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Police Service Strength



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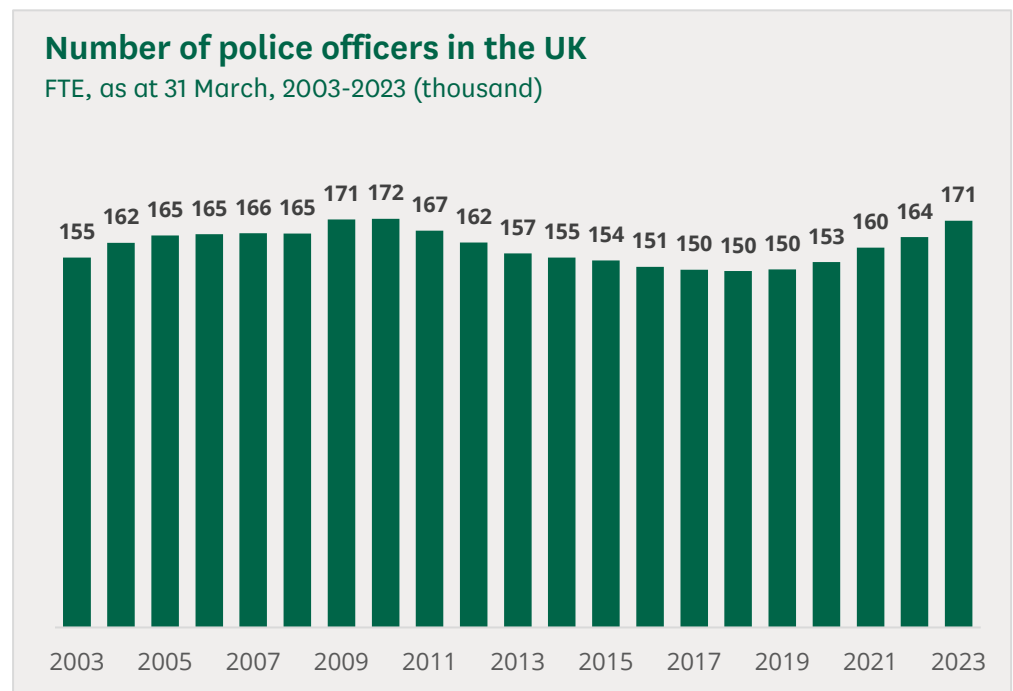
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Summary

The number of police officers in the United Kingdom increased each year between 2003, when there were just under 155,400 officers, and 2010, when there were 171,600.

Following this peak, the number of police officers fell each year up until 2018. Numbers have since risen and as of 31 March 2023, there were 170,775 police officers operating in the United Kingdom. This was an increase of 10% from the number of police officers operating in 2003, but a 0.5% fall from 2010.

These figures are given on a full-time equivalent (FTE) basis rather than headcounts and exclude Police Community Support Officers and Special Constables.



Notes: Data for England & Wales and Scotland is as of 31 March; data for Northern Ireland is for 1 April in 2023, data is for 1 October in 2022, data is for 01 August for 2021, for 1 July for 2018-2020, and calendar year end for previous years.

Sources: Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales](#) (various editions); Scottish Government, [Police Officer Quarterly Strength Statistics](#), (various editions); Police Service of Northern Ireland, [Strength of Police Service Statistics](#) (various editions), Figure for police officer strength in Northern Ireland as at 1 April 2023 provided to House of Commons Library by PSNI on request.

This briefing explores police service strength data from the Home Office, Scottish Government, and Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). The paper analyses England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland in turn, and includes international comparisons where available.

Latest figures

1. **England and Wales:** on 31 March 2023, there were 147,430 FTE police officers in England and Wales compared with 140,228 on the 31 March 2022 (Excluding British Transport Police and Central Service Secondments).
2. **Scotland:** on 31 June 2023, there were 16,615 FTE police officers in Scotland compared to 16,805 on 31 June 2022.
3. **Northern Ireland:** on 1 April 2023, there were 6,730 FTE police officers in Northern Ireland compared to 6,813 at 1 October 2022.
4. **British Transport Police:** on 31 March 2023 there were 2,973 FTE police officers employed by the British Transport Police.
5. **Central Service Secondments (CSS):** on 31 March 2023 there were 294 police officers on CSS.¹

¹ [Police Act 1996, s 97 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/32/section/97)

1 England and Wales

Data on the strength of the police service is published biannually by the Home Office. Detailed statistics are published in July, showing the situation at 31 March. Headline statistics are published in January showing the situation at 30 September in the previous year.

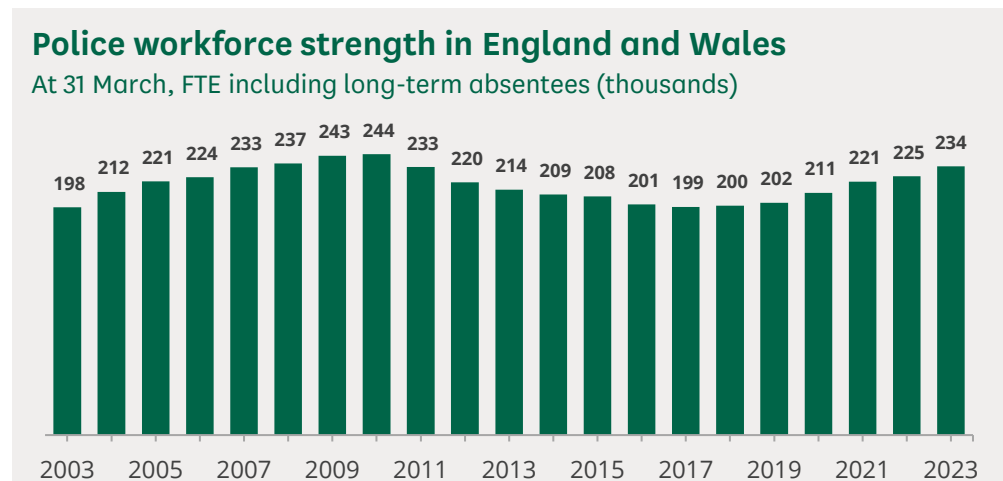
1.1 Police workforce in England and Wales

The police workforce is composed of police officers and police staff.

Of the full time equivalent (FTE) paid workforce in the police service of England and Wales at the end of March 2023, 63% were police officers (of various ranks), 34% were support staff or designated officers (combined) and 3% were Police Community and Support Officers (PCSOs).²

The size of the police workforce in England and Wales increased year on year to a peak in 2010. The police workforce fell year on year until 2018, before rising again. At 31 March 2023, there were 233,832 personnel, a 4% reduction compared to 2010 and an increase of 4% from 31 March 2022.³

The chart below shows the trend in total police workforce from 2003 to 2023:



Notes: excludes special constables, central service secondments and BTP. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.

Source: Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales: 31 March 2023](#), Table H3

² Home Office, Glossary, [User guide to police workforce statistics](#), 26 July 2023

³ Excludes special constables, secondments to central services, and British Transport Police.

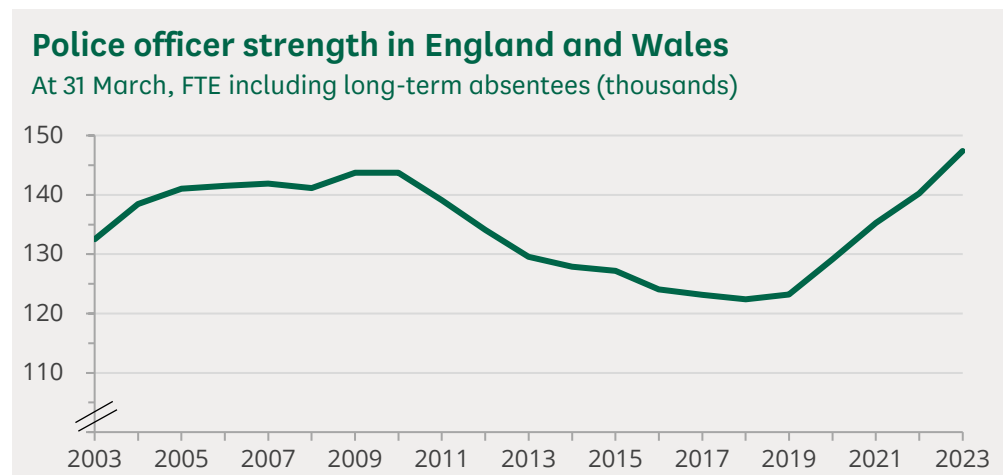
1.2

Police officer strength in England and Wales

The current headline measure of police officer strength includes long-term absentee staff, such as those taking career breaks or parental leave. At 31 March 2023, the total strength of the 43 police forces in England and Wales was 147,430 FTE officers.

Including those on Central Service Secondments (CSS) and British Transport Police (BTP) the total was 150,697.

The chart below shows the trends in police officer strength, as of 31 March, between 2003 and 2023.



Notes: excludes special constables, secondments to central services and British Transport Police. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Source: Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales: 31 March 2023](#), Table H3

Between 31 March 2022 and 31 March 2023, police officer strength in England and Wales increased by 7,201 FTE officers (5%). Since 31 March 2010, police officer strength across the 43 forces has risen by 3% (3,695 officers).

As of 31 March 2023, in addition to the officers in the 43 police forces, there were 294 officers in CSS and 2,973 working for the BTP.

Table A1 (available for download from this [briefing paper's webpage](#)) shows data on the strength of each police force in England and Wales, as well as CSS and BTP numbers.

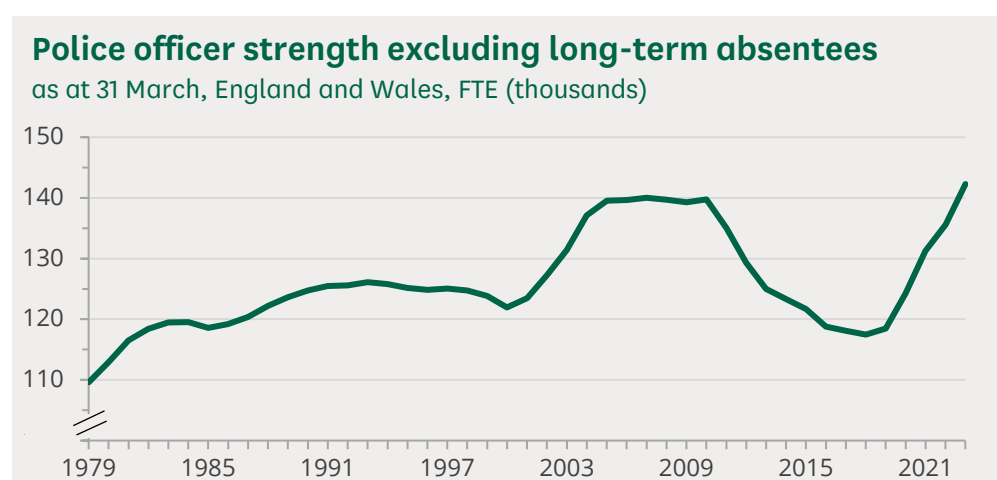
All 43 police forces except for Leicestershire and Lincolnshire had an increase in officer numbers in the year leading up to 31 March 2023. City of London Police had the largest officer increases, of around 13%. Merseyside reported the smallest increase of 2%.

Long-term absences

Before March 2003, long-term absent (LTA) staff, such as those taking career breaks or parental leave, were not included in measures of police officer strength. The Home Office still collects police strength data based on this definition, which allows comparison over a longer period of time.

Excluding absent staff there were 142,316 FTE police officers in the 43 police forces across England and Wales on 31 March 2023. These figures represent an increase of 3% compared to 2010. As of 31 March 2023 there were around 5,100 police officers considered long-term absentees.⁴

The chart below shows police officer strength excluding long-term absentees at 31 March each year, from 1979.



Notes: excludes special constables, secondments to central services and British Transport Police. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Source: Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales](#), Table H1 (various editions)

Police officer strength generally increased through the 1980s, and the first part of the 1990s. By 1993, police officer strength was 126,128, 15% higher than in 1979.

From 1993, police strength fell in six of the seven following years so that strength stood at 121,958 by 2000. Between 2000 and 2006 officer strength increased by a total of 17,678; this equates to an average yearly increase of 2.4%. After reaching a peak in 2007 at 140,032, police officer strength has decreased in most subsequent years until 31 March 2018, when there were 117,456 officers. This figure has since increased to 142,316 FTE officers as of 31 March 2023.

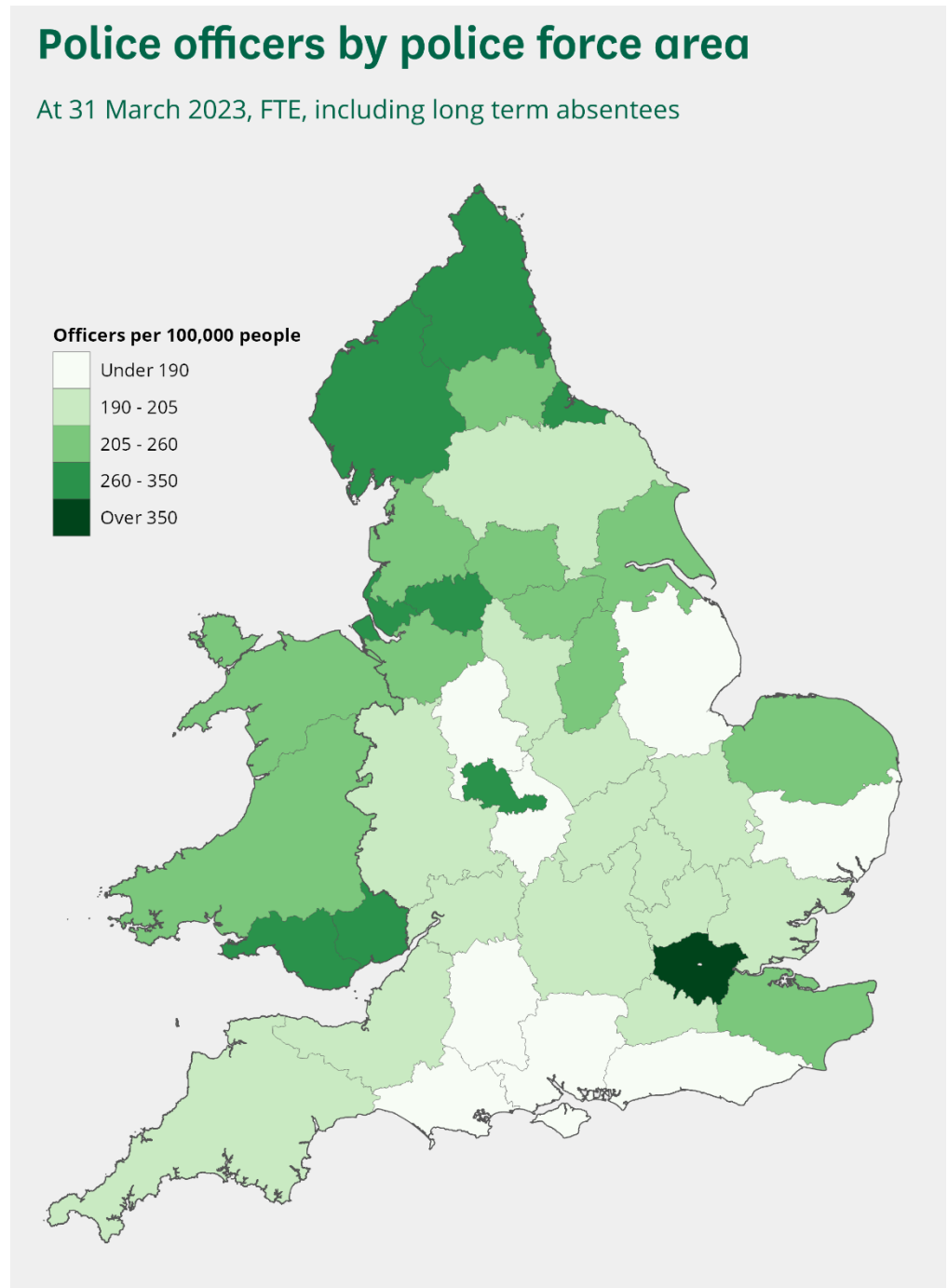
Table A2 (available for download from this [briefing paper's webpage](#)) shows police officer strength for all 43 police forces in England and Wales, excluding long term absentees, between 1979 and 2022.

⁴ Figure calculated as the difference between the figures for police officer strength including long term absentees and the figure excluding absentees.

Police per 100,000 population

The following map and table show the number of police officers per 100,000 head of population as of 31 March 2021.

Major population centres tended to have a higher rate of police officers per 100,000 head of population, such as the Metropolitan and Merseyside police forces.



Notes: Metropolitan Police Service and City of London forces have been combined.

Sources: Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales](#); ONS, [Census 2021, first results](#), released 28 June 2022.

Police officers per 100,000 people by police force area

At 31 March 2023, FTE, including long term absentees

	Police officers	Officers per 100,000 population	Rank
London	35,900	408	1
Merseyside	4,132	290	2
Greater Manchester	8,014	279	3
Cumbria	1,374	275	4
West Midlands	7,954	272	5
South Wales	3,487	265	6
Northumbria	3,807	263	7
Cleveland	1,479	260	8
Gwent	1,526	260	8
West Yorkshire	6,072	258	10
Dyfed-Powys	1,294	251	11
North Wales	1,698	247	12
Humberside	2,267	242	13
Lancashire	3,542	231	14
Kent	4,203	226	15
South Yorkshire	3,041	221	16
Durham	1,369	217	17
Cheshire	2,361	216	18
Nottinghamshire	2,400	209	19
Norfolk	1,897	207	20
Bedfordshire	1,443	205	21
Devon and Cornwall	3,642	204	22
Leicestershire	2,286	204	22
North Yorkshire	1,672	204	22
Derbyshire	2,140	203	25
Essex	3,746	201	26
Gloucestershire	1,295	201	26
Hertfordshire	2,390	199	28
Thames Valley	4,957	197	29
Cambridgeshire	1,731	193	30
Northamptonshire	1,519	193	30
Avon and Somerset	3,330	191	32
West Mercia	2,479	191	32
Surrey	2,291	190	34
Warwickshire	1,102	185	35
Suffolk	1,399	184	36
Sussex	3,108	182	37
Dorset	1,411	181	38
Staffordshire	1,964	173	39
Hampshire	3,337	167	40
Wiltshire	1,173	158	41
Lincolnshire	1,195	156	42
England & Wales	147,430	247	..

Notes: Population figures are from Office for National Statistics 2021 census; Figures for London are for Metropolitan Police Service and City of London combined.

1.3

Police officer diversity in England and Wales

The Home Office collects data on the sex and ethnic group⁵ of police officers.

Of the 147,430 police officers in England and Wales as of 31 March 2023, 51,210 were female. This is the highest proportion (35%) of female officers since 2010.

The table below shows the proportion of police officers who were female, and the proportion from minority ethnic groups, each year from 2010.⁶

Police officer diversity in England and Wales						
FTE, at 31 March 2023						
	Total	Female		Total	Ethnic Minority ^b	
	Strength	Number	% of total	Strength ^a	Number	% of total
2010	143,735	36,988	25.7%	141,935	6,642	4.7%
2011	139,110	36,532	26.3%	137,485	6,615	4.8%
2012	134,100	35,962	26.8%	132,242	6,664	5.0%
2013	129,585	35,401	27.3%	127,623	6,537	5.1%
2014	127,909	35,653	27.9%	125,785	6,715	5.3%
2015	126,818	35,737	28.2%	124,739	6,982	5.6%
2016	124,066	35,498	28.6%	121,655	7,218	5.9%
2017	123,132	35,842	29.1%	120,516	7,562	6.3%
2018	122,405	36,417	29.8%	119,357	7,850	6.6%
2019	123,171	37,427	30.4%	120,023	8,329	6.9%
2020	129,110	40,319	31.2%	125,709	9,174	7.3%
2021	135,301	43,762	32.3%	131,806	10,046	7.6%
2022	140,228	46,959	33.5%	136,274	11,053	8.1%
2023	147,430	51,210	34.7%	143,204	11,966	8.4%

Notes: a) Total strength for minority ethnic groups excludes those who did not state their ethnic group (around 4,000 officers). Total strength for both includes long-term absentees and excludes CSS and BTP. b) excluding White minority groups.

Source: Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales](#), Tables H2, D1 & D2 (various editions); ONS 2019 [mid-year population estimates](#).

As of 31 March 2023, 37% of police officers in England and Wales with the rank of constable were female, a slight increase on the previous year.

⁵ The ethnic groups used by the Home Office are: 'White', 'Black', 'Asian', 'Mixed' and 'Other'. Officers may choose not to state their ethnicity.

⁶ This includes 'Black', 'Asian', 'Mixed' and 'Other' groups. It does not include White minority groups or those who didn't state their ethnicity.

The proportion of women holding more senior ranks was lower. Of officers ranked chief inspector or higher, 30% were female, although this has increased from 14% in 2010 and from 23% in 2016.

270 in every 10,000 male officers in the police held senior ranks compared with 213 in every 10,000 female police officers.

As of 31 March 2023, 12,000 police officers declared themselves as being from a minority ethnic group (8.4% of those with a stated ethnicity), this figure has been increasing year-on-year since 2010. This is considerably lower than the proportion of the general population from a minority ethnic group (18.3%).⁷

Of the police officers that identified as being from an ethnic minority, 31% were of mixed ethnicity, 16% from Black or Black British backgrounds, 45% from Asian or Asian British backgrounds, and 8% from “Other” ethnicities.⁸

Officers from minority ethnic backgrounds were under-represented at senior ranks, accounting for 6% of officers at the rank of chief inspector or above. This proportion is roughly the same as at 31 March 2022.

The Metropolitan Police Service was the force with the largest proportion of officers from minority ethnic groups (17%). However, the ONS estimates that 46% of the resident population of London are from a minority ethnic background.⁹ The force with the next highest proportion is West Midlands (14%), followed by Bedfordshire (11%) and the City of London (10%).

North Wales and Devon and Cornwall have the smallest proportion of officers from minority ethnic groups (both with roughly 1%). Six of the 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales did not have any officers from a minority ethnic background ranked chief inspector or higher at 31 March 2023.¹⁰

1.4 Joiners and leavers

In the 12 months to 31 March 2023, the 43 police forces of England and Wales recruited 16,300 FTE police officers (excluding people who had transferred between police forces). This is up from 12,800 recruits in 2022 (a 27% increase) and 4,136 recruits in 2016.

⁷ ONS figures on minority ethnic groups refers to non-white ethnic groups and exclude White ethnic minority groups. Population data from the [Ethnic group, England and Wales: Census 2021](#), 29 November 2022

⁸ Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales 31 March 2023](#), Table D2

⁹ Nomis, [2021 Census Profile for areas in England and Wales](#), accessed 14 December 2023

¹⁰ Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales: 31 March 2023](#), Table D1

During the year, 10,500 officers left the service (down from 9,300 the previous year). Women accounted for 41% of joiners and 30% of leavers. The table below shows recruitment and leaving numbers.

The joiner rate (recruitment in proportion to total strength) across England and Wales was 11.1% (excluding transfers).

The police force with the highest rate of new joiners was Thames Valley (15.8%), followed by Derbyshire (15.4%). The lowest rate was for Leicestershire (6.1%).

The rate that officers left as a proportion of the overall strength (known as the wastage rate) was 6.6% across England and Wales (excluding transfers).

The police forces with the largest wastage rates were Wiltshire and City of London (9.5% each). Merseyside had the lowest wastage rate, at 4.6%.¹¹

Police officer recruitment & leavers, England & Wales

FTE, 12 months to 31 March

	Recruitment			Leavers		
	Total	Of which female		Total	Of which female	
		Number	%		Number	%
2007	8,671	3,014	35%	8,178	1,230	15%
2008	7,981	2,597	33%	7,846	1,275	16%
2009	9,873	3,245	33%	7,732	1,286	17%
2010	6,912	2,110	31%	6,825	1,069	16%
2011	2,197	693	32%	6,664	968	15%
2012	2,394	678	28%	6,889	997	14%
2013	2,358	785	33%	6,794	1,209	18%
2014	5,589	1,812	32%	6,904	1,359	20%
2015	6,866	2,125	31%	7,386	1,623	22%
2016	4,755	1,487	31%	7,723	1,759	23%
2017	7,532	2,521	33%	8,569	2,126	25%
2018	8,128	2,793	34%	8,574	2,080	24%
2019	9,428	3,269	35%	8,727	2,199	25%
2020	14,518	5,143	35%	8,546	2,253	26%
2021	13,296	5,401	41%	7,043	1,924	27%
2022	14,241	5,820	41%	9,303	2,700	29%
2023	17,948	7,469	42%	10,540	3,197	30%

Note: Date taken from open data tables and may not match other Home Office datasets. Figures include transfers. A number of joiners and leavers do not declare their sex or prefer to self-describe. Source: Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales 31 March 2021: joiners open data tables](#), accessed 8 November 2022; Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales 31 March 2021: leavers open data table](#), accessed 8 November 2022.

¹¹ Home Office, [Police Workforce England and Wales: 31 March 2023](#), Tables JL1 and JL3

1.5 Other police service staff

At 31 March 2023, there were 86,400 FTE staff in all supporting roles.¹² Staff in supporting roles comprise civilian staff, police community support officers (PCSOs), designated officers and traffic wardens.

Police Civilian Support Staff

On 31 March 2023, there were 78,596 FTE civilian staff in supporting roles in the 43 police forces of England and Wales¹³, including designated officers.¹⁴

This is an increase of over 2,000 staff on the previous year but a decrease of 6% compared to 2010.¹⁵

1.6 Measuring the “policing frontline”

In December 2010, the Home Office asked Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) to define what constitutes the “policing frontline”, in order to categorise police roles. The resulting definition states the frontline “comprises those who are in everyday contact with the public and who directly intervene to keep people safe and enforce the law.”¹⁶

From 2012, the Home Office published the number of police officers on the frontline, using HMIC’s definition.

From 31 March 2016, the police functions used by the Home Office and HMIC to calculate the number of frontline policing roles changed. From that point, the roles used to calculate the policing frontline are based on [Police Objective Analysis \(POA\) categories](#).

The change in framework means that frontline measures between 2016 and previous years, calculated under the old framework, are not directly comparable.

The appendix contains further detail on the methodology of measuring the frontline. Table A5, in the [briefing's](#) accompanying download shows the number of police officers in frontline roles based on the new framework.

¹² Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales, 31 March 2023](#), Table H3

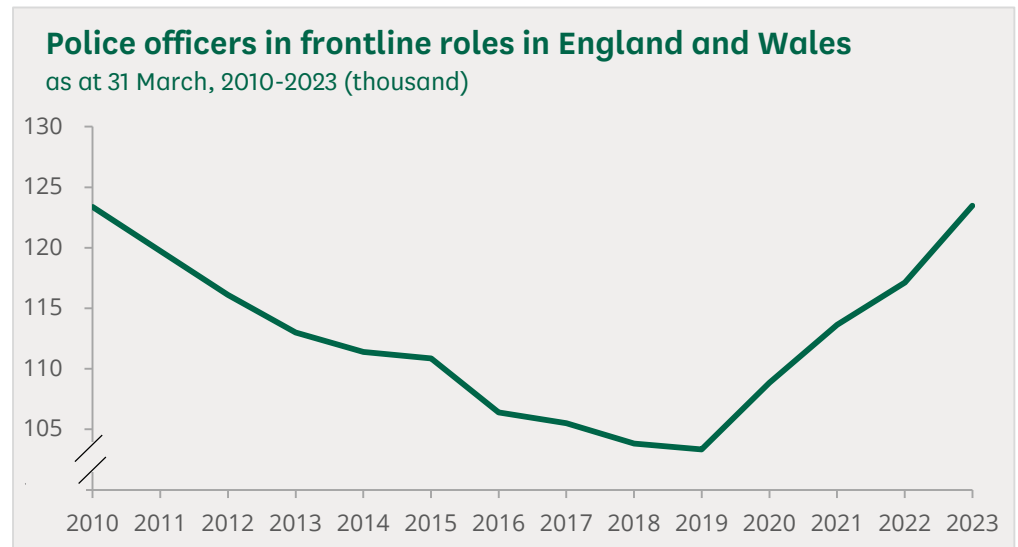
¹³ Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales, 31 March 2023](#), Table H3

¹⁴ It was not possible to provide separate police staff figures for the year ending 31 March 2022 as some police forces were unable to provide data on designated officers separately and therefore figures are combined with those for police staff.

¹⁵ Excluding PCSOs and traffic wardens.

¹⁶ HMIC, [Demanding Times: The frontline and police visibility](#), 2011 p.18

The chart below shows the number of police officers in frontline roles for 2010 to 2023. Please note figures for 2010 to 2014 are Home Office estimates calculated under the new framework.



Notes: 2010 to 2014 figures are Home Office estimates using the new framework.

Source: Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales, 31 March 2023](#), Table F5

As of 31 March 2023, there were 123,465 police officers in frontline roles – this is the highest level measured using the new framework. The number of police officers in frontline roles fell by 16% between 2010 and 2019 and has since increased by 19% between 2019 and 2023.¹⁷

The chart below shows forces ranked by the proportion of their police officers in frontline roles according to the new framework at 31 March 2023.

West Mercia police force had the highest proportion of police officers in frontline roles (97.1%), followed by Nottinghamshire (95.6%).

¹⁷ Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales, 31 March 2023](#), Table F3



Source: Home Office, [Police Workforce, England and Wales: 31 March 2023](#), Table F5

Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs)

PCSOs are civilians employed by a police authority in a 'highly visible, patrolling role'. PCSOs are currently funded partly through government grants to police authorities and partly through match funding from other organisations. Further information relating to PCSOs can be found in the Library briefing [Police Community Support Officers](#).

Table A3 (available for download from this [briefing paper's webpage](#)) shows the number of PCSOs in each of the 43 police force areas since the role was introduced. As of 31 March 2023 there were 7,806 FTE PCSOs, a 10.8% reduction (944 officers) on the year before.

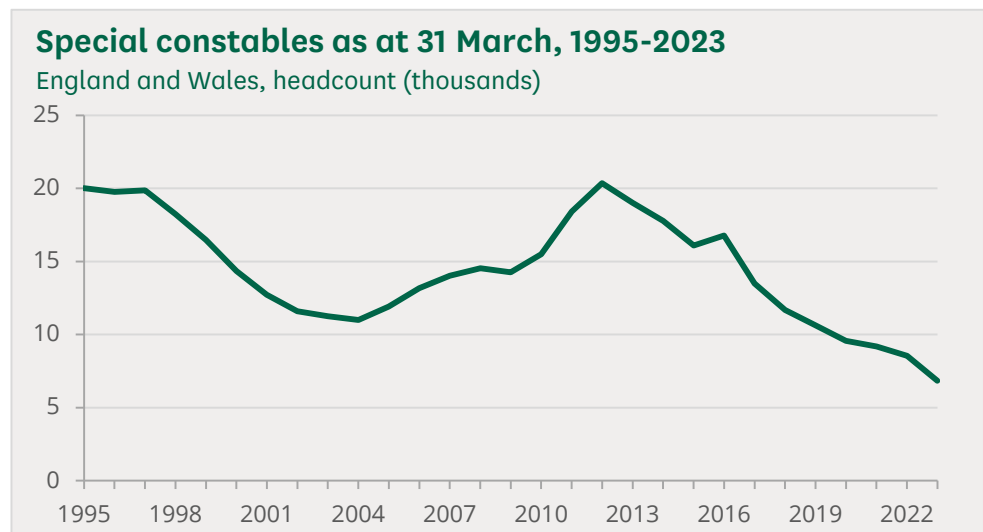
PCSO numbers have fallen year on year since the peak of 2010, except for a slight rise in the year up to 31 March 2021. 15.5% of the PCSOs are based in the

Metropolitan Police Service area.¹⁸ Of the PSCOs employed at the end of March 2022, 47% were female (4119).¹⁹

Special Constabulary

Special Constables are a force of volunteers who receive training from their local police force to work with regular police officers. Further information on special constables can be found in the Library briefing [Special Constables](#). The chart below shows special constabulary strength from 1995 to 2023.

As of 31 March 2023, there were 6,841 special constables, a 20% decrease on the 2022 figure of 8545.²⁰



Source: Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales](#), Table H12 and H8 (various editions)

Between 1997 and 2004, special constabulary strength decreased year on year at an average rate of 2%. From 2004, the number of special constables increased at an average rate of 9% until reaching the 2012 strength figure of 20,352. Between 2012 and 2015, special constables decreased at a rate of 5% per year. The number increased again in 2016, but decreased further in 2017.

In the 12 months to 31 March 2023, a total of 1,356 special constables joined the special constabulary, while 2,854 left.²¹ Many special constables leave their posts to become police officers each year.

In the 12 months to March 2023, there were 510 (3%) police officer joiners who were previously special constables.²²

¹⁸ Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales, 31 March 2023](#), Table H7

¹⁹ Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales, 31 March 2023](#), Table H12

²⁰ Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales, 31 March 2023](#), Table H13

²¹ Headcount, Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales, 31 March 2023](#), Table H13

²² Home Office [Police Workforce: England and Wales, 31 March 2023, Table J1.2](#)

Table A4 (available for download from this [briefing paper's webpage](#)) shows the trend in special constabulary strength for each police force area in England and Wales between 1995 and 2023.

The following table shows special constabulary figures for 2023, as well as special constables per 100,000 population.

Special constables by police force area

per 100,000 population, headcount, at 31 March 2023, England and Wales

	Number of constables	Constables per 100,000 population
Gloucestershire	134	21
Wiltshire	139	19
London	1,609	18
Norfolk	163	18
Essex	327	18
Northamptonshire	135	17
Suffolk	116	15
Cheshire	158	14
Avon and Somerset	235	13
Staffordshire	151	13
North Wales	91	13
Dorset	101	13
Hertfordshire	154	13
Devon and Cornwall	221	12
Warwickshire	73	12
Bedfordshire	83	12
Gwent	69	12
Lincolnshire	89	12
Kent	203	11
Surrey	131	11
Leicestershire	120	11
Cambridgeshire	95	11
Humberside	97	10
North Yorkshire	79	10
Hampshire	191	10
Nottinghamshire	109	10
Merseyside	134	9
Cleveland	50	9
West Midlands	253	9
South Wales	113	9
Cumbria	42	8
Thames Valley	210	8
Dyfed-Powys	40	8
Derbyshire	80	8
Greater Manchester	213	7
West Yorkshire	173	7
Northumbria	93	6
Lancashire	96	6
Sussex	100	6
South Yorkshire	79	6
West Mercia	69	5
Durham	23	4
England and Wales	6,841	11

Notes: Figures for Metropolitan Police Service and City of London are combined. Sources: Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales, 31 March 2023](#), Table H8; ONS, [ONS: Census 2021, first results](#).

1.7

Central Service Secondments

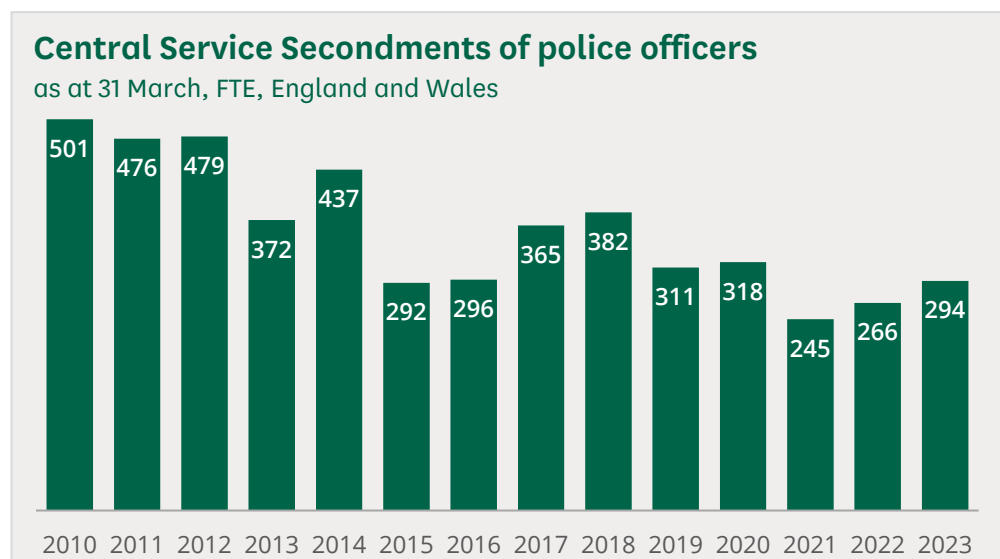
According to the [Guidance on Police Officer and Staff Secondments](#), police staff can take one the following types of secondments:

UK secondments – secondments to other police related UK organisations to provide specific expertise. These are set out in section 97 of the Police Act (police officers) or employment legislation and contracts of employment (police staff).

Mission deployments organised through the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). These are to meet the UK's international commitments to enhance its policing contribution to international missions in conflict prevention and crisis management situations.

Overseas deployments in response to requests for assistance from the Police Service to meet a specific local need.

The chart below shows the number of Central Service Secondments (CSS) between 2010 and 2023. The number of police officers on CSS decreased by 51% from 501 in March 2009 to 245 in March 2021, the lowest figure recorded over the period. It has since risen to 294 at 31 March 2023, a 11% increase on the figure at 31 March 2022 (266) .²³



Source: Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales](#), Table H1 (various editions)

²³ Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales](#), Table H3 (various editions)

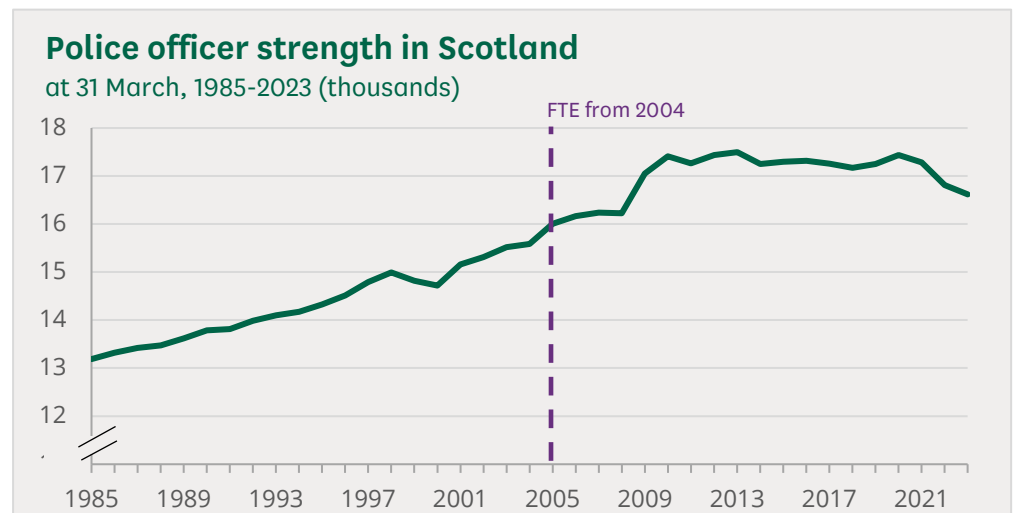
2

Police strength in Scotland

Data on the total strength of the Scottish police is published quarterly by the Scottish Government, in terms of officers.²⁴

From 01 April 2013, the eight police forces of Scotland were amalgamated under one command as per the [Police and Fire Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2012](#). As a result, it is not possible to produce time-series statistics on the number of police officers for sub-areas of Scotland. Only national police figures are published.

The chart below shows police officer strength for Scotland from 1985 to 2023:



Notes: Figures between 1985 and 2003 are headcounts. Figures from 2004 are full time equivalent (FTE) and therefore not directly comparable to those previously recorded.

Source: Scottish Government, [Police Officer Quarterly Strength Statistics Scotland](#) (various editions)

From 1985 to 2013, there was an almost continuous increase in Scottish police strength year on year. As of 31 March 2023, police strength was 26% greater than in 1985.

Over the last few years there has been a slight decrease. Figures fell in 2010/11, 2013/14 and 2017/18, although these were followed by increases the next year. However, police strength has been decreasing year on year since 2020/21.

²⁴ Scottish Government, [Police Officer Quarterly Strength Statistics Scotland](#) (various editions)

Data for the year ending 31 March 2023 show there were 16,615 FTE police officers in Scotland, 5% lower than the 2013 high of 17,496 officers and 1% lower than the figures for the year to 31 March 2022.

2.1

Police officer diversity in Scotland

The most recent information on police diversity in Scotland comes from the Police Scotland [Equality and Diversity Mainstreaming & Outcomes Progress Report 2021](#) although this uses information for the end of March 2020.

According to the report, 32% of police officers in Scotland were female which marks a 1 percentage point increase from 2019.

Only 1.5% of police officers reported that they were from a minority ethnic group. This figure has remained around 1% since 2010. Of the overall Scottish population, 4% identified as being from a minority ethnic group.²⁵

As of 31 March 2021, 27% of officers in a promoted post (at sergeant or above) were female, an increase of 2 percentage points on 2019.

For more senior ranks, superintendent or above, 26% were female, an increase of 5 percentage points on 2017.

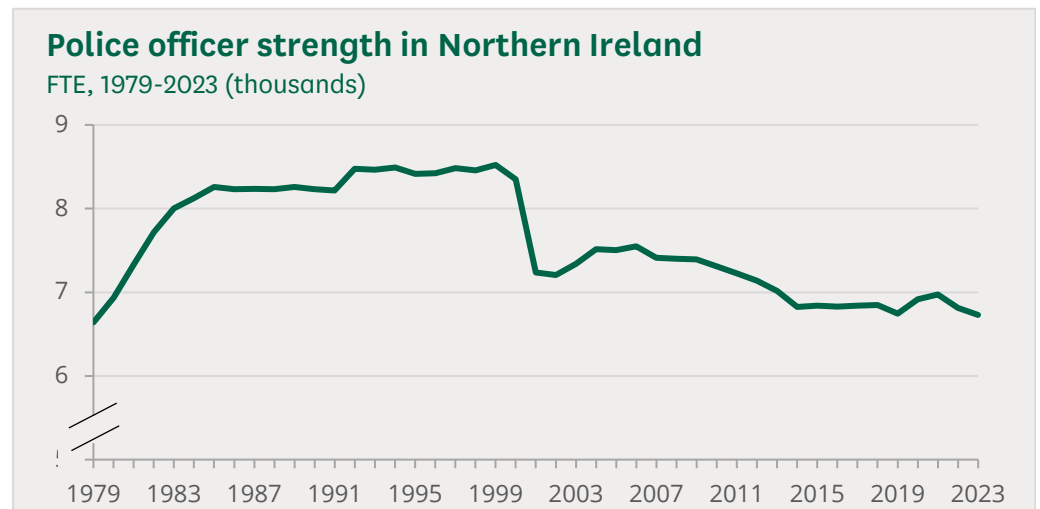
²⁵ [Scotland Census 2011](#). Data on ethnicity from the Scotland Census 2022 is not yet available.

3

Police strength in Northern Ireland

Data on the strength of the police force is published by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), both in terms of officers and police staff.

The chart below shows the trend in police officer strength in Northern Ireland from 1979 to 2023:



Sources: Police Service of Northern Ireland, [Strength of Police Service Statistics](#). Historical data compiled from sources provided by PSNI.

Following a large drop in strength from 2000 to 2001, there has been a steady decrease in the number of full-time regular police officers.

Numbers rose slightly in 2020 and 2021. As of 1 April 2023, the FTE police officer strength in Northern Ireland stood at 6,730. This is an 8% decrease on 31 December 2010²⁶, and a 21% decrease compared with 1999 when police officer strength was at its peak.

As of 1 December 2023, there were also 2,344 FTE police staff, including temporary workers.²⁷

²⁶ Data for 2023 is for 1 April, data for 2022 is for 1 October, data for 2021 is for 01 August, data for 2020 and 2019 is for 1 July and data for 2018 and prior is at 31 December.

²⁷ Police Service of Northern Ireland, [Strength of Police Service Statistics](#), accessed 15 December 2023

3.1

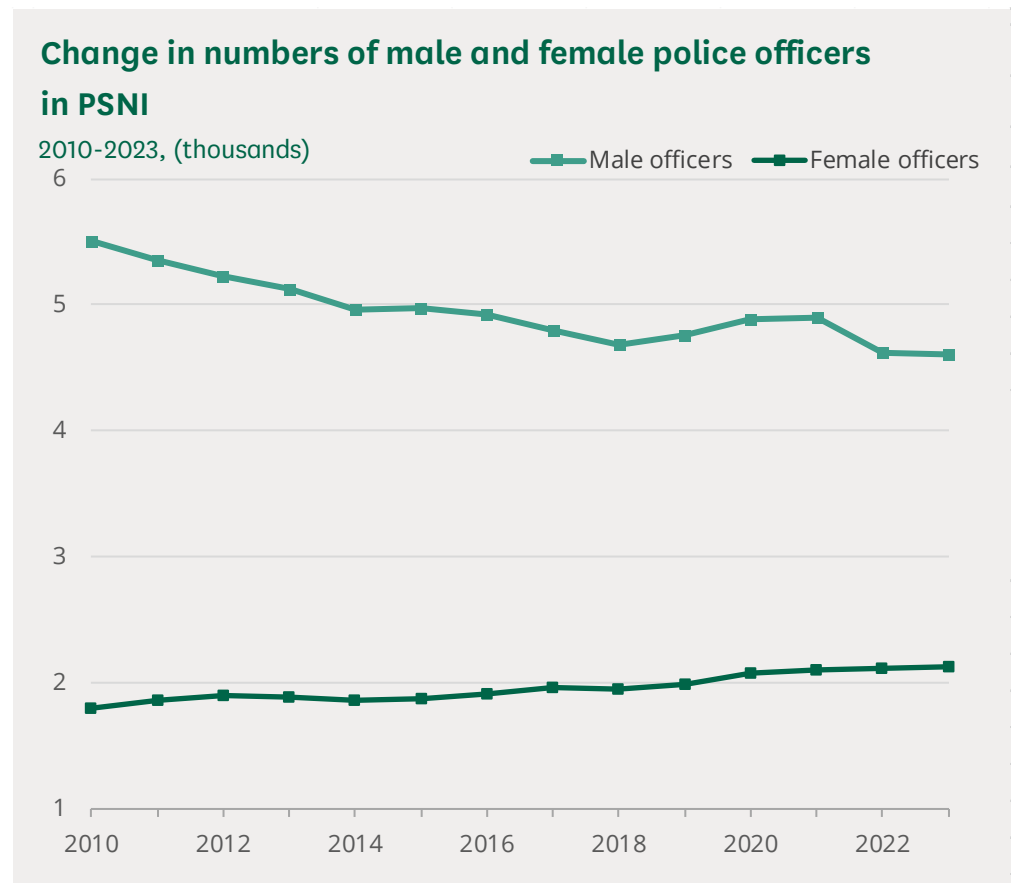
Police officer diversity in Northern Ireland

On 1 April 2023, women made up 31.6% of full-time regular police officers in Northern Ireland, a similar proportion to the previous year.²⁸

Since 2010, the number of female police officers has increased by 20%. Numbers increased year on year from 2010 and then fell for two consecutive years in 2013 and 2014. Numbers have increased every year since (except for 2018) to just under 2,124 female police officers in 2023.

The number of male police officers fell year on year between 2010 and 2014 (from 5,505 to 4,965). After a slight increase in 2015, the number of male officers fell again to a low of 4,688 in 2018.

Numbers then increased for three years but fell in 2022 and 2023, to 4,606. This is a 16% decrease on 2010.



Note: Figure for 2023 is at 1 April, figure for 2022 is at 1 September 2022, figure for 2021 is at 1 July 2021, figure for 2020 calculated using officer numbers at 1 January 2021 and diversity data at 01 November 2020. Data for 2017 and before is as of 31 December. Sources: Police Service of Northern Ireland, [Workforce Composition Statistics](#) and [Strength of Police Service Statistics Northern Ireland](#) (various editions)

²⁸ Police Service of Northern Ireland, [Workforce Composition Statistics](#)

Since 2010, the proportion of full-time regular police officers identifying as being from minority ethnic groups has consistently been below 1%. The proportion of ethnic minority officers currently stands at 0.6%. According to the Office for National Statistics, 3.4% of the general Northern Ireland population are from minority ethnic groups.²⁹

In April 2023, 66% of police officers considered themselves to be Protestant, 32% Roman Catholic, and 1% did not consider themselves either.³⁰

²⁸ ONS 2021, [mid-year population estimates](#)

³⁰ Police Service of Northern Ireland, [Workforce Composition Statistics](#)

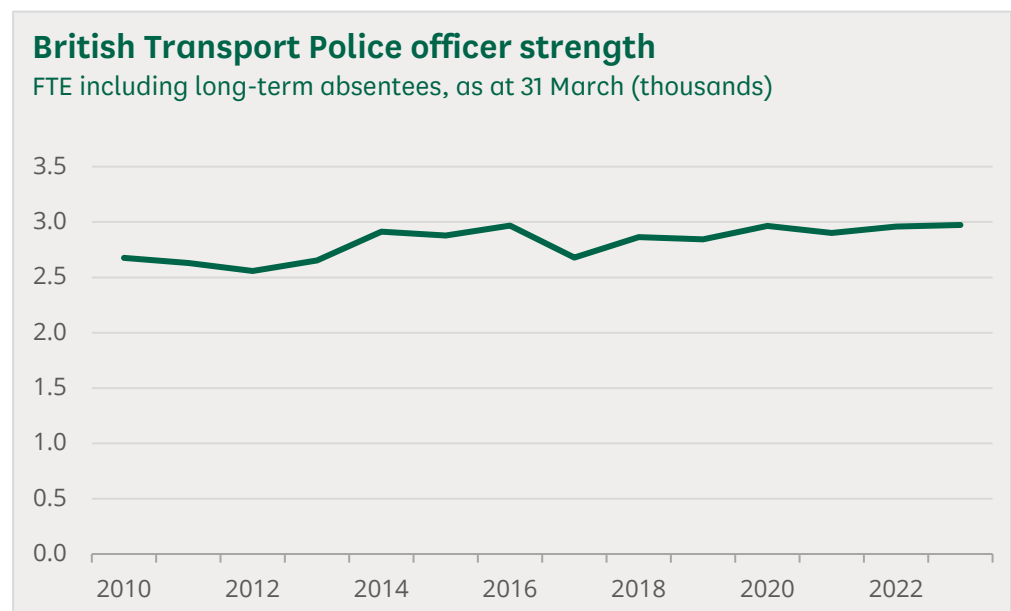
4

British Transport Police

The British Transport Police (BTP) staff work in railways, providing a service to rail operators, their staff, and passengers across the country. They also police Transport for London (TFL) services, the Midland Metro tram system, Tyne and Wear Metro and the Glasgow Subway.³¹

BTP officer numbers increased by 11% between 31 March 2010 and 31 March 2023. At 31 March 2023 there were 2,973 BTP officers – a 0.4% increase on March 2022.³²

The chart below shows BTP police officer strength between 2010 and 2023.



Source: Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales](#), Table H1 (various editions)

At 31 March 2023, in addition to 2,973 FTE police officers, the BTP also employed:

- 1,467 support staff and designated officers (combined), 102 more than in 2022
- 193 police community support officers (PCSOs), 38 fewer than in 2022
- 227 special constables, 20 fewer than in 2022

³¹ British Transport Police, '[About us](#)' accessed 24 August 2021

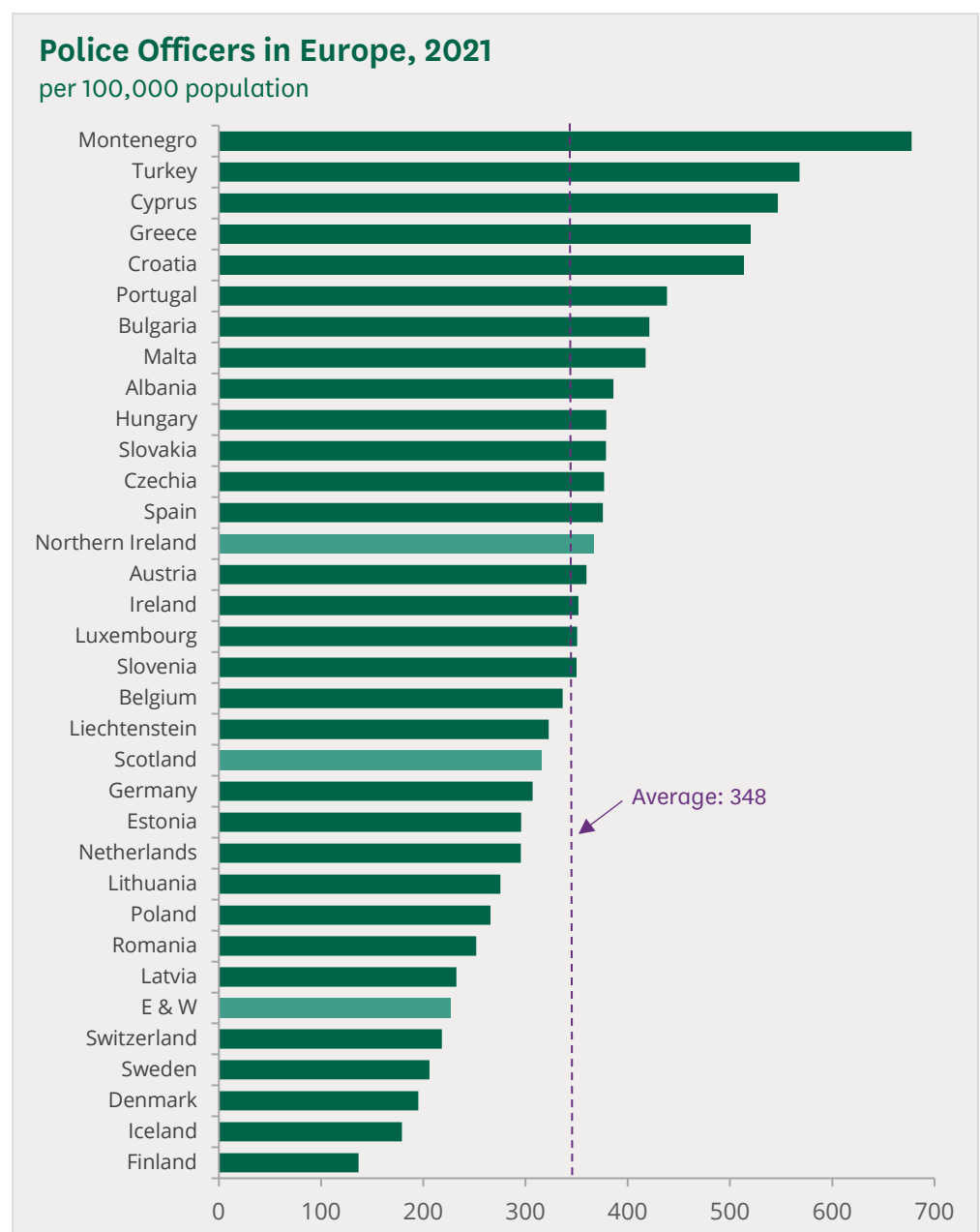
³² Home Office, [Police Workforce: England and Wales, 31 March 2022](#), Table H1

5

International comparisons

Police forces are organised differently in different countries. Some countries have more than one ‘police force’, all of which perform policing duties. This should be kept in mind when making comparisons between countries, as there is no information available on the percentage of policing duties carried out by each of these bodies.

The most recent data for European comparisons is from 2021. The chart below displays police officer strength for countries where data is available:

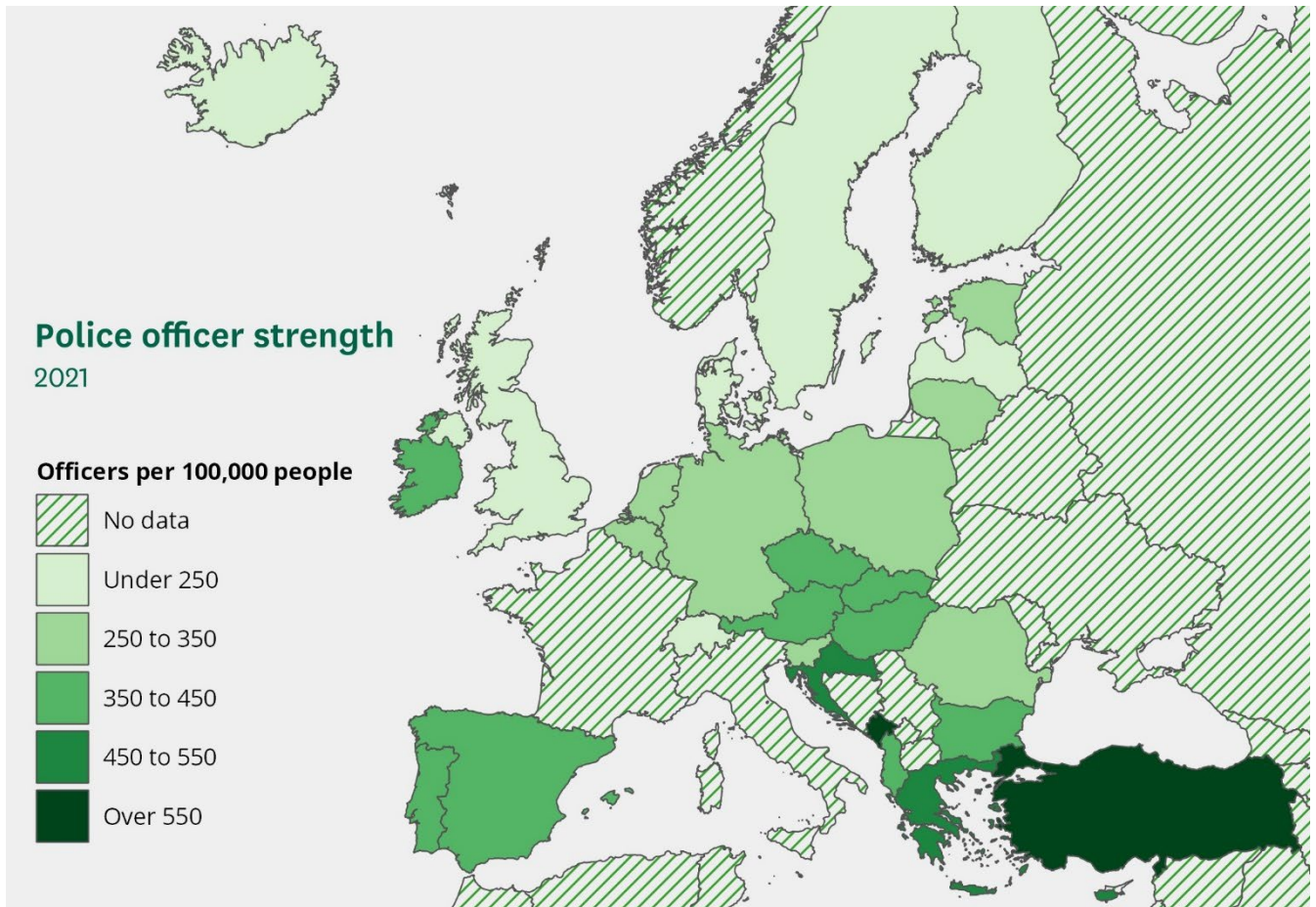


Note: See Table A6 for full data and sources.

In 2021, data was available for 35 nations.³³ England and Wales ranked 30th for the number of police officers per 100,000 head of population. Northern Ireland was ranked 14th and Scotland 22nd.³⁴

Table A6 (available for download from this [briefing paper's web page](#)) shows the number of police per 100,000 people in selected European countries between 2010 and 2021.

This data is illustrated in the map below:



Source: Eurostat, Personnel in the criminal justice system, 21 July 2021; Home Office: Police Workforce, England and Wales, Police Service of Northern Ireland, Scottish Government, ONS 2019 [mid-year population estimates](#). See table A6 (appended) for exact figures).

Notes: Figures for England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have been combined. EU collection methods may differ. Eurostat collection methods differ from those of England & Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

³³ Data for 2021 excludes Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Italy, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and other countries that do not usually publish such data.

³⁴ Eurostat figures for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are not available from 2019. The figures provided for England and Wales are based on police officer numbers from the Home Office's [Police Workforce Statistics](#). The figures provided for Scotland and Northern Ireland are based on police officer numbers available from the Scottish Government's [Police Service Strength Statistics](#) and PSNI's [Strength of Police Service Statistics](#). The rate of police officers per 100,000 was calculated using the first results from the [ONS 2021 Census](#) and [Scotland's Census 2022](#).

Southern European countries tend to report a higher number of police officers per 100,000 people. Montenegro, Turkey, Greece and Croatia are among those with the largest proportion.

Northern European countries tend to report a lower number of police officers per 100,000 people. Finland, Iceland, Denmark and Sweden reported the lowest rate of police officers per 100,000 people.

However, it is important to note that countries may have different definitions of what constitutes a police officer, as well as methods of reporting. These differences may influence, or account for the variation in results.

6

Appendix: Methodology for measuring frontline policing

HMIC's 2011 definition

In March 2011, following an analysis of the approximately 60 police functions and roles, and a consultation with police sector representatives and the public, HMIC published a definition of the policing frontline in [Police Visibility: Demanding Times](#):

The police front line comprises those who are in everyday contact with the public and who directly intervene to keep people safe and enforce the law.³⁵

In July 2013, HMIC revised the model used to divide the police into frontline and non-frontline roles. It remained based on the overall definition first used in 2011. HMIC grouped the different roles that comprise policing into three categories, as follows: 'operational frontline functions', 'operational support functions' and 'business support'. The Home Office estimated the number of staff on the frontline according to this definition using the strength figures from the Annual Data Return (ADR) of police forces.

Changes to categories in 2016

From 31 March 2016, the police functions framework was replaced with a new framework based on the Police Objective Analysis (POA) categories. These categories are as follows:

- **Visible operational frontline** which includes roles such as local policing, traffic units and wardens, PCSOs, police dog sections and firearms units.
- **Non-visible frontline** which includes those on the dispatch desk, airport and port policing units, police doctors, nurses & surgeons, public protection teams and intelligence gathering units.
- **Frontline support** which includes Police National Computer sections, criminal justice arrangements command teams and forensic services.
- **Business support** which covers functions without which the police service could not operate but are not operational policing roles. This includes human resources, finance teams, estates, Information Communication Technology, and training teams.

³⁵ HMIC, [Demanding Times: The frontline and police visibility](#), 2011 p.18

The lists provided above are not exhaustive. Table F4 in the Home Office's [Police Workforce of England and Wales](#) data tables for 2022 provides more detail on the roles included within each category.

The new categories from 2016 are not directly comparable with the previous framework and thus figures for the number of staff and officers in frontline roles may not be comparable across the time-series.

The definitions were changed to ensure policing roles remained relevant and reflected current policing structures.

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