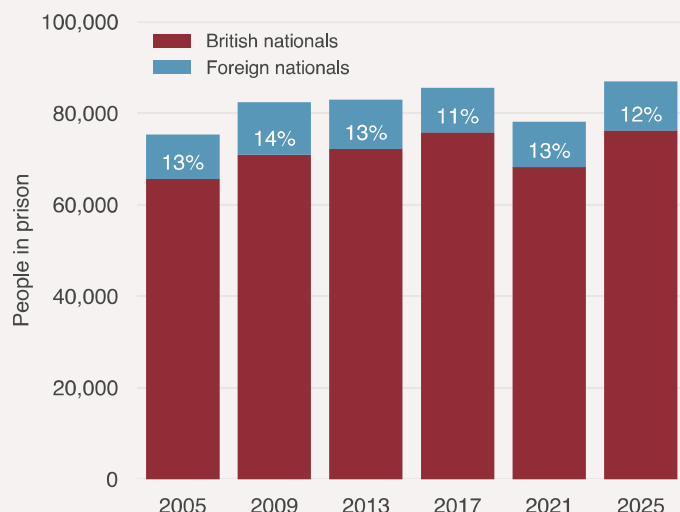
⁴⁰⁷ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.11, Prison population 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁴⁰⁸ Hales, L. and Gelsthorpe, L. (2013). The criminalisation of migrant women: research findings and policy and practice implications. *Prison Service Journal*, 206, 25–30.

⁴⁰⁹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.A.26, Prison population: 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.

Foreign nationals

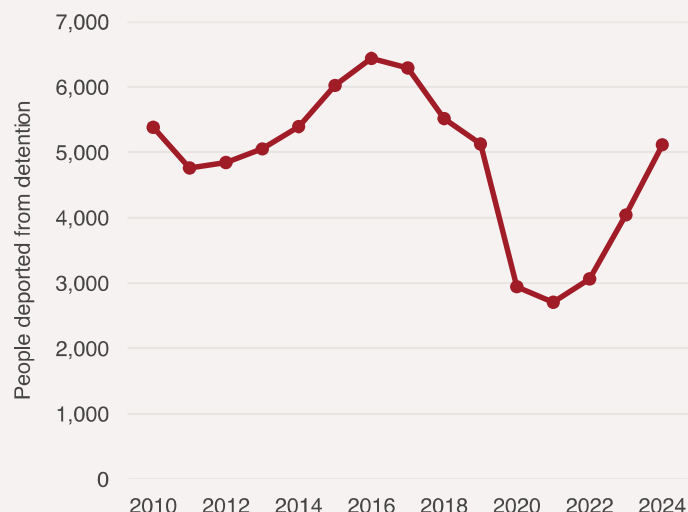
The foreign national population in prison has remained broadly stable over the last two decades



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.

Deportations

Over 70,000 people with convictions have been deported since 2010



Source: Table Ret_D03, Home Office (2025). Immigration system statistics: Year ending September 2025.

Inspectors continue to find that foreign national prisoners are disadvantaged in their opportunities to communicate with staff, with not enough use of the professional interpreting services available.⁴¹⁰

In 2024–25, the inspectorate did not publish survey results for foreign national prisoners. In 2023–24, surveyed foreign nationals were less likely to say that 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 that 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.⁴¹¹

Human rights organisations have drawn attention to the practice of holding age-disputed children in adult prisons. In 2023, 14 children who were wrongly assessed by the Home Office as being aged over 18 upon arrival in the UK spent time in adult prisons.⁴¹²

5,343 people were either removed or voluntarily returned to their home country in the year to September 2025 following a conviction for a criminal offence—a 10% increase compared with the previous year.⁴¹³

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.

101 people were still held in prison at the end of September 2025 under immigration powers, despite having completed their custodial sentence.⁴¹⁴

The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment has stated that “as a matter of principle” a prison is by definition not a suitable place in which to detain someone who is neither suspected nor convicted of a criminal offence. Following a visit to the UK in 2023, they concluded that the UK has taken insufficient action to end the practice of holding immigration detainees in prison beyond the end of their custodial sentences.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁰ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Annual report 2024–25. HC 1030. HM Stationery Office.

⁴¹¹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Table 12, Women's and men's comparator workbook, Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

⁴¹² 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.

⁴¹³ Home Office (2025). Table Ret_D03, Returns detailed datasets, year ending September 2025. Immigration system statistics, year ending September 2025.

⁴¹⁴ Home Office (2025). Table Det_03a, Detention summary tables year ending September 2025. Immigration system statistics, year ending September 2025.

⁴¹⁵ 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.

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 almost twenty years ago.⁴¹⁶

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 for a distinct, local, and whole system approach to women.⁴¹⁷ A Victims Strategy was also published, promising to use trauma-informed approaches to support women who offend who are also victims.⁴¹⁸ In 2019, the Farmer Review reported on family and relational ties for women in prison, recommending that “inside prisons...a relatively modest investment will go a long way.”⁴¹⁹

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.⁴²⁰ In 2023, the Ministry of Justice launched a new delivery plan, backed by a promised £24 million investment in community solutions across 2023–25.⁴²¹ A 2024 progress update indicated that £14 million had been invested in women’s centres and charities, £1 million in building whole system approaches, and £14 million in various prison initiatives, including specialist roles, an Early Days support service and better support for young adult women; and that 20 of the 51 targets had been reached.⁴²² However, with the plan now expired and no review of what has—or has not—been achieved in practice, it is unclear what gains have been made.

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 £150 million.⁴²³ 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.⁴²⁴

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. The board launched in January 2025, and a strategy was expected to be published in spring 2025,⁴²⁵ however, this appears to have been delayed.⁴²⁶

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.⁴²⁷

Ministers in Scotland have also committed to reducing women’s imprisonment. For data on women in Scotland and Northern Ireland please see page 84 and 89.

416 Baroness Corston (2007). The Corston report. Home Office.

417 Ministry of Justice (2018). Female offender strategy.

418 HM Government (2018). Victims strategy. Cm 9700. HM Stationery Office.

419 Lord Farmer (2019). The importance of strengthening female offenders’ family and other relationships to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime. Ministry of Justice.

420 National Audit Office (2022). Improving outcomes for women in the criminal justice system. HC 1012.

421 Ministry of Justice (2023). Female offender strategy delivery plan 2022–25. CP 772.

422 Ministry of Justice (2024). Female offender strategy delivery plan: ‘one year on’ progress report.

423 House of Commons written question 164487, 16 March 2021.

424 Parker, F. (2024). Letter to Chair of the Justice Select Committee Sir Bob Neill, 29 April 2024. Ministry of Justice.

425 Ministry of Justice (2024, 24 September). Extra support for women through the criminal justice system announced.

426 Ministry of Justice (2025). Women’s Justice Board minutes: held on 22 July 2025.

427 Ministry of Justice (2019). Female offending blueprint for Wales.

Women make up only

4%

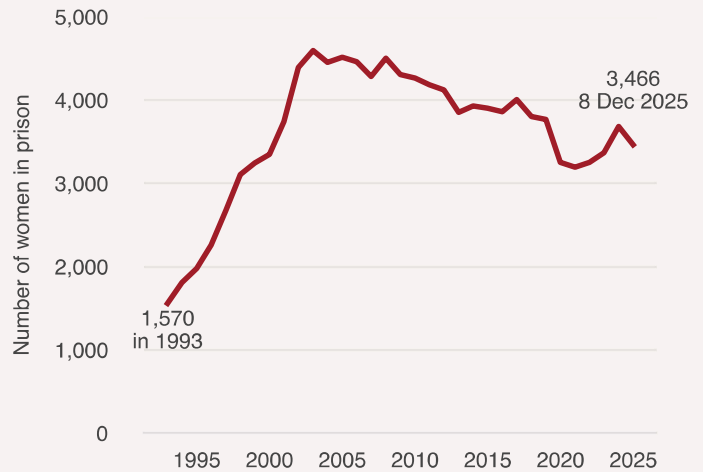
of the total prison population

6,275

women entered prison in the year to June 2025—either on remand or to serve a sentence

Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

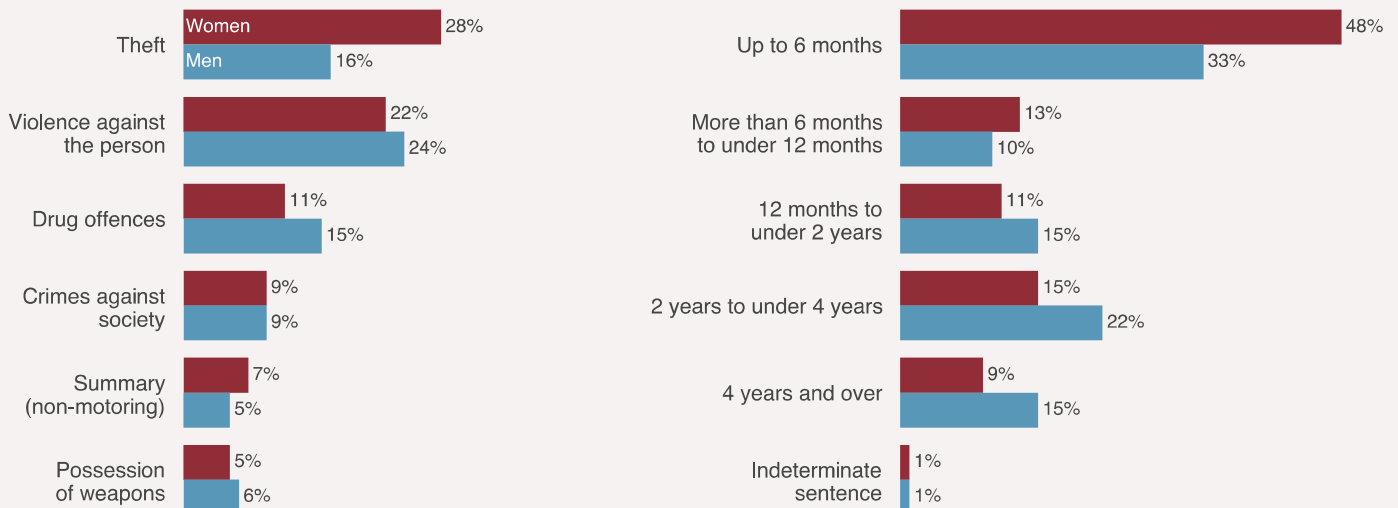
There are over twice as many women in prison as there were 30 years ago



Sources: Ministry of Justice (2025). Population bulletin weekly 8 December 2025. Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025. Home Office (2003). Prison statistics England and Wales 2001.

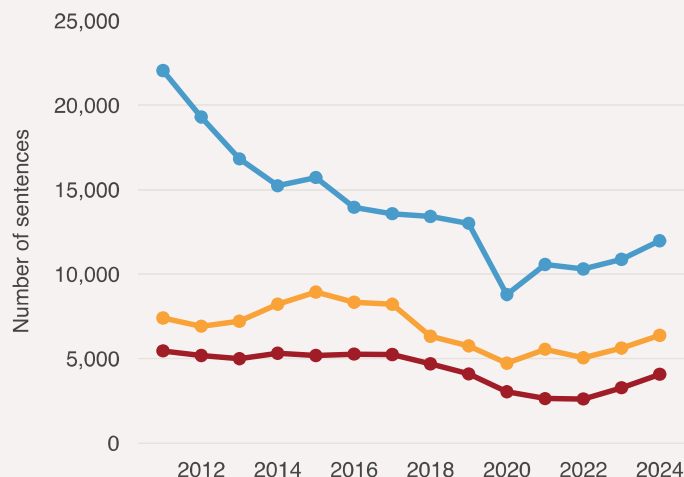
Women tend to commit less serious offences — many serve prison sentences of less than 6 months

In 2024, women entered prison for committing these offences, to serve these sentences



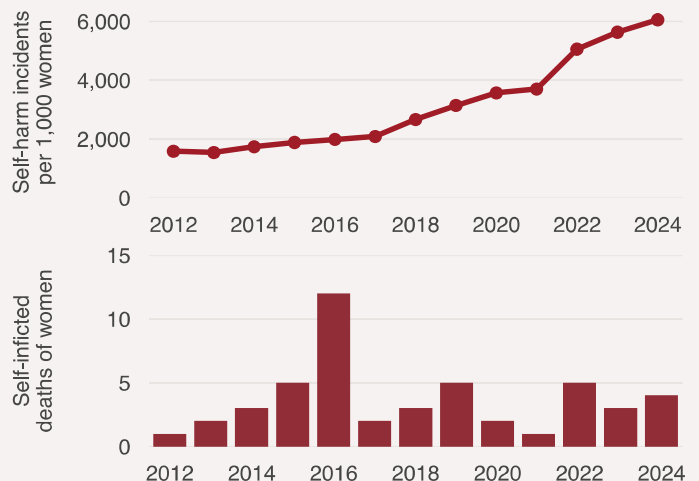
Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2024.

Community sentences for women have halved since 2010. Suspended sentences are also down—they account for only 4% of all sentences. Use of very short prison sentences declined, but is rising again.



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Criminal justice statistics quarterly: update to December 2024.

Many women in prison have mental health needs and histories of abuse. Self-harm is at a record high.



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Safety in custody: quarterly update to December 2024.

Use of custody

On 30 September 2025 there were 3,527 women in prison in England and Wales—around the same number as 12 months ago.⁴²⁸ Women entered prison on 6,275 occasions in the year to June 2025—either on remand or to serve a sentence—up 3% on the previous 12 months.⁴²⁹

Many women remanded into custody don't go on to receive a custodial sentence. In 2024, more than two-thirds (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 (45%).⁴³⁰

Most women entering prison to serve a sentence (63%) have committed a non-violent offence.⁴³¹

In 2024, 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.⁴³²

The proportion of women being sent to prison to serve very short prison sentences has risen. In 1993 only a third of custodial sentenced receptions were for six months or less—in 2024 it was almost half (48%).⁴³³

A cost-benefit analysis of problem-solving courts for women estimated that this approach is over £2,000 cheaper than a short prison sentence. Problem-solving courts provide regular engagement with a specially trained judge, and gender-responsive support services to address the root causes of offending.⁴³⁴

On average, around one in five women who entered prison in 2022–23 (19%) said they had been in local authority care.^{435,436}

Nearly two-thirds of surveyed women in prison serving less than 12 months (63%) said they needed help with previous or ongoing trauma, including domestic violence.⁴³⁷

In 2025, an investigation by inspectors concluded that there was a “deeply depressing” lack of support to help women cope with prison. Poorly trained and inexperienced staff struggled to deal with women in distress and lacked time to provide appropriate support.⁴³⁸

Almost three in five women (58%) said attending purposeful activity helps them cope in prison. Over a third (34%) said time outdoors was helpful, and a similar proportion (31%) said personal care helped. Inspectors thought these could be readily achieved with more “imagination and determination” from staff and leaders.⁴³⁹

Girls in custody

In 2024, inspectors highlighted concerns about housing girls in HMYOI Wetherby, a young offender institution for boys. They reported that care for girls was inadequate, and raised serious concerns about a girl who had clothing removed by male officers after she used them to make ligatures.⁴⁴⁰

In 2025, the government banned the use of YOIs to hold girls,⁴⁴¹ following an independent review,⁴⁴² and created a Girls in Youth Justice Board to improve their care.⁴⁴³

On average in 2024, eight girls were held in custody at any given time—a significant decrease from 56 in 2014.⁴⁴⁴

The 2025 independent review of girls in custody concluded that the system was “overwhelmingly designed for boys” and that significant experiences of trauma, gendered violence and abuse meant that many girls should not be in custody, but required intensive therapeutic care through health and social services.⁴⁴⁵

428 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.1, Prison population 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025

429 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.Q.1, Prison receptions: April to June 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025. And previous editions.

430 Ministry of Justice (2025). Remands data tool. Criminal justice system statistics quarterly: update to December 2024.

431 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.A.12, Receptions 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2024.

432 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.A.12, Receptions 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2024.

433 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.A.10, Receptions 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2024. And previous editions.

434 Centre for Justice Innovation (2025). Women's problem-solving courts: a financial analysis.

435 House of Lords written question HL8980, 17 July 2023.

436 Ministry of Justice (2023). Table 2.1. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2023.

437 Criminal justice joint inspection (2024). Survey analysis workbook. The quality of work undertaken with women.

438 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Time to care: what helps women cope in prison?

439 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Survey workbook, Time to care: what helps women cope in prison?

440 Cooney, F. (2024, 20 December). Where do girls live when in custody? House of Commons library.

441 Ministry of Justice (2025, 4 March). Government no longer places girls in young offender institutions.

442 Hancock, S. (2025). Delivering the best for girls in custody. Ministry of Justice.

443 Ministry of Justice (2025, 11 November). Government to transform care for girls in custody.

444 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 7.7, Chapter 7—Children in youth custody. Youth justice statistics: 2023 to 2024.

445 Hancock, S. (2025). Delivering the best for girls in custody. Ministry of Justice.

Rehabilitation and resettlement

46% of women leaving prison are reconvicted within one year. Of those who reoffended, 64% were serving a sentence of 12 months or less.⁴⁴⁶

Women released from prison are more likely to reoffend, and reoffend sooner, than those serving community sentences.⁴⁴⁷

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.⁴⁴⁸

Women are generally more positive than men about the benefits of purposeful activity in prison in helping them on release.⁴⁴⁹ However, just 12% of women were in paid employment six weeks after release from custody—compared with 21% of men.⁴⁵⁰ After six months, this rose to 23% and 35% respectively.⁴⁵¹

Almost three in five women (59%) left prison without settled accommodation in 2024–25.⁴⁵²

The number of women recalled to prison has risen in the last year. In the 12 months to June 2025, 3,221 women were recalled to prison—an increase of 30% on the previous 12 months.⁴⁵³

Family

More than two-thirds (69%) of women say keeping in touch with their loved ones helps them cope in prison.⁴⁵⁴ Family is also a vital support to resettlement on release.⁴⁵⁵

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 it is often significantly more.⁴⁵⁶ A 2025 review found that family support in women's prisons was much poorer than in men's prisons.⁴⁵⁷

More than 17,500 children were estimated to be separated from their mother by imprisonment in 2020.⁴⁵⁸ However, this information is not yet routinely published.⁴⁵⁹

A 2024 analysis by the Ministry of Justice estimated that over half (55%) of women in prison have children aged under 18.⁴⁶⁰

196 pregnant women were held in prison at some point during 2024–25—19 fewer than the previous year—with an average of 49 imprisoned at any one time.⁴⁶¹

42 babies were born to imprisoned women in 2024–25, compared to 53 in the previous year—all were born in hospital.⁴⁶² HMPPS does not record how many women experience miscarriage in prison.⁴⁶³

Health

Almost three-quarters of women in prison (74%) report that they have mental health problems, compared with just more than half of men (56%).⁴⁶⁴ In 2024, women accounted for 12% of transfers from prison to secure mental health facilities,⁴⁶⁵ despite making up only 4% of the prison population.⁴⁶⁶

446 House of Lords written question HL13460, 19 January 2026.

447 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.

448 Criminal justice joint inspection (2024). The quality of work undertaken with women.

449 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook, Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

450 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 4b, Employment at 6 weeks post-release from custody data tables. Offender employment outcomes, update to March 2025.

451 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 4b, Employment at 6 months post-release from custody data tables. Offender employment outcomes, update to March 2025.

452 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 4, Housed on release from custody data tables. Offender accommodation outcomes, update to March 2025.

453 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 5.Q.2, Licence recalls: April to June 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025. And previous editions.

454 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Survey workbook, Time to care: what helps women cope in prison?

455 Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2014). Resettlement provision for adult offenders: Accommodation and education, training and employment.

456 Ministry of Justice. (2018). Table 5.1a and 5.1b, Supporting data tables for the Female Offender Strategy.

457 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Time to care: what helps women cope in prison?

458 Kincaid, S. et al. (2019). Children of prisoners: Fixing a broken system. Crest Advisory.

459 House of Lords written question HL8979, 17 July 2023.

460 Ministry of Justice (2024). Official statistics in development: Estimates of children with a parent in prison.

461 HM Prison and Probation Service (2025). Table 8.2 and 8.3, Chapter 8 tables—Mother and Baby Units, pregnant prisoners and births. HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2024 to March 2025. Ministry of Justice.

462 HM Prison and Probation Service (2025). Table 8.2, Chapter 8 tables—Mother and Baby Units, pregnant prisoners and births. HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2024 to March 2025. Ministry of Justice.

463 House of Commons written question 176814, 17 April 2023.

464 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook, Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

465 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 7, Restricted patients 2024. Restricted patients statistics, England and Wales, 2024.

466 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.A.3, Annual prison population: 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.

Women serving long sentences report significant concerns, including untreated long-term health issues, inadequate healthcare—particularly in reproductive health and fertility.^{467,468}

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.⁴⁶⁹

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.⁴⁷⁰

Following a review of women's health and social care, the government has committed to invest £21 million across three years to improve care quality.⁴⁷¹

Women serving long sentences in prison

There are 358 women serving an indeterminate sentence in prison— almost all on life sentences (98%). They account for one in ten women in custody (10%).⁴⁷² The number of women serving an indeterminate sentence who have yet to be released has more than doubled since 2002.⁴⁷³

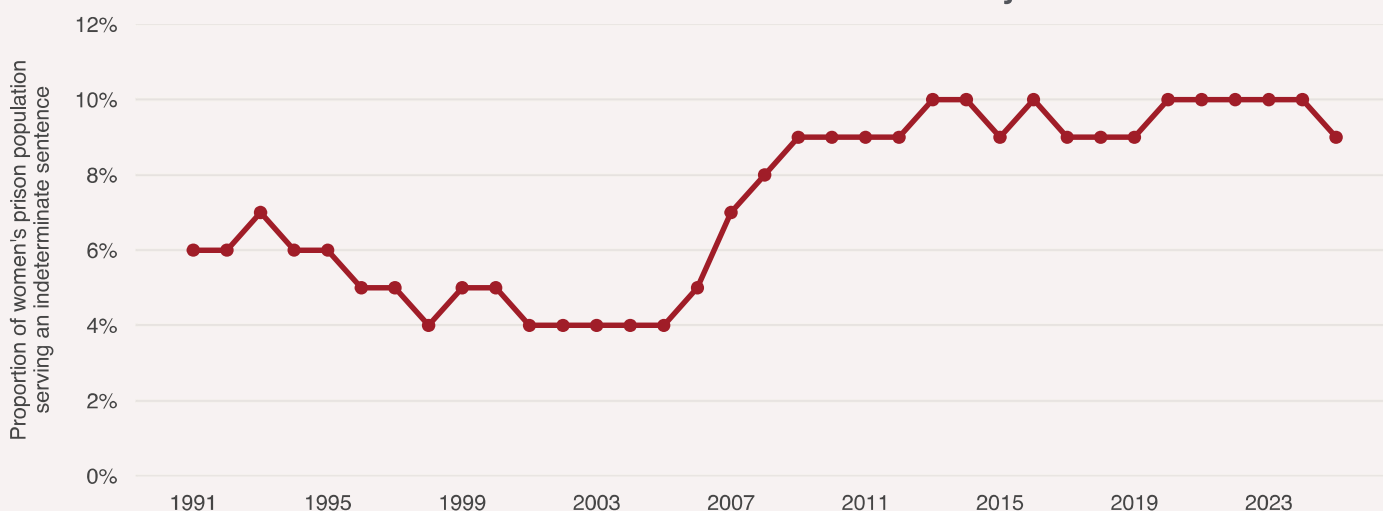
More than nine in 10 women currently serving an indeterminate sentence (92%) have never been released from custody. The remaining 8% have been recalled to prison after release.⁴⁷⁴

Of those who have never been released, 12% remain in prison despite having already served their tariff—the minimum period deemed necessary as punishment for their offence.⁴⁷⁵

A total of 129 women, accounting for 4% of the female prison population, are serving extended determinate sentences (EDS), which involve longer custodial periods followed by a period of extended licence supervision in the community.⁴⁷⁶ Over half (56%) were serving ten years or more.⁴⁷⁷

Women convicted of more serious crimes are spending longer in prison. Between 2015 and 2025, the number of women serving long sentences of four to less than 10 years has declined by a third (33%), but the number serving sentences of 10 years or more has increased by almost the same proportion (32%).⁴⁷⁸

The proportion of women serving indeterminate sentences has more than doubled in the last 30 years



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025. Home Office, Prison statistics

467 Vince, C. and Evison, E. (2023). Invisible women: Understanding women's experiences of long-term imprisonment: Briefing 2: Hope, health and staff-prisoner relationships. Prison Reform Trust.

468 Vince, C. and Evison, E. (2024). Invisible women: Understanding women's experiences of long-term imprisonment: Briefing 3: Progression. Prison Reform Trust.

469 Light, M., et al. (2013). Table A24, A27 and A28. Gender differences in substance misuse and mental health amongst prisoners. Ministry of Justice.

470 Light, M., et al. (2013). Table A40, A42 and A64. Gender differences in substance misuse and mental health amongst prisoners. Ministry of Justice.

471 House of Commons written question 91843, 25 November 2025.

472 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.2, Prison population 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

473 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Leg.3, Annual; prison population: 2002–2015. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2024.

474 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.14, Prison population 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

475 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.15, Prison population 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

476 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.2, Prison population 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

477 House of Lords written question HL13098, 5 January 2026.

478 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.A.2, Prison population: 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.

Children in custody

Children aged 10–17 can currently 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, including 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 under 400 in 2025, the reasons for detention have shifted significantly.⁴⁷⁹ The proportion held on remand has risen from around 21% to 43% over the last decade, showing no signs of abating despite stricter remand criteria being introduced under the Police, Crime, Courts and Sentencing Act 2022. Meanwhile, the proportion serving DTOs has decreased from 57% to 25% over the same period, and those serving longer sentences have increased from 22% to 32%⁴⁸⁰, including at least 17 children serving life sentences.^{481,482} The Ministry of Justice has forecast that the population of children aged 15–17 in custody will remain at around 300 through to September 2029.⁴⁸³

There are currently four main types of accommodation used to detain children. Eight secure children's homes (SCHs) in England and Wales⁴⁸⁴ generally accommodate younger children and are intended to provide tailored support for their 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. The previous government committed to opening two secure schools and legislated to allow these to be run by charitable organisations. The first, operated by Oasis Restore, opened in June 2024⁴⁸⁵ but remains temporarily closed since September 2025 because of safety concerns about heavily damaged doors.⁴⁸⁶ Lastly, four young offender institutions (YOIs) are designated as prisons that can accommodate boys. The prison capacity crisis saw a rise in young adults detained in YOIs, but numbers dropped from 118 to 71 in 2025.⁴⁸⁷ A fifth YOI, Cookham Wood, was re-rolled as an adult prison in 2025 following “appalling” findings by inspectors.⁴⁸⁸

Use of custody

Children are committing fewer recorded crimes—proven offences in 2024 were 61% lower than in 2014.⁴⁸⁹

The number of children sentenced to in custody fell steeply from 4,657 in 2009–10 to 660 children in 2023–24, although this number was an increase of 21% on the year before (546 children).⁴⁹⁰

Sentence lengths are getting longer. The average custodial sentence length for children increased from 11.3 months in 2010 to 17.5 months in 2024.⁴⁹¹

At the end of November 2025 there were 379 children in custody in England and Wales; 15 children were aged 14 or younger.⁴⁹² The number of children in custody has fallen by 81% compared with 15 years ago.⁴⁹³

More than two in three children in custody in 2024 were there for offences of violence against the person (68%).⁴⁹⁴

More than two in five children in custody (43%) are on remand.⁴⁹⁵

More than three in five of children (62%) remanded in custody in the year to March 2024 were either subsequently acquitted (17%) or given a non-custodial sentence (45%).⁴⁹⁶

More than half of children in custody are from a Black, Asian or minority ethnic background (51%). The drop in youth custody has not been as significant for ethnic minority children—between 2014 and 2024 the population in custody dropped by 56%, compared with 72% for white children.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁷⁹ Youth Justice Board (2026). Table 1.1, Youth custody population November 2025. Youth custody data.

⁴⁸⁰ Youth Justice Board (2025). Table 7.4, Chapter 7—Children in youth custody. Youth justice statistics 2023–24.

⁴⁸¹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.2, Prison population 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁴⁸² This figure only includes children between 15–17 years old. The number aged 10–14 serving life sentences is not routinely published.

⁴⁸³ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 5.1, Prison population projections 2025 to 2030.

⁴⁸⁴ Hancock, S. (2025). Delivering the best for girls in custody. Ministry of Justice.

⁴⁸⁵ Youth Justice Board (2024, 4 October). Inside the Oasis Restore secure school.

⁴⁸⁶ Ofsted (2025). Oasis Restore Trust monitoring visit.

⁴⁸⁷ Youth Justice Board (2026). Table 1.4, Youth custody population November 2025. Youth custody data.

⁴⁸⁸ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Children in custody 2024–25.

⁴⁸⁹ Youth Justice Board (2025). Table 4.1, Chapter 4—Proven offences by children. Youth justice statistics: 2023 to 2024.

⁴⁹⁰ Youth Justice Board (2025). Table 5.4, Chapter 5—Sentencing of children. Youth justice statistics: 2023 to 2024. And previous editions.

⁴⁹¹ Youth Justice Board (2025). Table 5.4, Chapter 5—Sentencing of children. Youth justice statistics: 2023 to 2024. And previous editions.

⁴⁹² Youth Custody Service (2025). Table 1.4. Youth custody report: November 2025.

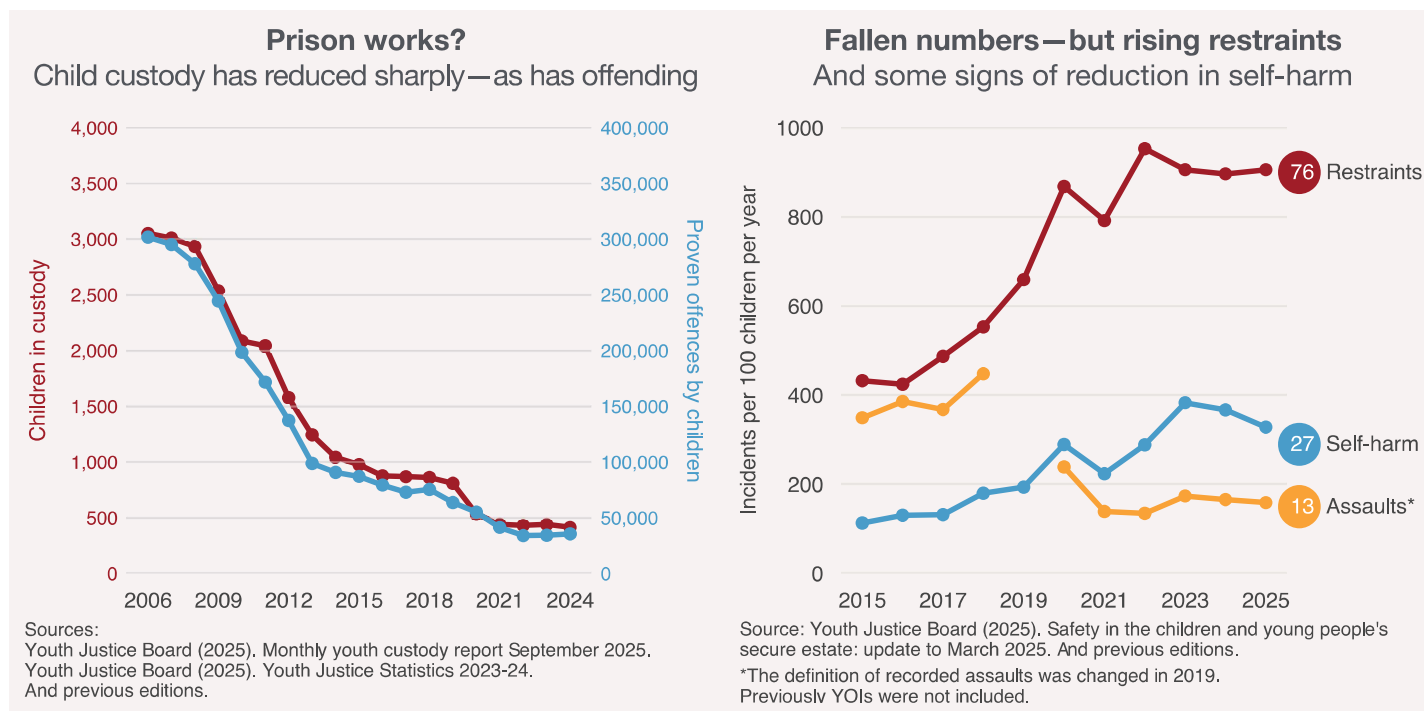
⁴⁹³ Youth Custody Service (2025). Table 1.1. Youth custody report: November 2025.

⁴⁹⁴ Youth Justice Board (2025). Table 7.5, Chapter 7—Children in custody. Youth justice statistics: 2023 to 2024.

⁴⁹⁵ Youth Justice Board (2025). Table 7.4, Chapter 7—Children in custody. Youth justice statistics: 2023 to 2024.

⁴⁹⁶ Youth Justice Board (2025). Table 6.6, Chapter 6—Use of remand for children. Youth justice statistics: 2023 to 2024.

⁴⁹⁷ Youth Justice Board (2025). Table 7.8, Chapter 7—Children in custody. Youth justice statistics: 2023 to 2024.



8% of children in custody said they were from a traveller community.⁴⁹⁸ Just 0.2% of all children in England and Wales are from a Gypsy or Irish Traveller background.⁴⁹⁹

Fewer than 1% of all children in England are in care,⁵⁰⁰ **but nearly two-thirds (65%) of children in custody reported to inspectors that they have been in care at some time in their lives.**⁵⁰¹

More than half (54%) of children in custody had been out of education for at least one academic year, one in four (25%) had been permanently excluded, and two in five (40%) had special educational needs.⁵⁰²

Safety, care and wellbeing in custody

In 2024–25, inspectors were concerned that children's perceptions of their time in custody had worsened, with too much time still spent locked up, higher levels of violence than the adult prison estate, and poor relationships with staff.⁵⁰³

Three in five children (61%) said they spend more than two hours out of their cell on weekdays, and just 45% at weekends.⁵⁰⁴

In 2024–25, almost three-quarters of children (71%) said they were taking part in education, 8% in vocational training, and 18% in offending behaviour programmes,⁵⁰⁵ **broadly similar to the year before.**⁵⁰⁶ Inspectors noted that attendance continues to be low,⁵⁰⁷ and have raised serious concerns about the declining quality of education in young offender institutions.⁵⁰⁸

More than two in five children (43%) told inspectors that they had felt unsafe where they are currently held.⁵⁰⁹

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.⁵¹⁰ HMPPS committed to a review of policy,⁵¹¹ however, no update appears to have been published.

⁴⁹⁸ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Table 1, Children's workbook, Children in custody 2024–25.

⁴⁹⁹ Office for National Statistics (2023). Gypsy or Irish Traveller 02, Gypsy or Irish Traveller populations data: Population counts and Table MYE2—Persons, Office for National Statistics (2022). Mid-year populations estimates, UK, June 2021.

⁵⁰⁰ 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.

⁵⁰¹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Table 1, Children's workbook, Children in custody 2024–25.

⁵⁰² Children's Commissioner (2025). The educational journeys of children in secure settings.

⁵⁰³ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Children in custody 2024–25.

⁵⁰⁴ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Table 1, Children's workbook, Children in custody 2024–25.

⁵⁰⁵ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Table 1, Children's workbook, Children in custody 2024–25.

⁵⁰⁶ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Table 1, Children and young people workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

⁵⁰⁷ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Children in custody 2024–25.

⁵⁰⁸ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). A decade of declining quality of education in young offender institutions: the systematic shortcomings that fail children.

⁵⁰⁹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Table 1, Children's workbook, Children in custody 2024–25.

⁵¹⁰ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2023). Restricted status children and prisoners held in women's establishments.

⁵¹¹ HM Prison and Probation Service (2023). Action plan: Response to the thematic report Restricted Status children and prisoners held in women's establishments.

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. Inspectors found separation is a common method of managing conflict and risk, and that many children choose to self-separate for safety.⁵¹²

In the year ending March 2025 there were 4,730 use of force incidents in custody, down 9% from the previous year. However, when the fall in the custodial population is taken into account, the average number of use of force incidents per 100 children has marginally increased, from 897 to 906 incidents per year.⁵¹³

There were 329 self-harm incidents per 100 children in custody on average in the year to March 2025, down from 367 incidents in the previous year.⁵¹⁴ The rate was 62 incidents per 100 children in the year to March 2012.⁵¹⁵

Only two in five children in custody (40%) said that it was quite or very easy for family or friends to visit.⁵¹⁶

Less than half of children (49%) said they felt cared for by staff.⁵¹⁷ In 2025, inspectors raised serious concerns about the failure of the Youth Custody Service to create environments where staff and children can form positive, appropriate relationships which integrate care with custody.⁵¹⁸

Only one YOI had a full inspection during 2024–25: Feltham A. It was judged as poor in safety and purposeful activity, but reasonably good in care and resettlement.⁵¹⁹ The remaining STC, Oakhill, was judged as inadequate, and later issued with an Urgent Notification. Inspectors said that it does not currently have capacity to improve.⁵²⁰ SCHs are inspected by Ofsted, with reports only available on request.

Children are inherently vulnerable to abuse in secure institutions.⁵²¹ In 2025, the Prison and Probation Ombudsman reported on a regime of “heinous” physical, sexual and psychological abuse at Medomsley Detention Centre in the mid-20th century, as well as incidents at other institutions. They suggested a culture of abuse is “inevitable” in the absence of clear direction, oversight and training, and the use of language about being “tough” on children.⁵²² The government apologised to the victims, and committed to establishing a Youth Custody Safeguarding Panel.⁵²³

Girls in custody

There are very few girls in custody, around eight on average in 2024.⁵²⁴

In 2024, inspectors highlighted concerns about housing girls in HMYOI Wetherby, a young offender institution for boys.⁵²⁵ They reported that despite the best efforts of staff, a lack of appropriate training or expertise meant that the YOI was unable to meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable girls in the country and that care for girls was inadequate.⁵²⁶

In 2025, the practice of holding girls in young offender institutions was ended, following an independent review of custody. The review also recommended ending the use of Oakhill Secure Training Centre for girls, establishing a Girls Justice Board, and expanding alternative accommodation options.⁵²⁷ The government committed to most of these measures, but retained the use of Oakhill, as currently other accommodation providers may refuse to hold girls who have been sentenced to custody.⁵²⁸

Girls are most likely to be convicted of violence, which is often against care workers, or police officers after going missing and being arrested. They have frequently been in local authority care, and have complex histories of trauma, loss, abuse and exploitation.⁵²⁹

⁵¹² HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Separation of children in young offender institutions—review of progress.

⁵¹³ Youth Justice Board (2025). Table 3.2.1, Separation and use of force tables. Safety in the children and young people's secure estate: update to March 2025.

⁵¹⁴ Youth Justice Board (2025). Table 2.2, Assaults and self-harm tables. Safety in the children and young people's secure estate: update to March 2025.

⁵¹⁵ Youth Justice Board (2019). Chapter 8, Behaviour management tables. Youth justice statistics 2018–19

⁵¹⁶ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Table 1, Children's workbook, Children in custody 2024–25.

⁵¹⁷ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Table 1, Children's workbook, Children in custody 2024–25.

⁵¹⁸ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Building trust: the importance of positive relationships in young offender institutions.

⁵¹⁹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Table 2, Judgements, scores and notable positive practice workbook. Annual report 2023–24. HM Stationery Office.

⁵²⁰ HM Inspectorate of Prisons and Ofsted (2024). Full inspections of Oakhill STC.

⁵²¹ Jarman, B. and Lanskey, C. (2019). 'A poor prospect indeed': the state's disavowal of child abuse victims in youth custody, 1960–1990.

⁵²² Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (2025). Investigation into the failing of Medomsley Detention Centre between 1961 and 1987.

⁵²³ Ministry of Justice (2025, 12 November). Government apologises for historical abuse at Medomsley Detention Centre.

⁵²⁴ Youth Justice Board (2025). Table 7.7, Chapter 7 - Children in custody. Youth justice statistics: 2023 to 2024.

⁵²⁵ Girls and boys live separately, but mix under supervision for daily activities such as education.

⁵²⁶ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2024). Report on an unannounced inspection of HMYOI Wetherby

⁵²⁷ Hancock, S. (2025). Delivering the best for girls in custody. Ministry of Justice.

⁵²⁸ Ministry of Justice (2025). Government response to the independent review: delivering the best for girls in custody.

⁵²⁹ Hancock, S. (2025). Delivering the best for girls in custody. Ministry of Justice.

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 the process of brain development and maturity 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.

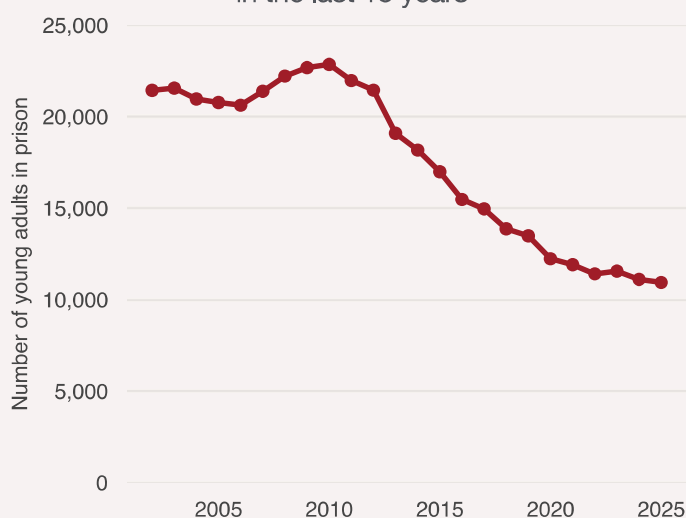
There is currently no separate sentencing framework for young adults, as there is for children. In 2025, the Sentencing Council published sentencing guidance for 18–25 year olds which advises sentencers to take their neurological development into account, the effects of custody upon them, and recognises their often high levels of adversity/disadvantage.⁵³⁰

In 2021, a prison inspectorate report concluded that outcomes remain poor for young adults compared with 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 with adult prisoners. Inspectors recommended that HMPPS develop and resource a national strategy for young adult prisoners.⁵³¹

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 report this was still listed as in progress.⁵³² A screening tool to identify young adult men in custody who have not yet reached full maturity is now in use,⁵³³ and HMPPS has also committed to several young adult specific projects, including an evaluation of a transitions unit for children entering the young adult estate; piloting a regional approach to improving provisions for young adults;⁵³⁴ and pilots to support young adult women.⁵³⁵ These are not yet published.

A falling population...

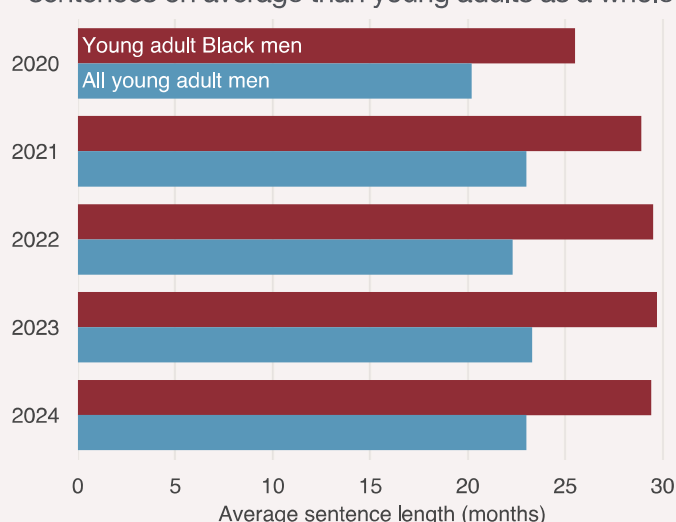
The number of 18-24 year olds in prison has declined in the last 15 years



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Prison population: 2025. Offender Management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.

...but uneven progress

Young Black men still receive longer custodial sentences on average than young adults as a whole



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Criminal justice statistics: quarterly update to December 2024.

⁵³⁰ Sentencing Council (2025, 1 September). Imposition of community and custodial sentences.

⁵³¹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2021). Outcomes for young adults in custody.

⁵³² Ministry of Justice (2024). Female offender delivery strategy: tracker table. Female offender strategy delivery plan: progress report.

⁵³³ House of Lords written question HL1417, 25 January 2024.

⁵³⁴ HM Prison and Probation Service (2021). A response to the HMI Prisons inspection: a thematic inspection on outcomes for young adults in custody.

⁵³⁵ Ministry of Justice (2024). Female offender delivery strategy: tracker table. Female offender strategy delivery plan: progress report.

Use of custody

10,813 young adults are currently in prison in England and Wales—they account for 12% of the total prison population.⁵³⁶

There are now almost half as many young adults in prison as there were 20 years ago.⁵³⁷

But the number of young adults on remand has only reduced by 17% in the last 20 years, compared with a 54% reduction in those serving a sentence. The number on remand has also begun to rise again since the pandemic—up 27% compared with 2020.⁵³⁸

A 2015 study 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.⁵³⁹

Almost two in five (39%) 18–20 year olds in prison are serving a sentence for violence against the person, almost one in five (18%) for drug offences, and around one in ten for robbery (11%) and theft (9%).⁵⁴⁰

On average, 53 18–20 year olds are entering prison each year to serve a life sentence—up from an average of 31 a decade ago.⁵⁴¹

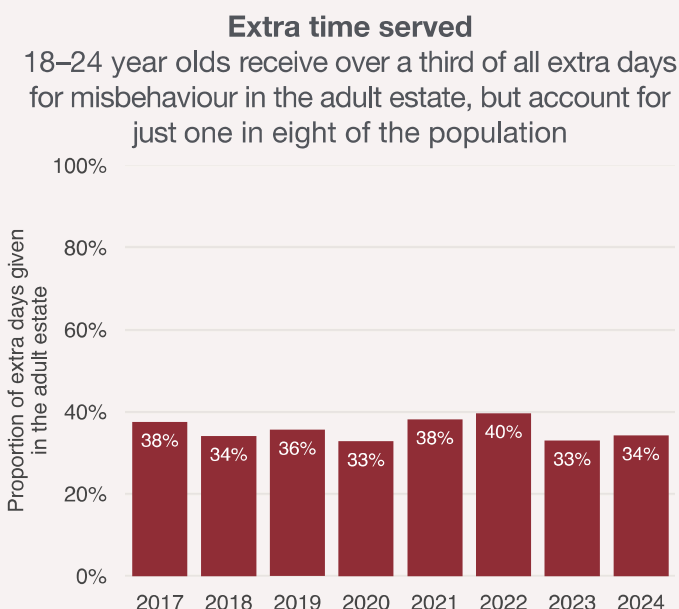
In 2025, there were 1,905 people in prison serving a life sentence with a tariff of 15 years or more, who were sentenced at age 25 or younger⁵⁴²—more than twice as many as in 2013.⁵⁴³

Safety and incentives

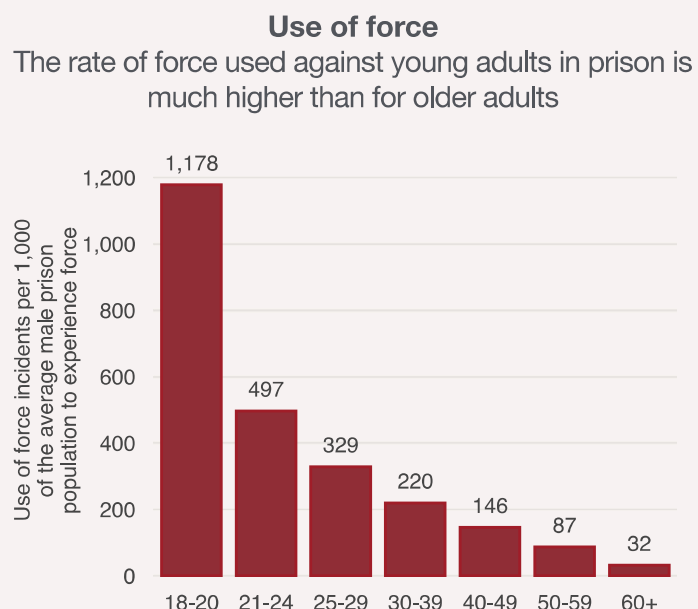
Young adults accounted for over one in five (21%) self-harm incidents in prison in 2024.⁵⁴⁴

There were more than 6,900 assaults initiated by young adults in 2024—accounting for 30% of all assaults.⁵⁴⁵

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 compared with 4% of the adult population.⁵⁴⁶ In 2018, inspectors found that the IEP scheme was least effective in young adult prisons.⁵⁴⁷ In 2024, HMPPS began advising prisons to focus on reward rather than punishment for young adults, and to take lack of maturity into account.⁵⁴⁸



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2024.



Source: Bosworth et al. (2025). Use of force: an exploratory analysis of use of force in prisons 2018–2023. HM Prison & Probation Service.

⁵³⁶ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.6, Prison population: 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁵³⁷ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.A.18, Annual prison population: 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025. And previous editions.

⁵³⁸ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.A.18, Annual prison population: 2025 Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025. And previous editions.

⁵³⁹ Kneen, H. (2017). Table 11, 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.

⁵⁴⁰ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.5, Prison population: 30 September 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

⁵⁴¹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.A.10, Prison receptions: 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2024. And previous editions.

⁵⁴² House of Lords written question HL13097, 5 January 2026.

⁵⁴³ Ministry of Justice (2020). Freedom of Information request 201117009, 15 December 2020, available at: <https://bit.ly/U25-lifers-15-plus>

⁵⁴⁴ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.3, Self-harm in prison custody 2004 to 2024. Safety in custody quarterly update to December 2024.

⁵⁴⁵ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 3.3, Assaults in prison custody 2000 to 2024. Safety in custody quarterly update to December 2024.

⁵⁴⁶ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 4.1, Chapter 4 tables: Incentives. HMPPS offender equalities annual report 2024 to 2025.

⁵⁴⁷ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2018). Incentivising and promoting good behaviour.

⁵⁴⁸ HM Prison and Probation Service (2024). Incentives policy framework.

HEALTH IN PRISON

Drugs and alcohol

In 2020–21, the independent review of drugs by Dame Carol Black 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.”^{549,550}

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 £780 million in a “world class treatment and recovery system.”⁵⁵¹

Since then, the prison service has expanded its efforts to reduce demand and support recovery, with mixed results. There are now Incentivised Substance Free Living (ISFL) units in 85 prisons,⁵⁵² up from 25 in 2022,⁵⁵³ and six Drug Recovery Wings (DRWs).⁵⁵⁴ ISFL units offer additional support, drug testing and incentives, and are open to any prisoner who wants to live in a drug-free environment (including people who have not used drugs). DRWs are abstinence-based regimes for people recovering from dependency.

Evaluations of ISFLs and DRWs have found that prisoners value the more settled environment, good staff relationships, a sense of community, and help with their problems, but regimes are inconsistent, capacity pressures affect delivery, and offering incentives can create bad feeling among prisoners on other wings. Stigmatisation towards drug users (from other prisoners and staff) is also a significant barrier.^{555,556,557} There is evidence that prisoners on ISFL wings commit fewer assaults and self-harm less frequently, but not yet any conclusive evidence that they use fewer substances.⁵⁵⁸

Between 2017 and 2020, HMP Holme House adopted a ‘whole prison’ approach to substance misuse, but prisoners leaving there committed more reoffences than equivalent prisoners in other Category C prisons. Evaluators pointed to the significant challenges of wholesale cultural change in a prison, and the risks of the ‘cliff edge’ of changes to support following release.⁵⁵⁹ In the ensuing years, the prison service has appointed 54 Drug Strategy Leads in prisons, and 35 Health and Justice Coordinators in probation regions to improve continuity of care,^{560,561} and there is promising evidence that engagement in treatment during and after prison has increased in recent years.^{562,563}

However, drug supply remains a critical issue. Drones are becoming a significant problem for prisons, and inspectors have raised concerns above a wave of “uncontrolled criminality”.⁵⁶⁴ In 2024–25 there were 1,712 drone incidents—43% more than the previous year. Four years ago when records began, there were just 138 incidents.⁵⁶⁵ Restricted Fly Zones were introduced around all closed prisons in January 2024, to disrupt drone use,⁵⁶⁶ yet the number of incidents has continued to climb steeply. HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) is investing over £40 million in physical security across 34 prisons,⁵⁶⁷ and 54 prisons now have enhanced gate security, comprising metal detectors and X-ray baggage scanners.⁵⁶⁸ However, a review of a £100 million investment in prison security in 2019 found mixed and inconclusive results, and that security was highly dependent on staff retention and skills.⁵⁶⁹

549 Black, C. (2020). Review of drugs: Phase one report. Home Office.

550 Black, C. (2021). Review of drugs: Phase two report. Home Office.

551 HM Government (2021). From harm to hope: A 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives. HM Government.

552 House of Commons written question 100713, 23 December 2025.

553 House of Commons written question 23904, 8 May 2024.

554 ICF Consulting Services Ltd. (2025). Process evaluation of drug recovery wings. Ministry of Justice.

555 Rand Europe et. al (2024). Tackling drug misuse in prisons: A qualitative study into the lived experience of drug testing and Incentivised Substance Free Living wings (ISFLs) in three prisons. Ministry of Justice.

556 Strang, L. et al. (2025). A process evaluation of Incentivised Substance Free Living wings in three prisons. Ministry of Justice.

557 ICF Consulting Services Ltd. (2025). Process evaluation of drug recovery wings. Ministry of Justice.

558 Churchward, D. et al. (2025). A randomised controlled trial in four prisons: impact of incentivised substance free living wings on prison stability. Ministry of Justice.

559 Elwes, B. and Stephenson, G. (2025). An impact evaluation of the Drug Recovery Prison at HMP Holme House. Ministry of Justice.

560 House of Commons written question 100713, 23 December 2025.

561 Wilkinson, K. and Wakeling, H. (2024). Process evaluation of the Drug Strategy Lead role in custody settings and the Health and Justice Partnership Coordinator/Manager role in community settings. Ministry of Justice.

562 Greevy, H. et al. (2023). £50m Reducing Reoffending Package process evaluation. Ministry of Justice.

563 Department for Health and Social Care (undated). Indicator C20, Public Health Outcomes Framework. Accessed 16 December 2025. <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/public-health-outcomes-framework/data>

564 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons. Annual report 2024–25. HC 1030. HM Stationery Office.

565 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 6.1, Chapter 6 tables—Finds in prison. HM Prison and Probation Service annual digest 2024–25.

566 House of Commons written question 23951, 20 January 2025.

567 House of Commons written question HL9482, 23 July 2025.

568 House of Lords written question HL10302, 22 September 2025.

569 Ramzir, A. et al. (2024). Security Investment Programme (SIP): Overview and outcome study. Ministry of Justice.

Substance use and supply in prison

Almost one in three women (30%) and almost two in five men (39%) report that it is easy to get illicit drugs in their prison.⁵⁷⁰ This is down from 40% (women) and 45% (men) in 2019–20.⁵⁷¹

More than a quarter of men (28%) said that it was easy to get alcohol in their prison—more than double the level amongst women in prison (11%).⁵⁷²

Nearly two in five women (39%) and men (38%) say it is easy to obtain medication that is not prescribed to them.⁵⁷³

Nearly one in five women (19%) and more than one in 10 men (11%) surveyed by inspectors reported that they had developed a drug or alcohol problem since they had arrived at prison.⁵⁷⁴

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.⁵⁷⁵

Drugs were seized on 26,348 occasions last year, an increase of 25% on the previous year. Where drugs were found, the percentage of finds where the exact substance was unknown accounted for the largest category (32%), followed by psychoactive substances (26%), then cannabis (25%).⁵⁷⁶

Drugs accounted for almost a quarter (24%) of illicit items seized in prisons in 2024–25—more than any other type of illicit item.⁵⁷⁷

53,341 random mandatory drugs tests (rMDTs) were conducted in the 12 months to March 2025, an increase of 4% from the previous year, but HMPPS says the number of tests is still not sufficient for reliable estimates of drug use (57,000 required).⁵⁷⁸ A 2025 evaluation of rMDT regimes concluded that targets may be increasing the predictability of testing times, and therefore counter-productive to addressing drug misuse.⁵⁷⁹

1,155 staff were investigated for supplying drugs to prisons in 2023. In the same year, 47 staff were arrested on drug conveyance charges, and 56 were charged.⁵⁸⁰

Substance-related needs upon entry to prison

Just under one in seven people (13%) serving a sentence in prison are there for drug offences, down from 17% in the previous year.⁵⁸¹

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.⁵⁸²

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.⁵⁸³

Nearly half of women in prison (48%) report having committed offences to support someone else's drug use.⁵⁸⁴

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.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁷⁰ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

⁵⁷¹ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2020). Annual report 2019–20. HC 856. HM Stationery Office.

⁵⁷² HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

⁵⁷³ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

⁵⁷⁴ HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

⁵⁷⁵ 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.

⁵⁷⁶ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 6.2, Chapter 6 tables—Finds in prison. HM Prison and Probation Service annual digest 2024–25. NB Multiple drugs can be found in a single seizure incident.

⁵⁷⁷ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 6.1, Chapter 6 tables—Finds in prison. HM Prison and Probation Service annual digest 2024–25.

⁵⁷⁸ Ministry of Justice (2025). HM Prison and Probation Service annual digest 2024–25.

⁵⁷⁹ Strang, L. and Wadsworth, E. (2025). Tackling drug misuse in prisons: A qualitative study on the implementation of drug testing in six prisons. Ministry of Justice.

⁵⁸⁰ House of Commons written question 15450, 29 February 2024.

⁵⁸¹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.A.6, Prison population: 2025. Offender management statistics quarterly: January to March 2025.

⁵⁸² House of Commons written question 14892, 27 February 2024.

⁵⁸³ Light, M. et al. (2013). Gender differences in substance misuse and mental health amongst prisoners. Ministry of Justice.

⁵⁸⁴ Light, M. et al. (2013). Gender differences in substance misuse and mental health amongst prisoners. Ministry of Justice.

⁵⁸⁵ Alcohol and Crime Commission (2014). The alcohol and crime commission report. Addaction.

Substance misuse monitoring and 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.⁵⁸⁶

The government is consulting on expanding access to naloxone following a rise in deaths involving nitazenes, a synthetic opioid.⁵⁸⁷ From December 2024 prisons were permitted to supply naloxone without a prescription.⁵⁸⁸

48,848 people received drug and alcohol treatment in prison during 2023–24, an increase of 7% from the previous year. Almost half (48%) were receiving treatment for opiate use.⁵⁸⁹

In 2024–25, just over half of adults (57%) identified as needing substance misuse treatment after prison were successfully engaged within 21 days—a four percentage point increase from the previous year,⁵⁹⁰ and a 27 percentage point increase from when records were first published in 2015–16 (30%).⁵⁹¹

Intensive Supervision Courts (ISCs) apply a problem-solving approach to divert people with complex needs, including substance misuse, away from custodial sentences and into enhanced community orders. From their pilot launch in 2023 up to March 2025, 6% of the 194 people going through an ISC had successfully completed their orders, 72% were ongoing, and 22% had breached the order.⁵⁹²

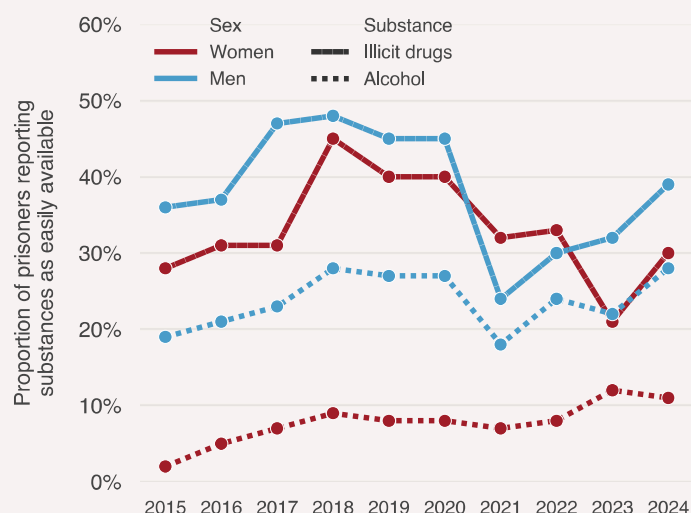
People with Community Sentence Treatment Requirements (CSTRs) show modest reductions in frequency and severity of reoffending, compared with people serving short custodial sentences. CSTRs mandate substance misuse interventions as part of a community sentence.⁵⁹³

When alcohol contributes to offending, courts may impose alcohol abstinence or treatment requirements. Abstinence requirements target non-dependent drinkers and are monitored through electronic alcohol testing with the threat of further sanctions for non-compliance.⁵⁹⁴

As of December 2025, 3,357 people were fitted with an alcohol monitoring device following release from custody.⁵⁹⁵

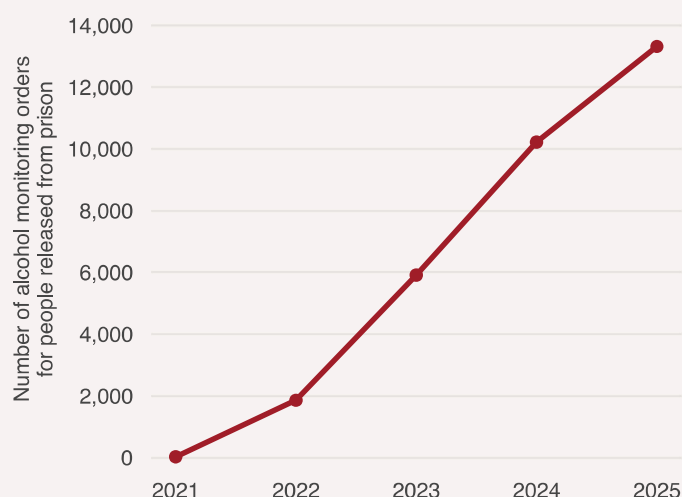
People given an abstinence requirement were about a quarter less likely to reappear before a court for another offence compared with those not given such a requirement, irrespective of age, sex, ethnicity, local area and offence type.⁵⁹⁶

Access to substances declined after the pandemic—but is rising again



Source: HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Annual report 2024–25 & previous editions.

The use of electronic monitoring for alcohol use is increasing



Source: Ministry of Justice (2026). Table 4.2, Data tables. Electronic monitoring publication, December 2025.

⁵⁸⁶ Merrill, E. et al. (2010). Meta-analysis of drug-related deaths soon after release from prison. *Addiction*, 105(9), 1545–54.

⁵⁸⁷ Department of Health and Social Care et al. (2025, 29 December). Expanding access to naloxone: supply and emergency use—consultation document.

⁵⁸⁸ The Human Medicines (Amendments Relating to Naloxone and Transfers of Functions) Regulations 2024.

⁵⁸⁹ Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (2025). Table 2.2, Data tables. Alcohol and drug treatment in secure settings 2023 to 2024. Public Health England. And previous editions.

⁵⁹⁰ Department for Health and Social Care (undated). Indicator C20, Public Health Outcomes Framework. Accessed 16 December 2025. <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/public-health-outcomes-framework/data>

⁵⁹¹ Department for Health and Social Care (undated). Indicator C20, Public Health Outcomes Framework. Accessed 16 December 2025. <https://tinyurl.com/24j9m33>

⁵⁹² CFE Research and Revolving Doors (2025). Process evaluation of the Intensive Supervision Courts pilot. Ministry of Justice.

⁵⁹³ Chalam-Judge, R. and Martin, E. (2024). The impact of being sentenced with a community sentence treatment requirement (CSTR) on proven reoffending. Ministry of Justice.

⁵⁹⁴ Lightowlers, C. (2024). Enforced alcohol abstinence: Does it reduce reoffending? Administrative Data Research UK.

⁵⁹⁵ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 4.1, Data tables. Electronic monitoring publication, December 2025.

⁵⁹⁶ 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 recommended 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.⁵⁹⁷

A 2021 Justice Committee inquiry found prison mental health provision to be inadequate, as did an inquiry by criminal justice inspectors. They called for a proper needs analysis to inform resource planning; an end to fragmentary service provision; better information sharing; improved staff training and an increase in care availability. They also endorsed the need to end prison as a place of safety and increase the speed of transfers to appropriate mental health inpatient services.^{598,599}

The Mental Health Act 2025 introduced a 28-day statutory time limit on transfers from prison to hospital. It also restricts the use of prisons as a place of safety and the use of remand solely for mental health concerns.⁶⁰⁰ However, concerns have been raised over adequate resourcing of alternative places of safety, and the government has promised to publish an annual review.⁶⁰¹

The National Preventative Mechanism (a group of organisations that oversee places of detention) also raised concerns about accountability for meeting the 28-day transfer time, and recommended mandatory annual reporting to a statutory body.⁶⁰²

In 2024–25, prison inspectors continued to raise concerns about stubbornly high delays to transfers, and the continued detention of severely mentally ill women in prison due to a lack of options in the community.⁶⁰³

Extent of mental health problems in prison

Mental ill health among people in prison in England is estimated to cost £2.1 billion annually, including £400 million 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.⁶⁰⁴

Over half of surveyed men (56%) and almost three-quarters of women in prison (74%) say they have mental health problems.⁶⁰⁵

A 2023 survey of mental health caseloads in English prisons found anxiety and/or depression to be the most common primary condition (29% of patients), followed by psychosis (22%) and personality disorders (17%).⁶⁰⁶ In London, where there are more local prisons with short-term and remand populations, the prevalence of psychosis was nearly double the national rate.

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%).⁶⁰⁷

Only one in seven surveyed prisons (14%) reported that mental health screenings upon entry were conducted by someone with a mental health qualification.⁶⁰⁸

Mental health support and diversion

In 2021, the Justice Committee found that around 10% of those in prison were receiving treatment for mental illness, but as much as 70% of the population had some form of mental health need. It expressed surprise that none of the relevant bodies knew the extent of need for mental healthcare services in prisons.⁶⁰⁹

597 Independent Review of the Mental Health Act 1983 (2018). Modernising the Mental Health Act: increasing choice, reducing compulsion. Department of Health and Social Care.

598 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.

599 House of Commons Justice Committee (2021). Mental health in prison. Fifth report of session 2021–22. HC 72. HM Stationery Office.

600 Mental Health Act 2025, s37, s48, s49.

601 Gajjar, D. et al. (2025). Mental Health Bill [HL] 2024–25: progress of the bill. House of Commons Library.

602 National Preventative Mechanism (2025). Recommended standard: tracking mental health bed transfer times.

603 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Annual report 2024–25. HC 1030, HM Stationery Office.

604 Cardoso, F. and McHayle, Z. (2024). The economic and social costs of mental ill health. Centre for Mental Health.

605 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook, Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

606 These figures underestimate the true prevalence of mental health conditions as people may have other conditions alongside the one classified as primary.

607 Durcan, G. (2023). Prison mental health services in England, 2023. Prison and young offender institution mental health needs analysis. Centre for Mental Health.

608 Durcan, G. (2023). Prison mental health services in England, 2023. Prison and young offender institution mental health needs analysis. Centre for Mental Health.

609 House of Commons Justice Committee (2021). Mental health in prison. Fifth report of session 2021–22. HC 72. HM Stationery Office.

In 2024–25, inspectors raised concerns about the continued difficulties in accessing mental health services in adult prisons, owing to chronic recruitment and retention issues with mental healthcare staff.⁶¹⁰

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%). However, data on the true level of service is patchy.⁶¹¹

4,880 mental health treatment requirements (MHTRs) were included in a community or suspended sentence order in 2024—a 40% increase compared with the year before. MHTRs were included in 2.8% of all orders, up from 0.3% in 2013.⁶¹²

People who received mental health treatment requirements had a reoffending rate 9 percentage points lower than those given short custodial sentences, reoffended less often and less seriously.⁶¹³

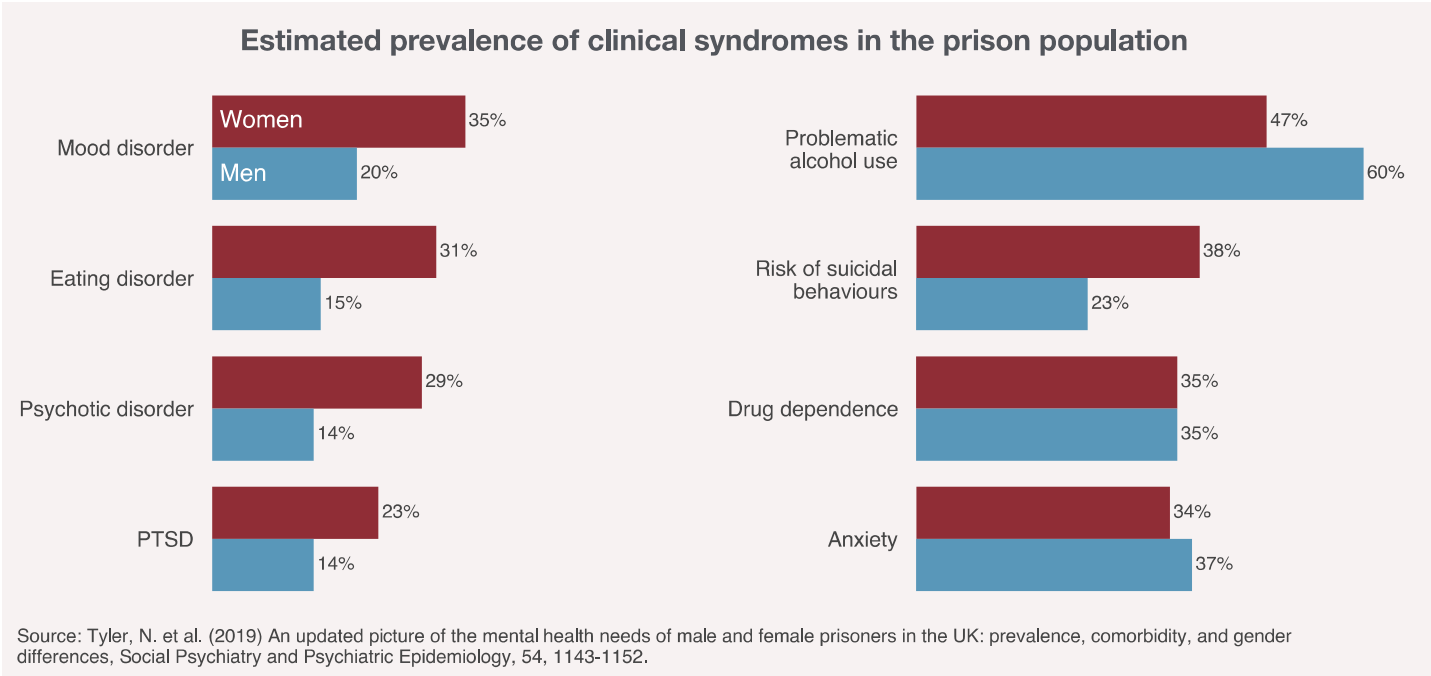
Transfers between hospital and prison

1,094 people were transferred from prison to a secure hospital in 2024—a 3% increase since 2015.⁶¹⁴

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.⁶¹⁵

In 2024, 207 people were returned from hospital to prison to continue serving their sentence (known as a remittal).⁶¹⁶

A 2020 study found that only one in five remitted people were receiving the aftercare they were entitled to under Section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983.⁶¹⁷ The government does not know how many prisoners are eligible for, or receiving aftercare.⁶¹⁸



610 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Annual report 2024–25. HC 1030. HM Stationery Office.
611 Durcan, G. (2023). Prison mental health services in England, 2023. Prison and young offender institution mental health needs analysis. Centre for Mental Health.
612 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 6.8, Probation: 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2024.
613 Chalam-Judge, R. and Martin, E. (2024). Evaluation report: the impact of being sentenced with a community sentence treatment requirement (CSTR) on proven reoffending. Ministry of Justice.
614 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 7, Restricted patients statistics: 2024. Restricted patients statistics, England and Wales, 2024.
615 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). The long wait: a thematic review of delays in the transfer of mentally unwell prisoners.
616 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 8, Restricted patients statistics: 2024. Restricted patients statistics, England and Wales, 2024.
617 Leonard, S-J., Webb, R. and 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.
618 House of Lords written question HL238, 28 November 2023.

Disability, health and social care

In 2025, the Chief Medical Officer for England undertook a major review of the health of people in prison and the care they receive. While it concluded that the last three decades have seen considerable improvements in care, the health of people in prison remains much worse than in the community, and prisons themselves make the treatment and prevention of disease more difficult. The review highlighted how the ageing prison estate and the tension between care and security considerations can negatively affect healthcare, as well as the vulnerability of people transitioning into, between, and out of prison, where poor information sharing means their care is disrupted and their health not well understood.

The review made a series of recommendations to improve the healthcare of prisoners, particularly in perinatal care, chronic conditions and blood-borne diseases, as well as addressing the dangers of extreme temperatures in prison for vulnerable groups. It also drew stark attention to the consequences of the ageing prison population, highlighting the need for better end-of-life care that allows people in prison to “die well” and with dignity.⁶¹⁹

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.⁶²⁰

56% of surveyed women, 46% of men and 33% of children in prison report having a disability. All groups reported feeling less safe in prison than non-disabled prisoners.^{621,622,623}

People with disabilities report more negatively about key aspects of prison life, including less access to clean clothing that fits, less time out of cell at weekends, and complaints not being fairly dealt with.^{624,625}

Inspectors highlighted that the continuing shortage of staff in prisons was creating risks for prisoners' healthcare. The demand for prison places, along with the introduction of the SDS40 early release scheme had impacted on the time available to plan healthcare on release.⁶²⁶

Less than a third of men (30%) and only one in six women (16%) said it was easy to see a doctor in prison. One in five men (21%) and one in seven women (13%) said it was easy to see a dentist.⁶²⁷

In a survey of prison leavers, more than one third (34%) said they were aware of people resorting to dentistry on themselves or others because they were unable to see a dentist.⁶²⁸

Less than a quarter of surveyed women (24%) and less than half of men in prison (43%) said the overall quality of health services was good⁶²⁹ — a review of women's healthcare in prison by NHS England and HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) found it to be insufficiently gender specific.⁶³⁰

In 2024–25, one third (33%) of recommendations by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO) following deaths in custody concerned healthcare provision.⁶³¹

In a survey of prison leavers, more than one third (34%) of people given a hospital appointment outside prison during their sentence said they were unable to attend it.⁶³²

The rate of infection for Hepatitis C in prison is around 6%, compared to 0.7% of the general population.⁶³³ Prevalence of other blood-borne viruses such as HIV is also higher in prison.⁶³⁴

The UK Health Security Agency classifies imprisonment as a social risk factor for TB. In 2023, 4% of all TB notifications in England were for people currently or previously imprisoned.⁶³⁵

619 Chief Medical Officer for England (2025). The health of people in prison, on probation and in the secure NHS estate in England: executive summary.

620 Cunliffe, C. et al. (2012). Estimating the prevalence of disability amongst prisoners: results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) survey. Ministry of Justice.

621 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 1 and 8, Men's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

622 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 1 and 8, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

623 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 1 and 9, Survey results for all children. Children in custody 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

624 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 8, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

625 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 8, Men's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

626 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025) Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

627 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

628 Nacro Justice Exchange (2025). The Better Futures Project briefing 3: physical health in prison.

629 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

630 NHS England and HM Prison and Probation Service (2023). A review of health and social care in women's prisons.

631 Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (2025). Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

632 Nacro Justice Exchange (2025). The Better Futures Project briefing 3: physical health in prison.

633 UK Health Security Agency (2023, 11 May). Taking a place-based approach to tackling hepatitis in prisons.

634 Chief Medical Officer for England (2025). The health of people in prison, on probation and in the secure NHS estate in England: executive summary.

635 UK Health Security Agency (2025). Table 6, Tuberculosis in England, 2023. Tuberculosis in England, 2024 report (data up to end of 2023).

The hospital admission rate was 2.2 times higher for people in prison during the pandemic, compared with the general population.⁶³⁶

The Care Act 2014 places a duty on local authorities 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.⁶³⁷ 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.⁶³⁸

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.⁶³⁹

Compassionate release

The number of people granted compassionate release for health reasons is low—between 2012 and 2024, only 120 people were released. Numbers have dropped in the recent years. In 2014, the three-year rolling average was 10 people a year. In 2024 it was five people.^{640,641,642,643}

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.⁶⁴⁴

Pregnancy, maternity and perinatal care

A Nuffield Trust study found that more than one in 10 imprisoned women (11%) went into pre-term labour, compared with around one in 15 women in the general population (6.5%).⁶⁴⁵

196 pregnant women were held in prison at some point during 2024–25—19 fewer than the previous year—with an average of 49 imprisoned at any one time.⁶⁴⁶

42 babies were born in prison in 2024–25, compared to 53 in the previous year.⁶⁴⁷ HMPPS does not record how many women experience miscarriage in prison.⁶⁴⁸

42 women and 41 babies were received into Mother & Baby Units (MBUs) in 2024–25.⁶⁴⁹ 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.⁶⁵⁰

Applications for admission to an MBU were successful in nine out of 10 cases (90%) where a board made a decision—11 percentage points higher than the previous year.⁶⁵¹ The Royal College of Midwives has recommended a presumption of MBU eligibility for all mothers with infants aged under two years.⁶⁵²

In the wake of the deaths of two babies born in prison in 2019–20,^{653,654} **HMPPS published a new policy on pregnancy, maternity and separation.**⁶⁵⁵ Previously, there were no mandatory requirements for care of pregnant or separated women.⁶⁵⁶ 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.⁶⁵⁷

⁶³⁶ Davies, M. and 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

⁶³⁷ Care Act 2014, s76.

⁶³⁸ Walton, H., Tomini, S., Sherlaw-Johnson, C., Ng, P. and 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.

⁶³⁹ NHS England and HM Prison and Probation Service (2023). A review of health and social care in women’s prisons.

⁶⁴⁰ House of Lords written question HL2099, 1 November 2017.

⁶⁴¹ House of Lords written question HL10210, 25 November 2020.

⁶⁴² House of Lords written question HL1414, 25 January 2024.

⁶⁴³ House of Lords written question HL12964, 18 December 2025.

⁶⁴⁴ Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (2017) Learning lessons from PPO investigations: Older prisoners.

⁶⁴⁵ Davies, M., Hutchings, R. and 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.

⁶⁴⁶ HM Prison and Probation Service (2025). Table 8.2 and 8.3, Chapter 8 tables—Mother and Baby Units, pregnant prisoners and births. HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2024 to March 2025. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁴⁷ HM Prison and Probation Service (2024). Table 8.2, Chapter 8 tables—Mother and Baby Units, pregnant prisoners and births. HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2024 to March 2025. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁴⁸ House of Commons written question 176814, 17 April 2023.

⁶⁴⁹ HM Prison and Probation Service (2025). Table 8.1, Chapter 8 tables—Mother and Baby Units, pregnant prisoners and births. HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2024 to March 2025. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁵⁰ HM Prison and Probation Service (2026). Pregnancy, Mother and Baby Units (MBUs), and maternal separation from children up to the age of two in women’s prisons. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁵¹ HM Prison and Probation Service (2025). Table 8.1, HMPPS Annual Digest, April 2024 to March 2025. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁵² Royal College of Midwives (2019). Position statement: Perinatal women in the criminal justice system.

⁶⁵³ Atkins, V. (2021). Letter to the Chair of the Justice Select Committee Sir Bob Neill MP, 28 October 2021. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁵⁴ Atkins, V. and Keegan, G. (2022). Letter to the Chair of the Justice Select Committee Sir Bob Neill MP, 28 January 2022. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁵⁵ HM Prison and 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.

⁶⁵⁶ Ministry of Justice (2020). Review of operational policy on pregnancy, Mother and Baby Units and maternal separation.

⁶⁵⁷ House of Commons written question 197024, 11 September 2023.

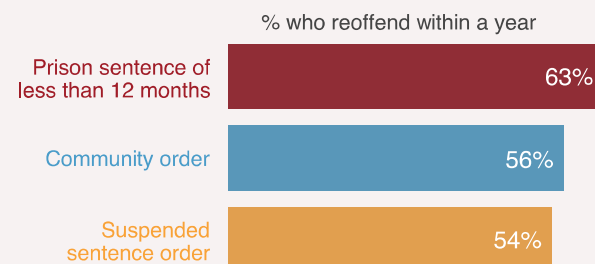
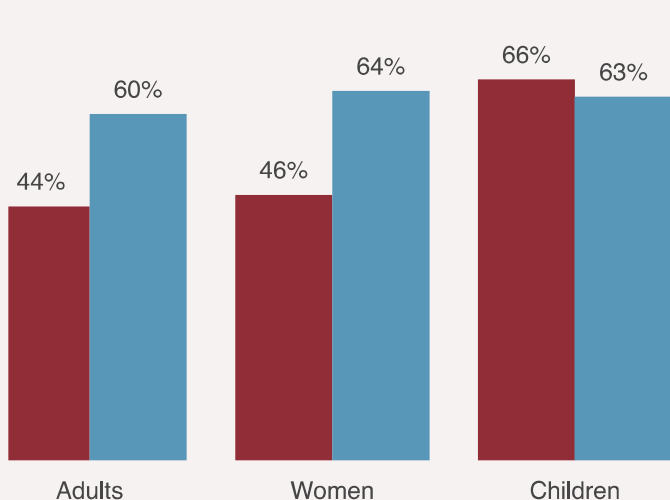
REHABILITATION AND RESETTLEMENT

Reoffending

Reoffending rates are hard, if not impossible, to measure. Published figures almost invariably use reconviction as a proxy measure. However, reconviction can be affected by many factors, in particular the ability of the police to detect crime and the priorities they set in doing so. In this section, 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.

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

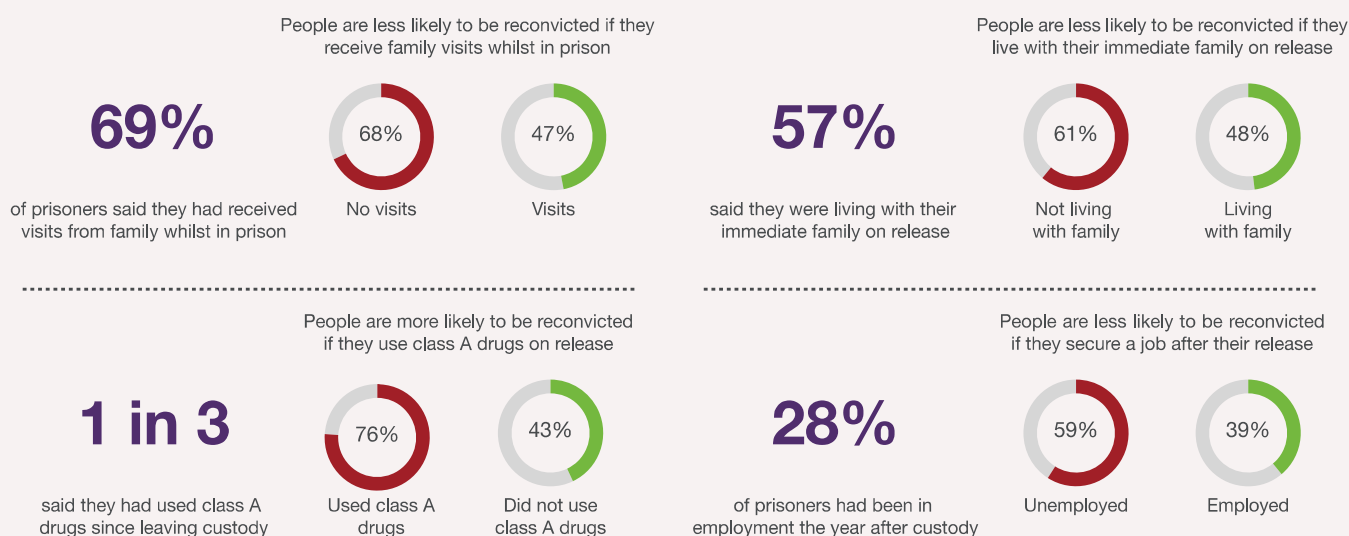
↑ 36 %

when a short prison sentence is used rather than a community sentence.⁶⁵⁸

Sources: Ministry of Justice (2025). Proven reoffending statistics: January to March 2023.
House of Lords written question HL13460, 19 January 2026.

A 2019 study has estimated the annual total economic and social cost of reoffending as £18.1bn.⁶⁵⁹

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.” It also found that “the evidence against the effectiveness of short custodial sentences is amongst the most robust.”⁶⁶⁰



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.

⁶⁵⁸ Hillier, J. and Mews, A. (2018). Do offender characteristics affect the impact of short custodial sentences and court orders on reoffending? Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁵⁹ Newton, A., May, X., Eames, S. and Ahmad, M. (2019). Economic and social costs of reoffending. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁶⁰ Gormley, J., Hamilton, M. and Belton, I. (2022). The effectiveness of sentencing options on reoffending. Sentencing Council.

Purposeful activity

Purposeful activity includes education, work and other activities to aid rehabilitation whilst in prison. Recent years have seen improved investment in provision. By 2024 specialist roles had been appointed to oversee educational and vocational delivery; and additional investment was made in vocational training; apprenticeships; Employment Advisory Boards; and literacy initiatives.^{661,662} The Labour government confirmed its commitment to continue investing in education and vocational opportunities.⁶⁶³ In 2025, Employment Councils were created to help more people into employment in the community,⁶⁶⁴ as well as a new national Careers, Advice, Information and Guidance service⁶⁶⁵ and Prison Education Service.⁶⁶⁶

However, inspection bodies have raised serious concerns that the reorganisation has resulted in significant budget cuts for many prisons in real terms.⁶⁶⁷ Independent Monitoring Boards at 41 prisons reported average budget reductions of between 36% and 45% with some reporting up to 65%, and a reduction in available classes.⁶⁶⁸ The government confirmed that many prisons will experience a reduction in core educational contract provision.⁶⁶⁹

In 2024–25, just under a third (30%) of inspectors' recommendations for purposeful activity from previous inspections remained unachieved.⁶⁷⁰ HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) continues to report purposeful activity as the worst performing area it inspects, with too many prisoners stuck in their cells or on wings with too little to do.⁶⁷¹

Of the 37 inspections of prisons and young offender institutions conducted by Ofsted (England) and Estyn (Wales) during 2024–25, less than a third (32%) were judged to be providing education, work or skills at a reasonable standard.⁶⁷²

On average in 2024–25, around three in five prisoners (61%) were engaged in purposeful activity—down eight percentage points from the previous year. This also varied widely—one third of prisoners (33%) were engaged full-time, but 28% were only engaged half-time. The rate of engagement across establishment varied from less than one in five (19%) in some prisons to nearly all (99%) in others.⁶⁷³

Only 10 out of 38 adult prisons received a positive rating from HMIP for purposeful activity in 2024–25 (26%)—up from 21% in the previous year. Four were open prisons.⁶⁷⁴

Just over one in five women (21%) and nearly three in 10 men (29%) surveyed by inspectors said that they spent less than two hours a day out of their cells. Rates had returned to pre-pandemic levels, but last year again saw a rise in the number of people reporting long periods of confinement to their cells.⁶⁷⁵

People are more likely to be locked up for longer in local prisons, where over half of surveyed men (54%) said they spent less than two hours a day out of their cells.⁶⁷⁶

Even in Category C training prisons, where people serve most of their sentence and work to reduce their risk of reoffending, almost a quarter of people (22%) said they spent less than two hours a day out of their cells.⁶⁷⁷

Weekends are particularly difficult in prison. Over one third of men (34%) and almost two in five women (39%) told inspectors they spent less than two hours a day out of their cells.⁶⁷⁸

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 these prisoners thought that they were more likely to reoffend.⁶⁷⁹

661 House of Commons written question 22366, 25 April 2024.

662 House of Commons written question 21770, 22 April 2024.

663 House of Commons written question 1840, 30 July 2024.

664 Ministry of Justice (2025, 10 January). Top bosses join forces to get thousands of offenders into work.

665 House of Commons written question 31331, 24 February 2025.

666 House of Lords written question HL10969, 22 October 2025.

667 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025, 15 October). What do cuts to prison education provision mean?

668 Davies, E. (2025, 30 December). Letter to Lord Timpson, Minister of State for Prisons, Parole and Probation. Independent Monitoring Boards.

669 House of Commons written question 78750, 20 October 2025.

670 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 8, HPA and concerns. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

671 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Annual report 2024–25. HC1030. HM Stationery Office.

672 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 9 and 10, HPA and concerns. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

673 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2, Annual performance ratings 2024–25 supplementary tables. Prison performance ratings: 2024 to 2025.

674 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 8, HPA and concerns. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

675 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office. And previous editions.

676 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Men's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

677 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Men's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

678 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

679 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2024). Purposeful prisons: Time out of cell.

Time well spent?

Many report spending **less than two hours a day** out of cell on an average weekday



Source: HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Annual report 2024–25.

Education

More than three-quarters of people leaving prison (78%) between June 2019 and December 2020 had previously had special educational needs identified while at school. Nearly three in five (59%) had been eligible for free school meals.⁶⁸⁰

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.⁶⁸¹

Literacy levels amongst the prison population remain significantly lower than in the general population. In 2024–25, prisoners took a total of 49,186 initial assessments in English. Almost two-thirds of assessment outcomes (65%) were at the equivalent literacy level expected of an 11-year-old or younger⁶⁸²—more than four times higher than in the general adult population (15%).⁶⁸³

55,105 adults in the prison system participated in education courses in the 2024–25 academic year—a 10% increase compared with last year.⁶⁸⁴

49,135 qualifications were achieved by prisoners in 2024–25—an 8% increase on the previous year.⁶⁸⁵

But there is variation in basic functional skills. Qualifications in English and Maths increased by 9% and 6% respectively, but ICT-related qualifications decreased by a fifth (19%).⁶⁸⁶

1,491 people achieved a level 3 qualification (A-level and equivalent) last year—up 9% on the previous year.⁶⁸⁷

1,486 people in prison are studying with the Open University—16% fewer than last year.^{688,689}

Prisoners wishing to study in higher education must be within six years of their release date to be eligible for a student loan,⁶⁹⁰ limiting opportunities for people serving long prison sentences. Prisoner participation in higher education has been estimated to cut reoffending rates by 20–40%.⁶⁹¹

In-cell laptops are now available to around 13,000 prisoners across 19 prisons.⁶⁹²

680 Ministry of Justice (2025). Prison education in England: educational backgrounds, characteristics and criminogenic needs.

681 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.

682 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.1, Prison education tables 2024–25. Prison education and accredited programme statistics 2024–2025.

683 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. Department for Business Innovation and Skills.

684 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.1, Prison education tables 2024–25. Prison education and accredited programme statistics 2024–2025. And previous editions.

685 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.2, Prison education tables 2024–25. Prison education and accredited programme statistics 2024–2025.

686 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.3, Prison education tables 2024–25. Prison education and accredited programme statistics 2024–2025.

687 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2.2, Prison education tables 2024–25. Prison education and accredited programme statistics 2024–2025.

688 House of Commons written question 7955, 15 January 2024.

689 House of Commons written question 100715, 23 December 2025.

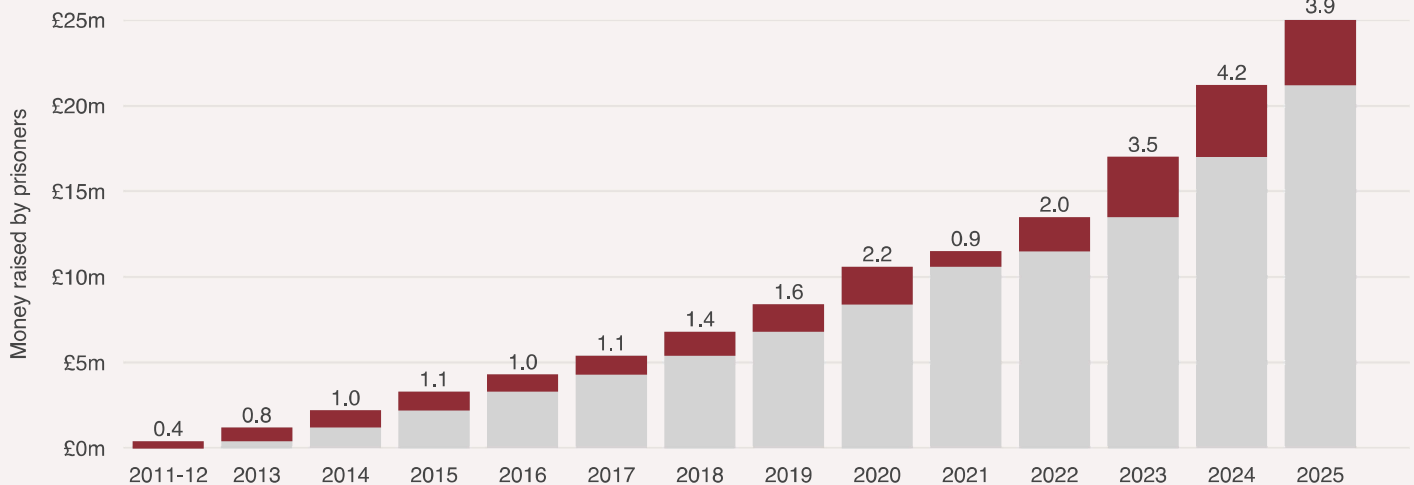
690 Education and Skills Funding Agency (2025, 9 July). Advanced learner loans funding and performance management rules: 2025 to 2026.

691 Higher Education Policy Institute (2019). Student loans for those on long prison sentences. Higher Education Policy Institute.

692 Ministry of Justice (2025). Annual report and accounts. HC 1417. HM Stationery Office.

Working for victims

People in prison have raised £25m through the Prisoners' Earnings Act levy—particularly in the last three years



Source: HM Prison and Probation Service Annual Digest, April 2024 to March 2025.

Employment

The New Futures Network develops partnerships between prisons and employers to create employment opportunities in prison and on release. Over 400 businesses now work with prisons to provide work and employment opportunities.⁶⁹³ The Future Skills programme provides training to prisoners nearing release, followed by guaranteed interviews.⁶⁹⁴

Employment advisory boards, which link business leaders with prisons to provide advice on skills gaps and the needs of the local job market, have been established across 93 prisons, as have employment hubs, with specialist staff offering prisoners support with job applications and CVs. Employment Councils expanded this model out to the Probation Service and Department for Work and Pensions, and aim to provide support to prison leavers.⁶⁹⁵

Following a change in the law in 2022, prisoners in open prisons and certain women's prisons became eligible to undertake apprenticeships.⁶⁹⁶ In 2025, this scheme was extended to closed prisons.⁶⁹⁷

HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) has not published national figures on the number of prisoners working in custody. This is the fifth year in a row that they have failed to publish these figures. In 2024, the cited reason was disruption to data quality.⁶⁹⁸ In 2025, reference to this data has entirely disappeared.

Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL)

ROTL plays an important part in helping people to prepare for release, particularly for people serving long sentences. Following a full risk assessment, it allows people to reconnect with the world they will rejoin. People may take part in work and volunteering, obtain ID and bank accounts, re-establish contact with their families, find accommodation and practice new or unfamiliar life skills.

In 99.8% of incidences, ROTL was completed successfully in 2024.⁶⁹⁹ 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.⁷⁰⁰

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.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹³ House of Commons written question 203060, 25 October 2023.

⁶⁹⁴ House of Commons written question 73956, 9 September 2025.

⁶⁹⁵ Ministry of Justice (2025, 10 January). Top bosses join forces to get thousands of offenders into work.

⁶⁹⁶ HM Prison and Probation Service (2022). Release on temporary licence (ROTL) policy framework. Ministry of Justice.

⁶⁹⁷ House of Commons written question 73956, 9 September 2025.

⁶⁹⁸ Ministry of Justice (2024). HM Prison and Probation Service annual digest: April 2023 to March 2024. And previous editions.

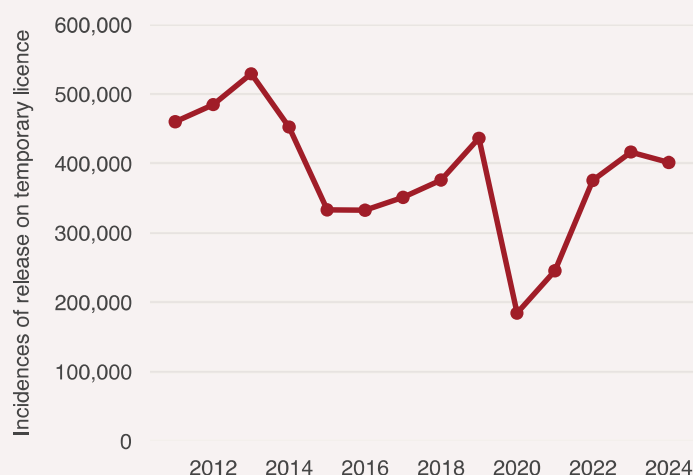
⁶⁹⁹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 3.A.20 and 3.A.23, Releases: 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: October–December 2024.

⁷⁰⁰ House of Lords written question HL10936, 6 November 2018.

⁷⁰¹ Hillier, J. and Mews, A. (2018). The reoffending impact of increased release of prisoners on temporary licence. Ministry of Justice.

Prepared for release

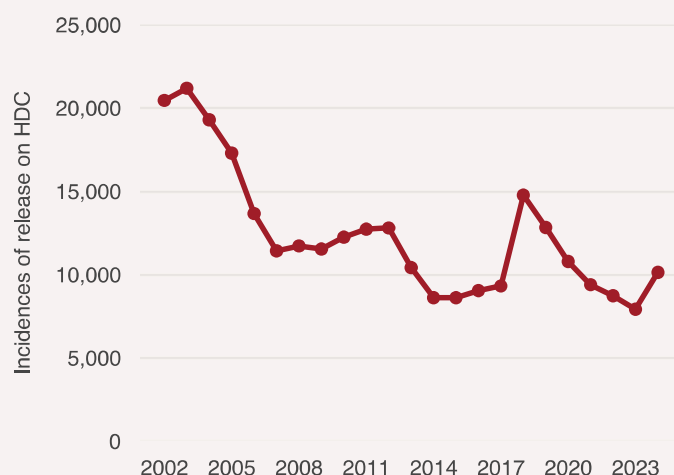
Release on temporary licence was increasing — but declined in 2024



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2024.

Home Detention Curfew

HDC was expanded as an emergency measure — but has now been removed altogether for adults



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2024.

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, temporarily began to recover, but dropped by 4% last year (around 15,000 fewer ROTLs). Use remains 24% lower than in 2013. At the time restrictions were introduced, the ROTL success rate was 99.9%.⁷⁰²

On average, 1,080 people per month were working out of prison on licence during 2024–25—a 9% decrease on the previous year, and the first fall in numbers since the pandemic. They paid £302 per month on average to the Prisoners' Earnings Act levy—nearly a fifth of their net earnings (18%). The levy goes toward supporting victims of crime.⁷⁰³

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.⁷⁰⁴ Previously only those serving between three months and under four years were eligible.⁷⁰⁵

The maximum amount of time a person can spend on HDC was extended from six to 12 months from June 2025 as a means of addressing the overcrowding crisis in prisons.^{706,707}

As a result of these combined changes, there were around 2,000 more people on HDC in June 2025 than at the same time the year before.⁷⁰⁸

There were 10,134 releases on HDC during 2024, a 28% increase on the year before.⁷⁰⁹

The Sentencing Act 2026 amends legislation relating to the provision of Home Detention Curfew (HDC) to allow release for only those serving youth sentences under section 91 or section 250 of the sentencing code. Individuals serving adult standard determinate sentences (SDSs) will no longer be able to be released early on home detention curfew.⁷¹⁰

⁷⁰² Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 3.A.20 and 3.A.23 A3.7, Releases: 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: October–December 2024.

⁷⁰³ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 3.2, Chapter 3 tables—Prisoner earnings. HM Prison and Probation Service Annual digest: April 2024 to March 2025.

⁷⁰⁴ Victims and Prisoners Act 2024, s.68.

⁷⁰⁵ Ministry of Justice (2023). Home Detention Curfew (HDC) policy framework.

⁷⁰⁶ Ministry of Justice (2024). Explanatory memorandum to The Home Detention Curfew and Requisite and Minimum Custodial Periods (Amendment) Order 2024

⁷⁰⁷ Ministry of Justice (2025). Home Detention Curfew (HDC) policy framework.

⁷⁰⁸ Ministry of Justice (2026). Prison population weekly estate figures 29 December 2025. And previous editions.

⁷⁰⁹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 3.A.14, Releases: 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: October–December 2024.

⁷¹⁰ Sentencing Act 2026, s26.

Resettlement

The Ministry of Justice was allocated £550 million 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.⁷¹¹ Over three-quarters of contracts (76%) were awarded to the voluntary sector.⁷¹²

In 2023, the National Audit Office found that HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) could not satisfactorily demonstrate if CRS contracts are effective because of inadequate monitoring, and warned that the resettlement delivery model was complex and fragmented. HMPPS's own audit of 28 of the highest value contracts found that two-thirds (68%) were rated as not meeting quality standards.⁷¹³ In 2025, HMPPS released a new specification that will restrict contracts to a single provider per geographical area, covering all rehabilitative services.⁷¹⁴ Many services are being re-procured.⁷¹⁵

In 2022, HMPPS established ID and Banking Administrators, Employment Leads, Hubs and Advisory Boards in all 93 resettlement prisons.^{716, 717} These roles and services are intended to assist prisoners with release preparation and opportunities, but the government does not know how many posts remain filled or vacant.⁷¹⁸

Of 38 adult prisons inspected in 2024–25, only nine were rated ‘good’ for release preparation, including four open prisons.⁷¹⁹ Inspectors highlighted that staff shortages and population pressures are negatively impacting resettlement. They praised the use of resettlement boards in some prisons, which begin preparations three months ahead of release.⁷²⁰

Nearly everyone in prison will be released at some point. In 2024, 57,277 people were released at the end of the custodial term of their sentence.⁷²¹

But inspectors found that only half of surveyed men (48%) and three in 10 women (29%) were due to be released from a prison in their home area.⁷²²

Resettlement passports—a single document bringing together information and services upon release—were promised in 2021,⁷²³ but the current government has no clear plans for their introduction.⁷²⁴

Inspectors found that, on average, probation regions have 30% fewer staff than they require to carry out resettlement work with people leaving prison.⁷²⁵

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 law was changed in 2022 to reduce how long some people need to disclose their conviction for.⁷²⁶

The proportion of people in employment six weeks after leaving prison has risen to one in five (20%)—a seven percentage point increase on five years ago when records began.⁷²⁷ Just over a third of people are in employment six months after release (35%)—a 21 percentage point rise on four years ago.⁷²⁸

Nearly 300 employers have signed up to Ban the Box, including the entire Civil Service—removing the need to disclose convictions at the initial job application stage.⁷²⁹

711 National Audit Office (2023). Improving resettlement support for prison leavers to reduce reoffending.

712 House of Lords written question HL2855, 3 December 2024.

713 National Audit Office (2023). Improving resettlement support for prison leavers to reduce reoffending.

714 Maidment, N. (2025, 10 April). Commissioned Rehabilitative Services (CRS)—Update. Clinks.

715 House of Commons written question 64155, 9 July 2025.

716 House of Commons written question 12476, 12 November 2024.

717 House of Commons written question 21770, 22 April 2024.

718 House of Commons written question 100717, 16 December 2025.

719 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Table 1, HPA and concerns. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

720 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Annual report 2024–25. HC 1030. HM Stationery Office.

721 Ministry of Justice. (2025). Table 3.A.1, Releases: 2024. Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2024.

722 HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

723 Ministry of Justice (2021). Prisons strategy white paper, CP 581. HM Stationery Office.

724 House of Commons written question 100719, 23 December 2025.

725 HMI Probation (2023). Offender management in custody—post-release. A thematic inspection by HM Inspectorate of Probation.

726 Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, s.193.

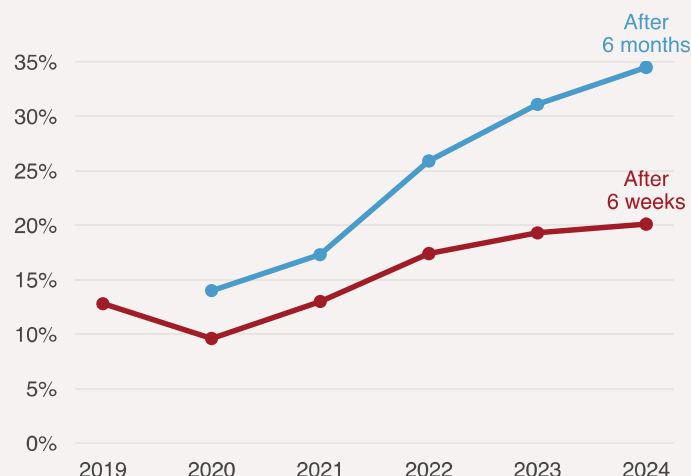
727 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 4b, Employment at 6 weeks post release from custody data tables. Offender employment outcomes, update to March 2025. And previous editions.

728 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 4b, Employment at 6 months post release from custody data tables. Offender employment outcomes, update to March 2025. And previous editions.

729 Business in the Community (2025). Personal communication.

Long-term prospects?

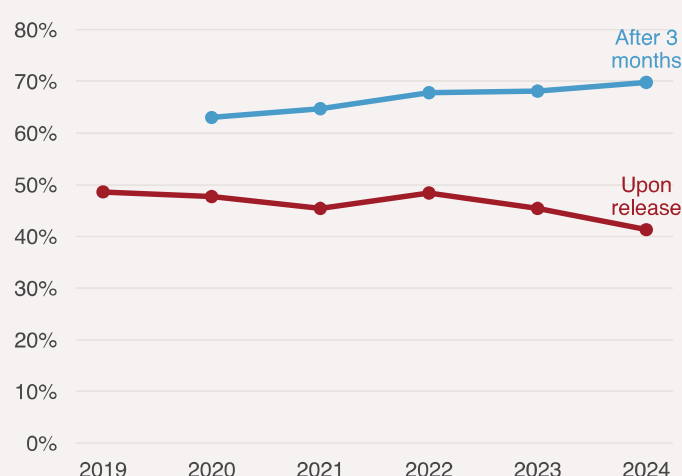
Levels of employment on release are improving, though the majority are still out of work



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Employment at 6 weeks/months post-release from custody data tables. Offender employment outcomes, update to March 2025.

The cliff edge of release

Many prisoners are released without settled accommodation to go to



Source: Ministry of Justice (2025). Housed on release from custody/ Settled accommodation at 3 months post-release from custody data tables. Offender accommodation outcomes, update to March 2025.

Accommodation

Just two in five people (41%) released from prison in 2024–25 had settled accommodation on release, and almost one in seven (15%) were homeless or sleeping rough.⁷³⁰

After three months, seven in ten people (70%) released from prison had settled accommodation and 6% were homeless or sleeping rough.⁷³¹

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.⁷³²

There were 10,020 placements in the HMPPS Community Accommodation Service (CAS) in 2024–25—a 46% increase on the previous year. CAS provides up to 12 weeks of transitional accommodation after leaving prison.⁷³³

However, less than a third of people (30%) left their CAS placement for settled accommodation. A similar proportion (29%) were reimprisoned, 17% moved on to further transient accommodation, and 12% became homeless or began sleeping rough.⁷³⁴ A 2025 evaluation found that there was insufficient evidence to say how CAS3 placements impact on reoffending for men.⁷³⁵

Finance, benefits and debt

In 2023 the subsistence payment on release from prison was raised to £89.52. But an annual rise is not guaranteed, and no further rises have occurred. Thousands of prisoners also remain ineligible, including people released from remand; fine defaulters; people awaiting deportation; and children.⁷³⁶

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.⁷³⁷

Prisoners can receive help prepare a Universal Credit claim, but cannot submit one until they have been released from prison,⁷³⁸ and must usually wait around five weeks for the first payment.⁷³⁹

⁷³⁰ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2, Housed on release from custody data tables. Offender accommodation outcomes, update to March 2025.

⁷³¹ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2, Settled accommodation at 3 months post-release from custody data tables. Offender accommodation outcomes, update to March 2025.

⁷³² HMI Probation (2020). Accommodation and support for adult offenders in the community and on release from prison in England: An inspection by HMI Probation.

⁷³³ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1, Annex 3: Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 data tables. Offender accommodation outcomes, update to March 2025.

⁷³⁴ Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 2, Annex 3: Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 data tables. Offender accommodation outcomes, update to March 2025.

⁷³⁵ Morrison, K. et al. (2025). Community Accommodation Service Tier 3 (CAS3): resident outcomes. Impact evaluation report. Ministry of Justice.

⁷³⁶ HM Prison and Probation Service (2024). PSI 72/2011. Discharge.

⁷³⁷ 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.

⁷³⁸ HM Government (2025, 11 August). Supporting prison leavers: A guide to Universal Credit.

⁷³⁹ HM Government (undated). Universal Credit. Accessed on 23 December 2025. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/how-you're-paid>

Electronic monitoring

Electronic monitoring was first introduced in 1999 to monitor adherence to curfews imposed under conditional release from prison (but other reasons include bail, community sentences and immigration status).⁷⁴⁰ Adherence is monitored via Radio Frequency (RF) devices, which send a signal to a base station installed in a person's home, to check if they are present during the required hours.⁷⁴¹ Plans to expand electronic monitoring have been underway since 2011 but have faced contracting challenges, including overcharging by service providers.⁷⁴² In 2017, the National Audit Office (NAO) concluded that the Ministry of Justice's strategy was "overly ambitious" and "not grounded in evidence."⁷⁴³

The last eight years have seen an unprecedented expansion in the use of electronic monitoring devices, often known as 'tags'. GPS location monitoring devices were introduced in 2018, which track a person's movements 24 hours a day, known as 'trail monitoring'. In 2020, tags were introduced for monitoring levels of alcohol in the blood via sweat. In 2021, the use of GPS devices was expanded to children.⁷⁴⁴

Since 2021, HMPPS has completed several pilots that mandate electronic monitoring as a condition of release on licence for particular groups and circumstances. These include people convicted of theft, burglary or robbery (acquisitive crime) serving a sentence of three months or more; and people convicted of domestic abuse. In 2022–23, five probation regions ran a pilot allowing tags to be used for anybody on post-release supervision, as a response to escalating risk and an alternative to recall.^{745,746,747,748} Alcohol monitoring tags were rolled out across England in 2022 as an available measure for post-release supervision.⁷⁴⁹

The Independent Sentencing Review recommended "responsible expansion" of electronic monitoring that was matched by investment in "skilled, well-resourced human support".⁷⁵⁰ The acquisitive crime pilot evaluation concluded that the rollout had increased the workload of an already resource constrained probation service, and national rollout would need to seriously consider levels of staffing.^{751,752} While the government committed in 2025 to recruiting an extra 1,300 probation officers and an additional investment of up to £700 million by 2028–29,⁷⁵³ 1,279 probation officers and probation services officers left in the 12 months to September 2025.⁷⁵⁴

The government has confirmed its intention to tag thousands more people leaving prison, following changes to the Sentencing Act 2026, which permit earlier release for many.⁷⁵⁵ Earlier release will be followed by a period of "intensive" supervision that can involve electronic monitoring. The impact assessment for the Bill did not assess the increased cost of electronic monitoring, because it does not require primary legislation.⁷⁵⁶

As of December 2025, there were 3,620 people wearing a tag who were on licence following release from prison—more than two in five (43%) of all people fitted with a tag.⁷⁵⁷

Between March 2017 and March 2024 the number of people with an electronic monitoring requirement increased by 75%, to just over 20,000 people. The number of people with this requirement after release from prison more than doubled in this period, rising from around 2,482 to nearly 5,440 people. However these figures are not directly comparable to present numbers wearing a tag, because a stricter definition of tagging was adopted in June 2025.^{758,759}

740 Ministry of Justice (2026, 22 January). Technical note. Electronic monitoring statistics publication, December 2025.

741 Independent Sentencing Review (2025). Independent sentencing review: final report and proposals for reform.

742 National Audit Office (2022). Electronic monitoring: a progress update. HM Prison & Probation Service. HC 62. HM Stationery Office.

743 National Audit Office (2017). The new generation electronic monitoring programme. HC 242. HM Stationery Office.

744 Ministry of Justice (2026, 22 January). Technical note. Electronic monitoring statistics publication, December 2025.

745 Sinclair, S. & McAlonan, D. (2025). Impact evaluation of the acquisitive crime electronic monitoring project: 12 month+ cohort. Ministry of Justice.

746 Yates, J. et al. (2025). Process evaluation of the acquisitive crime electronic monitoring project: 3–12 month cohort. Ministry of Justice.

747 Rolls, E. et al. (2024). Electronic monitoring of domestic abuse perpetrators on licence. Process evaluation. Ministry of Justice.

748 Davey, M. et al. (2025). Process evaluation of the electronic monitoring as licence variation project. Ministry of Justice.

749 Ministry of Justice (2026, 22 January). Technical note. Electronic monitoring statistics publication, December 2025.

750 Independent Sentencing Review (2025). Independent sentencing review: final report and proposals for reform.

751 Yates, J. & McAlonan, D. (2025). Process evaluation of the acquisitive crime electronic monitoring project: 3–12 month cohort. Ministry of Justice.

752 Sinclair, S. & McAlonan, D. (2025). Impact evaluation of the acquisitive crime electronic monitoring project: 12 month+ cohort. Ministry of Justice.

753 Ministry of Justice (2025, 2 September). Tens of thousands more to be tagged under biggest ever expansion.

754 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 8, HMPPS workforce statistics bulletin: September 2025 tables. HM Prison & Probation Service workforce quarterly: September 2025.

755 Ministry of Justice (2026, 22 January). Sentencing Act ensuring punishment cuts crime gets Royal Assent.

756 Ministry of Justice (2025). Sentencing bill impact assessment.

757 Ministry of Justice (2026). Table 3.1, Data tables. Electronic monitoring statistics publication, December 2025.

758 Ministry of Justice (2024). Table 1.1, Data tables. Electronic monitoring statistics annual publication, March 2024.

759 Ministry of Justice (2026, 22 January). Technical note. Electronic monitoring statistics publication, December 2025. Under the pre-June 2025 definition, an individual was considered tagged if equipment was assigned to one of their orders. From June 2025, successful installation must be confirmed.

Among male prison leavers who had committed an acquisitive crime and were serving a sentence of 12 months or more, those wearing a tag had a reoffending rate seven percentage points lower than those not fitted with one (33% vs. 26%) within 12 months of being released.⁷⁶⁰

However, the same pilot showed no difference in breach or recall rates between people wearing a tag and those who were not. Around three in five (62%) were recalled.⁷⁶¹

Technology is creating additional barriers to compliance. In the pilot for people convicted of domestic abuse, three in five recorded violations (61%) were for failing to keep the battery charged.⁷⁶² People in the acquisitive crime pilots also reported that devices had poor battery life, and feared that a charger malfunction could result in a recall to prison.^{763,764}

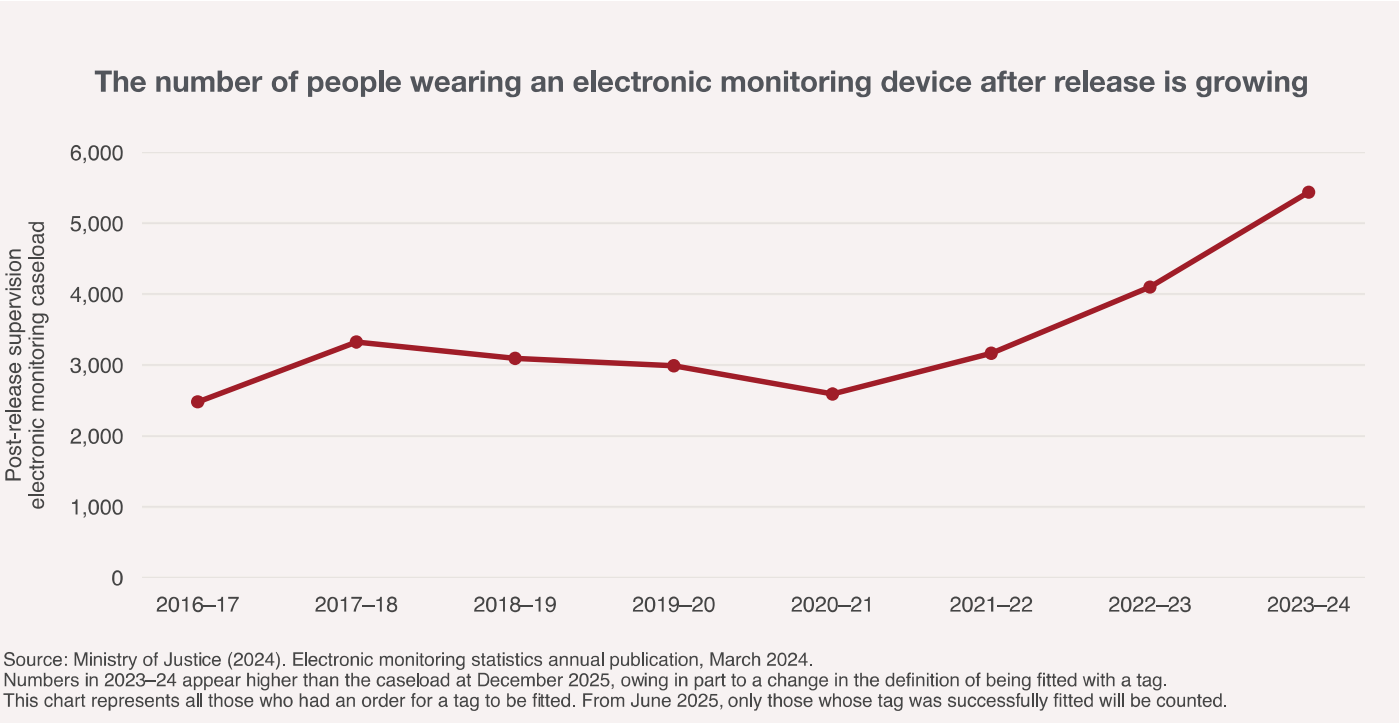
Practitioners and people on probation agree that tags act as a deterrent and an opportunity to prove compliance. However, it is difficult to know what people on probation really think, as participation rates in evaluations have been extremely low.^{765,766}

Location monitoring is very labour intensive for probation staff. Nearly 80% of the estimated 140,000 hours spent on the acquisitive crime pilot by probation staff were spent reviewing location monitoring data.⁷⁶⁷

In the acquisitive crime pilots, 300 people were directed to wear a tag on release who were ineligible— 12% of all those enrolled.⁷⁶⁸

One quarter (25%) of people in the acquisitive crime pilot who were serving less than 12 months did not have a tag successfully fitted, compared to 9% with those serving over 12 months.⁷⁶⁹

People directed to wear tags can experience physical discomfort, and negative effects on mental health/wellbeing, particularly feelings of paranoia related to constant monitoring. Tags are large and difficult to conceal, which can create stigma and negatively impact relationships.^{770,771}



760 Sinclair, S. & McAlonan, D. (2025). Impact evaluation of the acquisitive crime electronic monitoring project: 12 month+ cohort. Ministry of Justice.
761 Sinclair, S. & McAlonan, D. (2025). Impact evaluation of the acquisitive crime electronic monitoring project: 12 month+ cohort. Ministry of Justice.
762 Rolls, E. et al. (2024). Table 6.1. Electronic monitoring of domestic abuse perpetrators on licence. Data tables. Ministry of Justice.
763 Yates, J. & McAlonan, D. (2025). Process evaluation of the acquisitive crime electronic monitoring project: 3–12 month cohort. Ministry of Justice.
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765 Yates, J. & McAlonan, D. (2025). Process evaluation of the acquisitive crime electronic monitoring project: 3–12 month cohort. Ministry of Justice.
766 Davey, M. (2025). Process evaluation of the electronic monitoring as licence variation project. Ministry of Justice.
767 Sinclair, S. & McAlonan, D. (2025). Impact evaluation of the acquisitive crime electronic monitoring project: 12 month+ cohort. Ministry of Justice.
768 Yates, J. & McAlonan, D. (2025). Process evaluation of the acquisitive crime electronic monitoring project: 3–12 month cohort. Ministry of Justice.
769 Yates, J. & McAlonan, D. (2025). Process evaluation of the acquisitive crime electronic monitoring project: 3–12 month cohort. Ministry of Justice.
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Family

Family and friends are a highly significant factor in enabling successful resettlement on release. But help to maintain and strengthen family ties is variable across prisons, and often not given sufficient priority or resources according to two independent reviews by Lord Farmer^{772,773} and prison inspectors.⁷⁷⁴

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%.⁷⁷⁵

HMPPS estimates that 192,912 children had a parent in prison between 2021 and 2022.⁷⁷⁶ An earlier independent study estimated that 320,000 children had a parent in prison in 2020.⁷⁷⁷

42 babies were born to women held in prison in the year to March 2025—11 fewer than the previous year. All occurred in hospital.⁷⁷⁸

Less than half of surveyed men (45%) and nearly three in five women (57%) were offered a free phone call on the first night in their current prison.⁷⁷⁹

Research suggests that the odds of reoffending are 39% lower for prisoners who receive family visits compared to those who do not receive visits.⁷⁸⁰

One third of surveyed women (33%) and around two in five men (39%) reported that it was easy for family to visit them at their current prison. 35% of women and 36% of men said they had seen family or friends more than once in the last month. One in six men (16%) and just under a quarter of women (24%) had taken part in a video call.⁷⁸¹

Women are often held further away from their families, making visiting difficult and expensive. The average distance is 63 miles, but it is often significantly more.⁷⁸²

One in 20 prisoners (5%) has no outside social contact at all, particularly people aged 60 and over (16%), people serving indefinite sentences (8%), people held in high security prisons (10%), and people convicted of criminal damage/arson (12%).⁷⁸³

A 30 minute call during the working week to a landline costs 74 pence and for mobiles is £1.65. At weekends, this reduces slightly to 66 pence and £1.08, respectively. A 20% reduction to call rates was introduced in April 2025.⁷⁸⁴

Secure in-cell telephones are now available in all closed prisons.⁷⁸⁵ People in prison reported that their relationship with family had strengthened as a result of in-cell phones.⁷⁸⁶

Secure video calls, rolled out during the Covid-19 pandemic, are also available in all prisons and young offender institutions in England and Wales.⁷⁸⁷ But only about 9% of prisoners use video calls monthly.⁷⁸⁸

Patterns of visiting have changed since the pandemic. In June 2024, 33% of prisoners had an in-person visit, down from 41% in 2019.⁷⁸⁹

An evidence review found that imprisonment affects families profoundly, causing confusion, fear, trauma, economic hardship, health issues, and social exclusion due to stigma.⁷⁹⁰

772 Farmer, M. (2017). The importance of strengthening prisoners' family ties to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime. Ministry of Justice.

773 Farmer, M. (2019). The importance of strengthening female offenders' family and other relationships to prevent reoffending and reduce intergenerational crime. Ministry of Justice.

774 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

775 Ministry of Justice (2024). Official statistics in development: Estimates of children with a parent in prison.

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777 Kincaid, S. et al. (2019). Children of prisoners: Fixing a broken system. Crest Advisory.

778 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 8.2, Chapter 8 tables: Mother and Baby Units, pregnant prisoners and births. HMPPS annual digest, April 2024 to March 2025.

779 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

780 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.

781 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2025). Table 2, Women's comparator workbook. Annual report 2024–25. HM Stationery Office.

782 Ministry of Justice. (2018). Table 5.1a and 5.1b, Supporting Data Tables for the Female Offender Strategy.

783 Randall, E. et al. (2025). Social contact in prison. Ministry of Justice.

784 House of Lords written question HL13459, 19 January 2026.

785 House of Lords written question HL6639, 30 April 2025.

786 Ellison, A., et al. (2018). The demand for and use of illicit phones in prison. Ministry of Justice.

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788 Randall, E. et al. (2025). Social contact in prison. Ministry of Justice.

789 Randall, E. et al. (2025). Social contact in prison. Ministry of Justice.

790 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 2024.⁷⁹¹

In February 2025, legislation came into force to allow the routine release of short-term prisoners after serving 40% of their sentence rather than the usual 50%.⁷⁹² 312 prisoners were released in three tranches over the following two months.⁷⁹³ The law also makes provision for ministers to amend the release point more easily in future, for short-term and certain long-term prisoners—sexual abuse and domestic violence offences are excluded.⁷⁹⁴

However, this measure is failing to stem capacity issues, and a further seven tranches of emergency early release are planned between November 2025 and April 2026, of around 1,000 prisoners. Both eligibility and the amount of time people can spend on Home Detention Curfew have also been extended. Like in England and Wales, an independent Sentencing and Penal Policy Commission is exploring options for demand reduction, and was due to report to the Scottish Government by the end of 2025.⁷⁹⁵

There are 17 prisons in Scotland, including one privately managed prison and two community custody units (CCUs) for women. CCUs aim to provide closer contact with community services in gender-specific and trauma-informed environments. There is one prison for women (HMP & YOI Stirling), one open prison (HMP Castle Huntly), one young offender institution (HMYOI Polmont), and two prisons that specialise in provision for prisoners serving long-term and indefinite sentences.⁷⁹⁶ Certain prisons are designated as “community facing”, intended to align prison rehabilitation and reintegration services with those in the community.⁷⁹⁷

The 2026–27 Scottish budget included a £20.8 million increase to the prison service’s resource budget, and £459 million in capital funding to replace two ageing and overcrowded prisons with two modern ones.⁷⁹⁸ The Criminal Justice Committee found that the Scottish Prison Service is facing considerable increased costs from a rising, and ageing prison population; the replacement prisons; contractual inflationary increases to private providers;⁷⁹⁹ and bringing HMP Kilmarnock back into the public estate.⁸⁰⁰ It was authorised an overspend of £22.5 million in 2025–26.⁸⁰¹ Scotland is not presently planning to build additional prisons (though the new ones will increase capacity),^{802,803} despite calls from victims’ groups to do so.⁸⁰⁴

In 2019, Scotland extended its restriction on the use of short custodial sentences from 3 months to 12 months, with the aim of reserving prison for people who have committed serious offences, and where there are issues of public safety.⁸⁰⁵ However, sentences of 12 months or less accounted for almost three-quarters (73%) of all custodial sentences in 2023–24.⁸⁰⁶ Almost one third (30%) were given to people already serving a sentence in prison for a previous offence.⁸⁰⁷

In 2019, the age of criminal responsibility in Scotland was increased to 12 years old,⁸⁰⁸ 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.⁸⁰⁹ Detaining 16 and 17 year olds in prison custody had been criticised by prison inspectors.⁸¹⁰

⁷⁹¹ Scottish Government (2024, 3 December). Prison population. <https://www.sps.gov.uk/about-us/transparency/data-research-and-evidence>

⁷⁹² Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Act 2025, s1.

⁷⁹³ Scottish Prison Service (2025). Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Act 2025 data report.

⁷⁹⁴ Prisoners (Early Release) (Scotland) Act 2025, s3(2).

⁷⁹⁵ Scottish Government (2025, 2 October). Prison population: information note—October 2025.

⁷⁹⁶ Scottish Prison Service (n.d.) Prisons. Accessed 19 January 2026. <https://www.sps.gov.uk/prisons>

⁷⁹⁷ Reid-Howe Associates Ltd. (2015). Community facing prisons. Scottish Prison Service.

⁷⁹⁸ Scottish Government (2025). Scottish Budget 2026–27.

⁷⁹⁹ Criminal Justice Committee (2025). Criminal justice committee report on its pre-budget scrutiny 2026/27. SP Paper 944. The Scottish Parliament.

⁸⁰⁰ Criminal Justice Committee (2024, 25 November). Letter to Angela Constance MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Justice and Home Affairs.

⁸⁰¹ Criminal Justice Committee (2025). Criminal justice committee report on its pre-budget scrutiny 2026/27. SP Paper 944. The Scottish Parliament.

⁸⁰² Scottish Government (2024, 5 April). New Highland prison.

⁸⁰³ Scottish Prison Service (2025, 6 February). HMP Glasgow given the go-ahead.

⁸⁰⁴ McCall, C. (2025, 3 Oct). SNP urged to build more prisons instead of repeatedly releasing inmates from jail early. Daily Record.

⁸⁰⁵ Scottish Government (2019, 26 June). Presumption against short sentences extended.

⁸⁰⁶ Scottish Government (2025). Table 10a, Criminal proceedings in Scotland 2023–24.

⁸⁰⁷ Scottish Government (2025). Short custodial disposals from court and the prison population.

⁸⁰⁸ Age of Criminal Responsibility (Scotland) Act 2019, s1.

⁸⁰⁹ Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Act 2024, s19.

⁸¹⁰ HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (2021). Removal of under-18s from prison.

People in prison

On 5 December 2025 the total number of people in prison in Scotland stood at 8,301.⁸¹¹

The number of women in prison had declined substantially but has begun to rise again since the Covid-19 pandemic. There were 324 women in prison on 5 December 2025, up 4% on five years ago.⁸¹²

Around one in 14 of the prison population (7%) are aged 60 or over—up from one in 50 (2%) in 2009–10.⁸¹³

Around 7% of the prison population are from an ethnic minority background—up from 4% in 2009–10.⁸¹⁴

Around 3% of prisoners identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another sexual orientation.⁸¹⁵ Less than 1% identified as transgender, non-binary or gender-fluid—18 people.⁸¹⁶

Sentencing and the use of custody

Scotland has the highest imprisonment rate in western Europe, imprisoning 147 people per 100,000 of the population. The rate for England and Wales is 138 people. Northern Ireland imprisons 107 people per 100,000 of the population. Scotland's rate of imprisonment has reduced by two points since last year.⁸¹⁷

One in six of people sentenced by the courts (16%) were given a custodial sentence in 2023–24—three percentage points higher than last year. The number of people receiving a custodial sentence rose by 1,164 (13%).⁸¹⁸

Half of people sentenced to custody in 2023–24 (50%) had committed a non-violent offence.⁸¹⁹

Prison sentences are getting longer. The average length of a custodial sentence is now just over a year (393 days)—around three months (107 days) longer than nine years ago.⁸²⁰

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 2,139 people in prison on remand on 5 December 2025, of whom nearly nine in 10 (86%) were awaiting trial.^{821,822}

The use of community sentences has been gradually rising over the last decade—they accounted for a quarter (25%) of all sentences in 2023–24, up from 17% in 2014–15.⁸²³

On average, 15% of the sentenced prison population in 2024–25 were serving a life sentence. A further 3% were serving a lifelong indeterminate sentence, and 6% were serving determinate sentences of 10 years or more.⁸²⁴

The cost of imprisonment has risen. In 2024–25 it cost an average of £52,260 per prison place, a rise of 7% in real terms compared with the previous year.^{825,826}

A 2023 evidence review and a 2025 consultation with prisoners serving very long sentences found that this group faced many specific issues. These included a lack of resources to support sentence progression, rising tariff lengths, increased use of recall and a decline in progressive parole decisions. Together these factors contributed to a growing loss of hope, and reduced trust among this group of prisoners.^{827,828}

811 Scottish Prison Service (2025, n.d.). Prison population. Accessed 13 December 2025. <https://www.sps.gov.uk/about-us/transparency/data-research-and-evidence>

812 Scottish Prison Service (2025, n.d.). Prison population. Accessed 13 December 2025. <https://www.sps.gov.uk/about-us/transparency/data-research-and-evidence>

813 Scottish Prison Service (2025). Table B2, Scottish prison population statistics 2024–25.

814 Scottish Prison Service (2025). Table B3, Scottish prison population statistics 2024–25.

815 Scottish Prison Service (2024). Table B6, Scottish prison population statistics 2024–25.

816 Scottish Prison Service (2025). Prison by numbers quarter 4 (January to March 2025).

817 Institute for Crime and Justice Policy Research (n.d.). World prison brief. Accessed 19 January 2026.

818 The Scottish Government (2025). Table 7a and 7b, Criminal proceedings in Scotland 2023–24.

819 The Scottish Government (2025). Table 8b, Criminal proceedings in Scotland 2023–24.

820 The Scottish Government (2025). Table 10c, Criminal proceedings in Scotland 2023–24.

821 Scottish Prison Service (2025, n.d.). Prison population. Accessed 13 December 2025. <https://www.sps.gov.uk/about-us/transparency/data-research-and-evidence>

822 Ministry of Justice (2025). Table 1.Q.1, Prison population 30 September 2025, Offender management statistics quarterly: April to June 2025.

823 The Scottish Government (2025). Table 7b, Criminal proceedings in Scotland 2023–24.

824 Scottish Prison Service (2025). Table M3, Scottish prison population statistics 2024–25.

825 HM Prison Service (2025). Appendix 9, Annual report and accounts 2024–25.

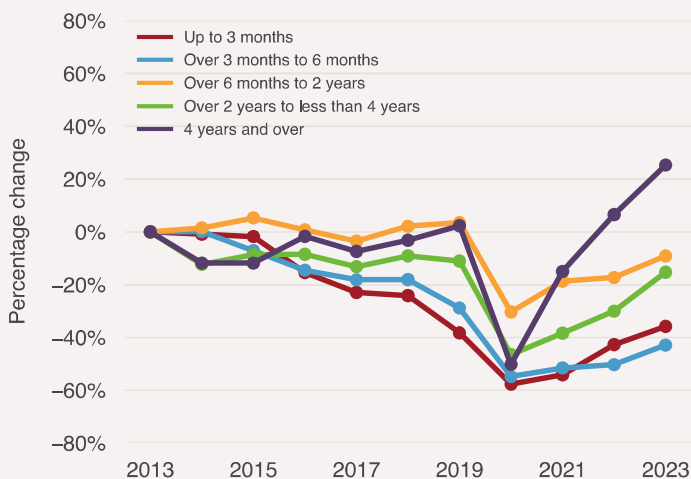
826 HM Treasury (2025). GDP deflators at market prices, and money GDP November 2025 (Autumn Statement).

827 McGhee, J. et al. (2023). The very long-term prison population in Scotland: A scoping document. Prison Reform Trust.

828 Cross, D. (2025). The pains of progression: the pathway through a very long-term sentence in a Scottish prison. Prison Reform Trust.

Short custodial sentences in Scotland

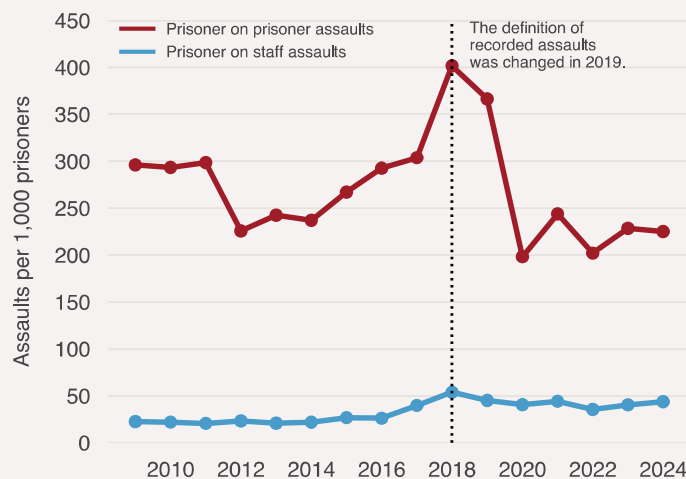
The decline of shorter sentences



Source: Scottish Government (2025). Criminal proceedings in Scotland, 2023–24.

A volatile environment?

Rates of assault steadied last year



Sources: Scottish Prison Service (2025). Annual report and accounts 2024–25. Scottish Government (2025). Scottish prison population statistics 2024–25.

Safety in prisons

In 2024, one in five surveyed prisoners (20%) said they had feared for their safety. More than a quarter (28%) said they had been verbally abused and 17% said they had been physically abused. Of those who had been abused, threatened, bullied or assaulted, more than half (54%) said they had not reported it.⁸²⁹

There have been 251 deaths in custody in the five years to 2025—with 50 in 2025.⁸³⁰ 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, drug and suicide related deaths are rising.⁸³¹

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.⁸³² A Deaths in Prison Custody Action Group was established, but a progress review in 2024 found that only eight of the 19 recommendations made in 2021 had been completed.⁸³³

Self-harm incidents have increased in the last decade, but information is not routinely published. There were 1,022 incidents of self-harm in 2024⁸³⁴—over a third (34%) more than in 2018 (762 incidents)⁸³⁵ and almost four times the number in 2013 (267 incidents).⁸³⁶

Recorded violence in prisons rose by 5% last year, following an increase of 20% the year before. But the number of serious assaults decreased by 15%—from 123 to 104 incidents.⁸³⁷

There were 360 assaults on staff in 2024–25—11 of which were serious. This compares with 318 in 2023–24—nine of which were serious.⁸³⁸

Treatment and conditions

Inspectors have continued to issue warnings about the “stubbornly entrenched” issue of overcrowding in Scotland’s prisons.⁸³⁹

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 their support of complex and vulnerable prisoners.⁸⁴⁰

⁸²⁹ Office of the Chief Executive (2025). Prison survey 2024.18th series. Scottish Prison Service.

⁸³⁰ Scottish Prison Service (2026, n.d.). Prisoner deaths. Accessed 19 January 2026.

⁸³¹ Armstrong, S. et al. (2022). Still nothing to see here? Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research.

⁸³² HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland et al. (2021). Independent review of the response to deaths in custody.

⁸³³ Scottish Government (2024). Independent review of the response to deaths in prison custody: second progress report.

⁸³⁴ Scottish Prison Service (2025). Freedom of Information request HQ24307.

⁸³⁵ Scottish Prison Service (2019). Freedom of Information request HQ18297.

⁸³⁶ Scottish Prison Service (2019). Freedom of Information request HQ18000.

⁸³⁷ Scottish Prison Service (2025). Annual report and accounts 2024–25.

⁸³⁸ Scottish Prison Service (2025). Annual report and accounts 2024–25.

⁸³⁹ HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland. (2024). Annual report 2023–24.

⁸⁴⁰ Ravalde, L. and Russo, D. (2023). A thematic review of segregation in Scottish prisons. HM Inspectorate of Prisons in Scotland.

A review of the two Community Custody Units for women found that broadly positive outcomes had been achieved. Women praised the quiet, safe and private environment afforded to them, and the level of health and social support. However, many felt that access to the community was still too restricted in practice.⁸⁴¹

Over a quarter (27%) of surveyed prisoners said the atmosphere in their prison was fairly or very tense, up eight percentage points from five years ago.⁸⁴²

But more than four in five (82%) said they got on with other prisoners, and nine in ten (90%) said they got on with staff in their hall.⁸⁴³

Three in five of surveyed prisoners (61%) said they felt treated with respect by staff, compared to less than three in 10 (29%) five years ago.⁸⁴⁴ But two-thirds said they do not trust the complaints process.⁸⁴⁵

Health and social care

In 2024, over half (54%) of prisoners reported having a disability or long-term health condition. Less than one in five (18%) said they were well supported to manage their condition⁸⁴⁶

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. Illegal buprenorphine was the only drug more commonly detected at release than at reception, accounting for 10% of positive tests.⁸⁴⁷

In 2024, nearly half of surveyed prisoners (46%) said they had been diagnosed with depression before coming to prison. Just over a third (35%) had been diagnosed with anxiety/panic disorders and one in five (21%) with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.⁸⁴⁸

More than two in five (42%) of surveyed prisoners said a social worker had been involved in their life when they were growing up.⁸⁴⁹

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.⁸⁵⁰

In 2019, more than a third of women (38%) and a quarter of men (24%) reported having been in care as a child.⁸⁵¹

In 2019, seven in 10 women in prison reported that they had been a victim of domestic violence.⁸⁵²

Rehabilitation and resettlement

More than two in five people released from custody (43%) are reconvicted within a year— rising to 54% of men and 61% of women with more than 10 previous convictions.⁸⁵³

Inspectors noted that there remained very limited access to purposeful and rehabilitative activity, and backlogs in offending behaviour work.⁸⁵⁴

In 2024, almost half (45%) of surveyed prisoners said they had never been offered any form of evening activity in prison. 15% said they had not left their cell at all the previous day because no activities were offered.⁸⁵⁵

More than a quarter of surveyed prisoners said the activities regime was much worse than before the pandemic.⁸⁵⁶

841 Scottish Government (2025). Scottish prisons assessment and review of outcomes for women (SPAROW)—Executive summary: theory of change, key messages and recommendations.

842 Office of the Chief Executive (2025). Prison survey 2024.18th series. Scottish Prison Service.

843 Office of the Chief Executive (2025). Prison survey 2024.18th series. Scottish Prison Service.

844 Office of the Chief Executive (2025). Prison survey 2024.18th series. Scottish Prison Service.

845 Office of the Chief Executive (2025). Prison survey 2024.18th series. Scottish Prison Service.

846 Office of the Chief Executive (2025). Prison survey 2024.18th series. Scottish Prison Service.

847 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/>

848 Office of the Chief Executive (2025). Prison survey 2024.18th series. Scottish Prison Service.

849 Office of the Chief Executive (2025). Prison survey 2024.18th series. Scottish Prison Service.

850 HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland. (2024). Annual report 2023–24.

851 Broderick, R. and Carnie, J. (2020). Women in custody 2019. 17th survey bulletin. Scottish Prison Service.

852 Broderick, R. and Carnie, J. (2018). Women in custody 2017. 16th survey bulletin. Scottish Prison Service.

853 The Scottish Government (2025). Table 9 and 11, Reconviction rates in Scotland: 2021–22 offender cohort.

854 HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland. (2024). Annual report 2023–24.

855 Office of the Chief Executive (2025). Prison survey 2024.18th series. Scottish Prison Service.

856 Office of the Chief Executive (2025). Prison survey 2024.18th series. Scottish Prison Service.

In 2024, nearly half of surveyed prisoners said they had problems receiving visits from friends and family in prison, including distance (37%), cost (28%), time limits (22%) and location of the prison (19%).⁸⁵⁷

Less than one in 10 (9%) surveyed prisoners said they had a sentence management plan.⁸⁵⁸

In 2024, half (50%) of surveyed prisoners said they felt well prepared for release. Nearly a quarter (23%) said they felt badly prepared.⁸⁵⁹

In a review of the progression system in prisons, prison inspectors concluded that “the system is not working for all prisoners.”⁸⁶⁰

Children and young adults in custody

There were an average of 169 young people (aged under 21) in prison in 2024–25, including three 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 2007–08.⁸⁶¹

In 2019, two-fifths (40%) of young people reported being in care as a child.⁸⁶²

In 2019, two in five young people (40%) reported that they had witnessed violence between their parents/carers. A fifth had been a victim of domestic violence (21%) from their partner.⁸⁶³

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. Half of young people reported being drunk at the time of their offence, compared with fewer than two in five adults (38%).⁸⁶⁴

Inspectors found that young adults housed at HMP/YOI Polmont reported better experiences than those housed in the adult estate. Young adults in other prisons reported more negatively on many aspects of prison life.⁸⁶⁵

⁸⁵⁷ Office of the Chief Executive (2025). Prison survey 2024, 18th series. Scottish Prison Service.

⁸⁵⁸ Office of the Chief Executive (2025). Prison survey 2024, 18th series. Scottish Prison Service.

⁸⁵⁹ Office of the Chief Executive (2025). Prison survey 2024, 18th series. Scottish Prison Service.

⁸⁶⁰ HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (2024). A thematic review of prisoner progression in Scottish prisons.

⁸⁶¹ Scottish Prison Service (2025). Table A2 and B2, Scottish prison population statistics 2024–25.

⁸⁶² Broderick, R. and Carnie, J. (2020). Young people in custody 2019. 17th survey bulletin. Scottish Prison Service.

⁸⁶³ Broderick, R. and Carnie, J. (2020). Young people in custody 2019. 17th survey bulletin. Scottish Prison Service.

⁸⁶⁴ Broderick, R. and Carnie, J. (2020). Young people in custody 2019. 17th survey bulletin. Scottish Prison Service.

⁸⁶⁵ HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (2024). Young people's experiences of the Scottish prison estate: an HMIPS analytical review.

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.⁸⁶⁶

Magilligan is a medium secure prison housing around 500 sentenced adult men, with one semi-open unit.⁸⁶⁷

Hydebank Wood Secure College—situated within the Hydebank Wood campus—holds young adult men aged 18–24 years old.⁸⁶⁸

Hydebank Wood Women's Prison—also situated within the Hydebank Wood campus—holds all women prisoners. 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.⁸⁶⁹

Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre holds boys and girls aged 10–17 in custody for police questioning, remand, and serving custodial sentences.⁸⁷⁰

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 25,⁸⁷¹ and almost three-quarters (74%) were reported as achieved.⁸⁷² Prior to the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive in February 2024, there had been no functioning devolved government for two years.⁸⁷³ A new programme for government was published in 2025, with an emphasis on extending Northern Ireland's holistic approach to criminal justice, and preventing people from entering the justice system.⁸⁷⁴ In 2024–25, the Director General of the Prison Service drew attention to the impact of overcrowding in Northern Ireland's prisons, including reopening of closed, ageing buildings.⁸⁷⁵

A review of vulnerable people in custody, was published in October 2021. It recommended that 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.⁸⁷⁶ But funding commitments contain little to benefit prisoners,⁸⁷⁷ despite the high prevalence of mental health issues in prison.⁸⁷⁸

In 2022, the Department of Justice consulted on raising the age criminal of responsibility from 10 to 14, and found strong support for the measure, but justice ministers have so far struggled to gain cross-Executive agreement. In 2024, the government introduced the Justice Bill to strengthen the presumption of bail for children, and ensure that they are never held in a prison, even if they have committed serious offences.⁸⁷⁹ The bill is currently making its way through the Assembly.⁸⁸⁰

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. However, 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.^{881,882,883,884}

866 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2023). Report on an unannounced inspection of Maghaberry Prison. 20 September–6 October 2022.

867 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2022). Report on an unannounced inspection of Magilligan Prison. 21 May–10 June 2021.

868 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report on an unannounced inspection of Hydebank Wood Secure College. 21 May–6 June 2024.

869 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report on an unannounced inspection of Hydebank Wood Women's Prison. 21 May–6 June 2024.

870 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2022). Report on an unannounced inspection of Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre. 22–29 January 2022.

871 Northern Ireland Prison Service (2022). Prisons 25 by 25.

872 Northern Ireland Prison Service (2025). Annual report and accounts 2024–25.

873 BBC News (2024, 18 January). Stormont stalemate: Deadline to restore Northern Ireland Executive to expire.

874 Northern Ireland Executive (2024). Our plan: doing what matters most. Programme for government 2024–2027.

875 Northern Ireland Prison Service (2025). Annual report and accounts 2024–25.

876 The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (2021). Review of services for vulnerable persons detained in Northern Ireland prisons.

877 Bailie, J. (2024). Mental health and the criminal justice system: an overview. Research and information service research paper 31/24. Northern Ireland Assembly.

878 Northern Ireland Prison Service (2025). Annual report and accounts 2024–25.

879 Bailie, J. (2024). Justice bill. Research and information service briefing paper 33/24. Northern Ireland Assembly.

880 Northern Ireland Assembly (n.d.). Justice bill. Accessed 16 January 2026.

881 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2023). Report on an unannounced inspection of Maghaberry Prison. 20 September–6 October 2022.

882 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2022). Report on an unannounced inspection of Magilligan Prison. 21 May–10 June 2021.

883 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.

884 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

After a period of stability, Northern Ireland's prison population rose sharply in 2022–23 and 2023–24. Growth then slowed in 2024–25, increasing by 34 people to 1,911—the highest average population for the last decade.⁸⁸⁵ By early 2026, the population had risen further to 2,079 people.⁸⁸⁶

The imprisonment rate for Northern Ireland is 107 people per 100,000 of the population. England/Wales and Scotland have higher imprisonment rates of 138 and 147 people per 100,000 respectively. However, Northern Ireland's rate has risen by eight points compared with last year, while Scotland's has reduced by two points and England/Wales by one point.⁸⁸⁷

There were 4,228 receptions into prison during 2024–25—broadly similar to last year, but up by more than one fifth (22%) compared with three years ago.⁸⁸⁸

57 people were imprisoned for failure to pay a fine or other civil offences in 2024–25, a decrease from 82 in the previous year, and continuing a broad decline from a peak of 484 such cases in 2016–17.⁸⁸⁹

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 (39%) of its prisoners on remand compared with one in five in England and Wales (20%), and one in four in Scotland (25%).⁸⁹⁰ In 2025, the Public Accounts Committee concluded that Northern Ireland is behind other jurisdictions in developing bail support services that provide alternatives to being remanded in custody.⁸⁹¹

Remand accounted for 80% of all receptions into prison in 2024–25, with a total of 3,381 receptions on remand.⁸⁹²

On average in 2024–25, half of women (50%) and three in five young men (60%) in prison were being held on remand, compared with just over a third of adult men (35%).⁸⁹³

Almost three-quarters (72%) of people entering prison to serve a sentence in 2024–25 had been sentenced to a year or less in custody.⁸⁹⁴ In 2025, the Public Accounts Committee concluded that poor rehabilitative provision for people serving short sentences was a driver for the largely static reoffending rate, and recommended greater investment in community alternatives.⁸⁹⁵

But people are serving longer sentences. The number entering prison to serve more than a year has increased by over half (56%) in the last nine years, while those entering to serve less than a year has increased by 5%.⁸⁹⁶

There are 214 people serving an indeterminate sentence in prison. They account for nearly a fifth (18%) of the average prison population.⁸⁹⁷

The average cost of keeping a person in prison has fallen from historically high levels—costing £57,180 per year in 2024–25,⁸⁹⁸ down from £73,732 in 2010⁸⁹⁹—a 46% decrease in real terms.

Safety in custody⁹⁰¹

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 in.

Almost half of women in prison (49%) said they had felt unsafe—12 percentage points lower than at the previous inspection in 2019.

⁸⁸⁵ Department of Justice (2025). Table 1e, Data tables. The Northern Ireland prison population 2024/25.

⁸⁸⁶ Department of Justice (n.d.). Weekly situation reports 2025/26. Week ending 9 January 2026. Accessed 16 January 2026.

⁸⁸⁷ Institute for Crime and Justice Policy Research (n.d.). World prison brief. Accessed 10 January 2025.

⁸⁸⁸ Department of Justice (2025). Table 15d, Data tables. The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2024/25. And previous editions.

⁸⁸⁹ Department of Justice (2025). Table 15c, Data tables. The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2024/25. And previous editions.

⁸⁹⁰ Institute for Crime and Justice Policy Research (n.d.). World prison brief. Accessed 10 January 2025.

⁸⁹¹ Public Accounts Committee (2025). Report on reducing adult reoffending in Northern Ireland.

⁸⁹² Department of Justice (2025). Table 15b and 15d, Data tables. The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2024/25.

⁸⁹³ Department of Justice (2025). Table 1b and 1e, Data tables. The Northern Ireland prison population 2024/25.

⁸⁹⁴ Department of Justice (2025). Table 19b, Data tables. The Northern Ireland prison population 2024/25.

⁸⁹⁵ Public Accounts Committee (2025). Report on reducing adult reoffending in Northern Ireland.

⁸⁹⁶ Department of Justice (2025). Table 19b, The Northern Ireland prison population 2024/25.

⁸⁹⁷ Department of Justice (2025). Table 7c, Data tables. The Northern Ireland prison population 2024/25.

⁸⁹⁸ Northern Ireland Prison Service (2025). Northern Ireland Prison Service annual report and accounts 2024–25.

⁸⁹⁹ Committee for Justice (2014). Prison service reform and management of drugs misuse: Northern Ireland Prison Service. Northern Ireland Assembly.

⁹⁰⁰ HM Treasury (2025). GDP deflator at market prices, and money. GDP November 2025 (Autumn Statement).

⁹⁰¹ 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 2024–25 there were eight deaths in custody, and a further two deaths within a fortnight of leaving custody.⁹⁰²

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.⁹⁰³

Rates of self-harm were lower for women than in similar prisons 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, but inspectors were concerned there was no clear plan to address the rising rate and with 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.⁹⁰⁴

All three men's prisons had relatively low levels of violence, often less than similar prisons. Hydebank Wood Women's Prison had experienced rising violence at the time of its 2024 inspection, with levels 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 considered 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.⁹⁰⁵

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.⁹⁰⁶

At the other prisons, on average just 6% of people reported spending less than two hours unlocked on weekdays, rising to 10% at weekends.

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.”⁹⁰⁷

902 The Prisoner Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (2025). Annual report 2024–25

903 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report of an Independent Review of Progress (IRP) at Maghaberry Prison. 31 October–2 November 2023.

904 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report of an Independent Review of Progress (IRP) at Maghaberry Prison. 31 October–2 November 2023.

905 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report of an Independent Review of Progress (IRP) at Maghaberry Prison. 31 October–2 November 2023.

906 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report of an Independent Review of Progress (IRP) at Maghaberry Prison. 31 October–2 November 2023.

907 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report of an Independent Review of Progress (IRP) at Maghaberry Prison. 31 October–2 November 2023.

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.⁹⁰⁸

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 at 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.

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 with just under a quarter at Maghaberry (24%) and three in 10 young men (30%) at Hydebank Wood. Almost half of women (46%) said they had received support.

On average, three in 10 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 (51%) and 53% of women reported having drug problems. 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 with 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.

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 has been reasonable progress in their 2023 follow up inspection.⁹⁰⁹

Prevalence of mental health problems is 25% higher in Northern Ireland than the rest of the UK,⁹¹⁰ 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.⁹¹¹

908 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report of an Independent Review of Progress at Magilligan Prison. 31 October–2 November 2023.

909 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024). Report of an Independent Review of Progress (IRP) at Maghaberry Prison. 31 October–2 November 2023.

910 O'Neill, S. et al. (2018). Mental health in Northern Ireland: an urgent situation. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 5(12), 965–966.

911 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2019). The safety of prisoners held by the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

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 inappropriate⁹¹²—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 prisoners, 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 with only around a third of adult men (36%). Almost four in five young men (78%) said they were receiving help.

46% of adults released from custody went on to be reconvicted within a year.⁹¹³ Almost half of adults (47%) who reoffended did so within two months of release.⁹¹⁴

219 people were recalled back to prison in 2024–25—98% of all potential recall cases considered by the Parole Commissioners.⁹¹⁵

People in prison

108 women were held in prison in Northern Ireland on average in the year 2024–25—18 more than last year, and the highest number in ten years.⁹¹⁶

On average, nearly one in ten prisoners serving a sentence in 2024–25 (9%) were aged 60 or over—104 people. The average daily population of prisoners aged over 60 has increased by more than half (60%) since 2015/16—an additional 39 people.⁹¹⁷

Half (50%) of prisoners are Catholic.⁹¹⁸ **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.

One in 12 people in prison in 2023–24 (8%) were from an ethnic minority group, compared with 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 did not consult them sufficiently.

Almost a fifth of women (17%) and more than one in 15 men (7%) identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or another sexual orientation. 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 with the medium security Magilligan prison (3%). In 2019—the most recent data available—over two-thirds (67%) of foreign national prisoners were on remand.⁹¹⁹

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.

912 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.

913 Department of Justice (2025). Table 8, ODS tables. Adult and youth reoffending in Northern Ireland (2022/23 cohort).

914 Department of Justice (2025). Table 7b, ODS tables. Adult and youth reoffending in Northern Ireland (2022/23 cohort).

915 Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland (2025) Annual report 2024–25.

916 Department of Justice (2025). Table 1f, Data tables. The Northern Ireland prison population 2024/25.

917 Department of Justice (2025). Table 2c, Data tables. The Northern Ireland prison population 2024/25.

918 Department of Justice (2025). Table 14e, Data tables. The Northern Ireland prison population 2024/25.

919 Northern Ireland Prison Service (2020). Analysis of NIPS prison population from 01/10/2018 to 31/12/2019.

Children in custody

95 children (aged 10–17) were in custody in 2024–25, more than half (52%) as many as a decade ago. Almost three-quarters were boys (72%).⁹²⁰

There were a total of 180 child admissions to custody in 2024–25. Just three of these were because a child had been sent there to serve a sentence. All other children were either held pending police questioning or on remand.⁹²¹

Eight children were held in custody on average at any one time in 2024–25, down from 10 the year before. The majority—six children on average—were held on remand, whilst just one child on average was being held to serve a sentence.⁹²²

More than half of children (57%) who entered custody in 2024–25 were in care—up from 39% 10 years ago.⁹²³

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 do not have a suitable bail address.⁹²⁴ In 2024, the Northern Ireland Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People recommended ending the use of Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre as a place of safety,⁹²⁵ and the government brought forward legislation to strengthen the presumption of bail for children.⁹²⁶

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”.⁹²⁷

920 Youth Justice Agency (2025). Table 17, 2024–25 tables, Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency annual workload statistics 2024/25.

921 Youth Justice Agency (2025). Table 15, 2024–25 tables, Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency annual workload statistics 2024/25.

922 Youth Justice Agency (2025). Table 32, 2024–25 tables, Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency annual workload statistics 2024/25.

923 Youth Justice Agency (2025). Table 27, 2024–25 tables, Northern Ireland Youth Justice Agency annual workload statistics 2024/25.

924 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2022). An announced inspection of Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre, 22–28 January 2022.

925 Northern Ireland Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People (2024). Justice briefing.

926 Bailie, J. (2024). Justice bill. Research and information service briefing paper 33/24. Northern Ireland Assembly.

927 Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2022). An announced inspection of Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre, 22–28 January 2022.

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