

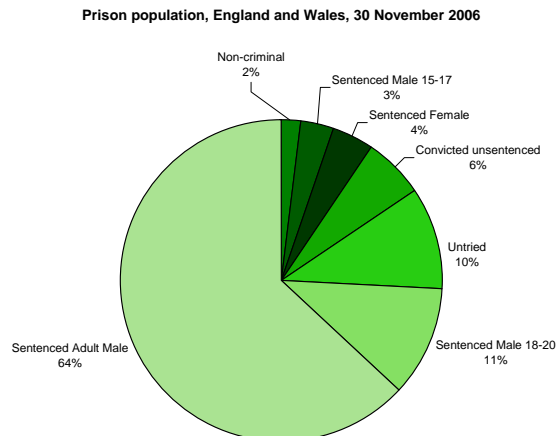
IV Prison Population

The prison population in England and Wales has increased steadily over the past century and exceeded 80,000 for the first time in December 2006. The number of prisoners has fallen since then, as it does each December and according to HM Prison Service there were 78,888 prisoners in prison on 5 January 2007.ⁱ

5.6 percent of the current prison population are female. Over the past decade the number of female prisoners has doubled from approximately 2,300 in 1996.

The UK has the highest imprisonment rate in Western Europe at 148 per 100,000 population.ⁱⁱ

Of the population in prison custody in November 2006 around 16 percent were on remand, either awaiting trial or sentence, and 2 percent were non-criminal prisoners (including fine defaulters).

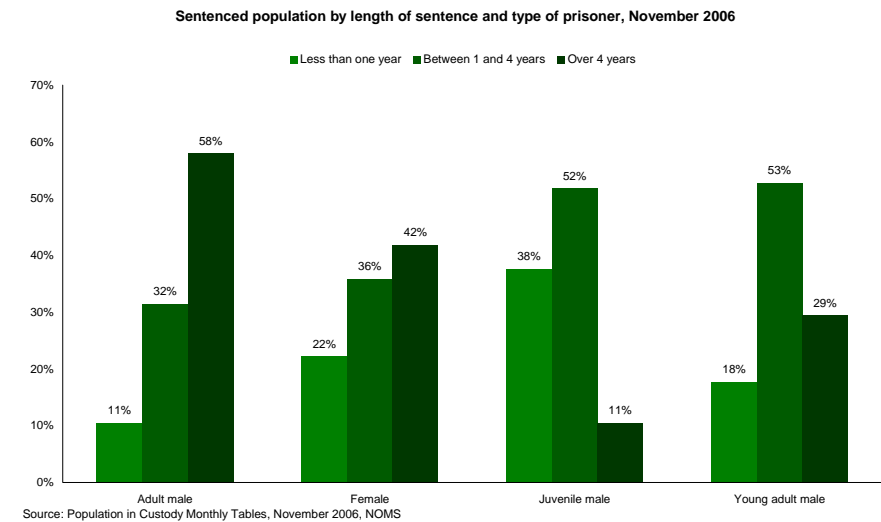


Source: Population in Custody Monthly Tables, November 2006, NOMS

Three-quarters of the population comprises sentenced males aged 18 or older.

Length of sentence

More than half of the total sentenced prison population are serving sentences of more than four years. One in ten juvenile males, aged under 18, are serving sentences of this length.

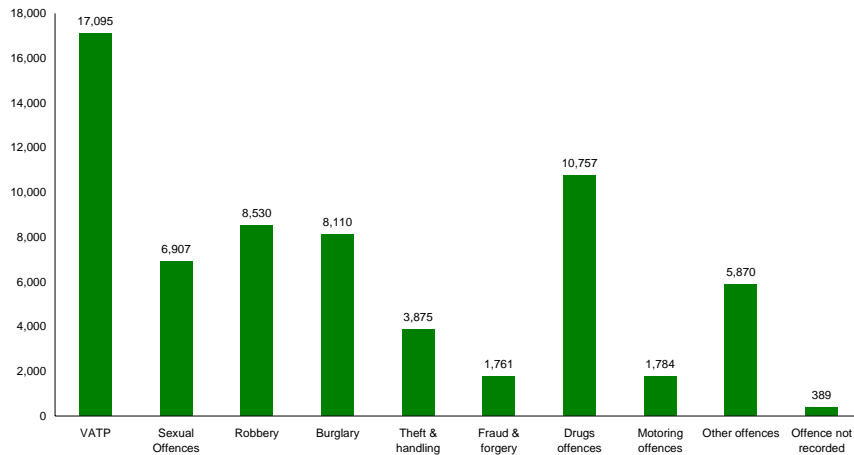


Type of offence

The violence against the person offence group accounted for the largest proportion of the total sentenced population in November 2006 (27 percent). This is mainly due to the high number of adult males serving sentences for these offences.

Among sentenced women, drugs offences account for the largest proportion of the population (32 percent), while more juvenile offenders are serving sentences for robbery than any other offence (28 percent).

Sentenced prison population by offence group, November 2006

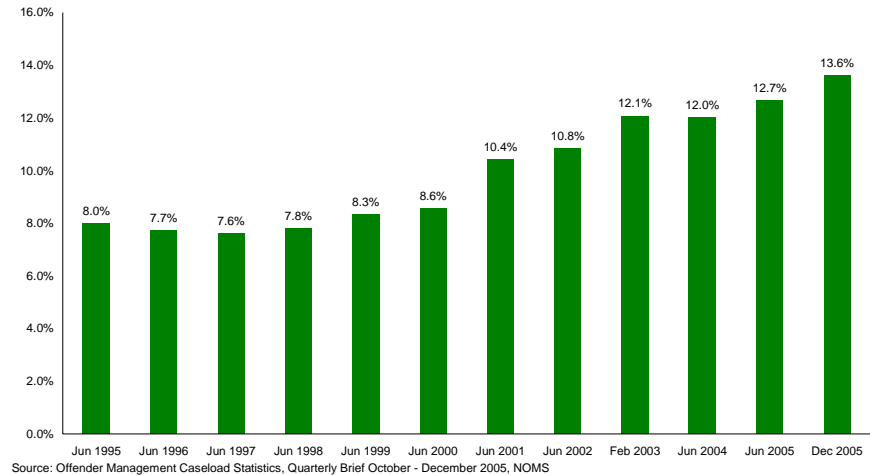


Source: Population in Custody Monthly Tables, November 2006, NOMS

Nationality and ethnicity

The proportion of foreign national prisoners in the prison population has increased steadily over the past decade. In the early/mid 1990s foreign prisoners accounted for almost 8 percent of the total prison population increasing to approximately 14 percent by 2005.

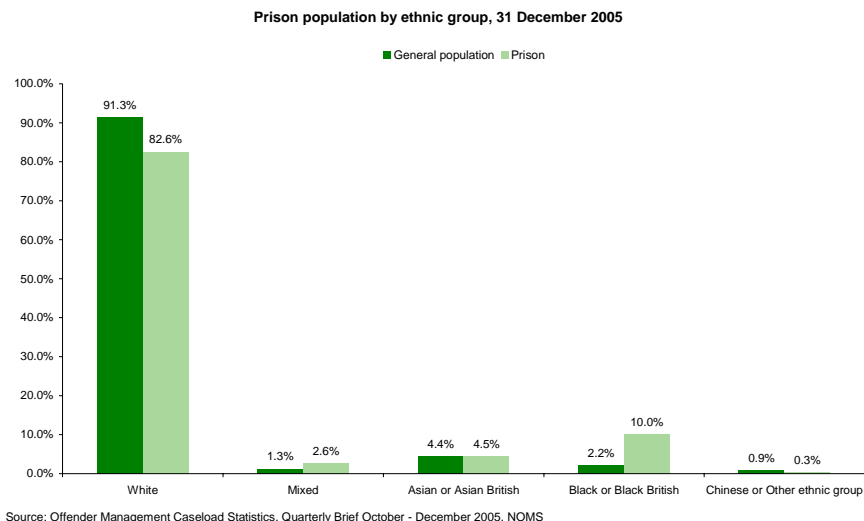
Foreign national prisoners as a proportion of total population



Source: Offender Management Caseload Statistics, Quarterly Brief October - December 2005, NOMS

On the 31 December 2005 there were over 10,000 foreign nationals in prisons in England and Wales, from 169 different countries. Ten of these countries accounted for half of the foreign nationals in prisons. Jamaica, Nigeria and the Irish Republic are the countries with the most nationals in prison establishments.

At the end of December 2005 almost a quarter of the prison population whose ethnicity was recorded were from a minority ethnic group. Among British nationals 18 percent of the population were from a minority ethnic group. 70 percent of foreign national prisoners were from a minority ethnic group.



Overcrowding

A prison is overcrowded when the number of prisoners held exceeds the establishment’s Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA). The CNA is the Prison Service’s own measure of accommodation and represents the decent standard of accommodation that the Prison Service aspires to provide all prisoners.

At the end of November 2006, 86 prison establishments in England and Wales (61 percent of the estate) were overcrowded. In 13 of these establishments the population was more than 150 percent of the CNA figure.

The operational capacity of a prison is the absolute limit on the prison estate. According to the Prison Service it is the total number of prisoners that an establishment can hold taking into account control, security and the proper operation of the planned regime. It is determined by area managers on the basis of operational judgement and experience.

On 5 January 2007 the total prison population stood at 1,500 below the useable operational capacity of prison establishments. The gap between population and operational capacity has not been this wide since June 2006.

In October 2006, with the prison population nearing the operational capacity of the estate, the Home Secretary announced that Operation Safeguard would be implemented. This formal use of police cells to accommodate prisoners was implemented on 12 October and ceased on 22 December. Prisoners were last held under this provision on 20 December 2002.ⁱⁱⁱ

Although there is a lack of empirical evidence, the anecdotal evidence suggests that prison overcrowding leads to an increase in re-offending. Approximately two-thirds of adult offenders commit an offence within two-years of release from prison and are subsequently convicted in court.

In a speech in September 2005^{iv} the then Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, emphasised the need to reduce prisoners’ re-offending by improving their employability, treating drug and alcohol addiction and maintaining family links via a new network of community prisons. The Prison Reform Trust, which the Home Secretary was addressing, suggested that overcrowding hazards these ambitions.^v

A National Audit Office report^{vi} concluded that prison overcrowding disrupts work to prevent re-offending and prisons should therefore change the way they deliver education courses

The Home Affairs Select Committee carried out an inquiry into the rehabilitation of offenders and the report, published in January 2005, suggested that ‘overcrowding is having a hugely damaging impact on the delivery of rehabilitative regimes across the prison estate, both in terms of quality and quantity of appropriate interventions’.^{vii}

Similar comments were made in a report by the Social Exclusion Unit in 2002:

There is a growing consensus that we are sending some people to prison who should not be there. Short prison sentences are not appropriate for all the offenders who currently receive them; and too many people with severe mental illness are in prison rather than secure treatment facilities. All of this contributes to the problem of overcrowding, which in turn limits the capacity of prisons, probation and other services to work effectively to reduce re-offending.^{viii}

Characteristics of population^{ix}

- 47 percent of male sentenced prisoners and 50 percent of female sentenced prisoners had run away from home as a child. This compares to 10 percent of the general population.
- Over 25 percent of prisoners had been taken into care as a child compared to 2 percent of the population.
- 43 percent of prisoners had a family member that had been convicted of a criminal offence. 35 percent had a family member that had actually been in prisoner.
- 81 percent of prisoners were unmarried prior to imprisonment, rising to 85 percent since imprisonment. Almost 10 percent had been divorced. These figures are twice as high as those found in the general population.
- A quarter of young male offenders in prison are young fathers.
- One in five women prisoners were living at home with dependent children at the time of imprisonment.
- One half of male and one third of female sentenced prisoners were excluded from school. One half of male and seven out of ten female prisoners have no qualifications.

- Two thirds of prisoners have numeracy skills at or below the level expected of an 11 year old. Half have a reading ability and 82 percent have writing ability at or below this level.
- Two thirds of prisoners were unemployed in the four weeks before imprisonment.
- Around 70 percent of prisoners suffer from two or more mental disorders. In the general population the figures are 5 percent for men and 2 percent for women.
- Prisoners are more likely to be abusers of illegal drugs and alcohol than other sectors of the community.
- Nearly three quarters of prisoners were in receipt of benefits immediately before entering prison.
- 5 percent of prisoners were sleeping rough prior and almost a third were not living in permanent accommodation immediately prior to imprisonment.

Sources of prison data

The most up to date prison population data is available from the HM Prison Service website. Each week they publish the *Prison Population and Accommodation Briefing*. This shows the total prison population on the previous Friday and provides a comparative figure for the corresponding Friday a year earlier.

At the end of each month a Monthly Bulletin is produced providing population data for each prison establishment as well as operational capacity and certified normal accommodation figures.

The Home Office publishes a range of regular statistics on the population in custody and under probation service supervision.

Monthly tables on the population in custody give summary figures on the population in prison establishments, local authority secure children's homes (LASCHs) and Secure Training Centres (STCs). More detailed information on the make-up of the prison population by custody type, offence group, sentence length, age group and establishment is also presented. This publication is usually released one month in arrears.

The Offender Management Caseload Statistics quarterly brief presents detailed trends over the previous 24 months on the population in custody and the numbers received into prison establishments. Information is presented by ethnic group and nationality, as well as on the numbers released on HDC and parole. It also presents information on the caseload of offenders under Probation Service supervision, number of people commencing court order supervision by type of supervision, the number of pre-sentence reports prepared by the Probation Service and the number of court orders terminated.

The annual Offender Management Caseload Statistics bulletin covers prison population and probation service supervision. The associated internet tables provide a wider range of statistics than the hard copy publication.

HM Prison Service Annual report has a statistical appendix containing CNA, population and expenditure data for individual establishments. Figures on self-inflicted deaths and programme completions are provided by type of prison.

Further information:

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ⁱPrison Population and Accommodation Briefing, HM Prison Service

ⁱⁱWorld Prison Population List, Home Office

ⁱⁱⁱHC Deb 12/7/2006 1900-1w

^{iv}<http://press.homeoffice.gov.uk/Speeches/09-05-sp-prison-reform>

^v<http://www.ws3.prisonreform.web.baigent.net/subsection.asp?id=350>

^{vi}p4, *National Offender Management Service: Dealing with increased numbers in custody*, HC 458 2005/06

http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/05-06/0506458.pdf

^{vii}Para 27, *Rehabilitation of Prisoners*, Home Affairs Select Committee, HC 2004/05 193-I

^{viii}*Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners*

<http://www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/downloaddoc.asp?id=64>

^{ix} ibid