

By Georgina Sturge

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# UK Prison Population Statistics



## Summary

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## Summary

This briefing paper explores data on the UK prison population, including the population size and change over time, the demographic profile of prisoners, safety in prisons, and the cost per prisoner.

Prisons are devolved, so UK prison statistics are published separately for England and Wales (the Ministry of Justice), Scotland (the Scottish Government), and Northern Ireland (the Department of Justice). This briefing also compares the UK with other countries.

Weekly prison population data are available for England, Wales and Scotland and quarterly data are available for Northern Ireland. As of June 2023, the UK had a total **prison population of approximately 95,526 people**, comprising

- 85,851 in England and Wales<sup>1</sup>,
- 7,775 in Scotland<sup>2</sup>, and
- 1,900 in Northern Ireland.<sup>3</sup>

The prison population fell in all jurisdictions during the Covid-19 pandemic. The starkest decline was between February and June 2020, when the prison population of the UK as a whole reduced by 5,500 people or by 6%.<sup>4</sup> It has steadily grown since then without yet returning to its pre-pandemic level.

In addition to snapshots on particular days, all jurisdictions publish an average annual prison population. This was 80,798 people in England and Wales in 2021, and 7,504 in Scotland and 1,494 in Northern Ireland in 2021/22.

Up until 2015, the prison population had been generally increasing in size, with the sharpest increases happening in the mid-1990s and the 2000s. After that it flattened off, even falling in Scotland and Northern Ireland prior to the pandemic.

The graph below shows prison population change relative to 1900 (and relative to 2000 for Northern Ireland).

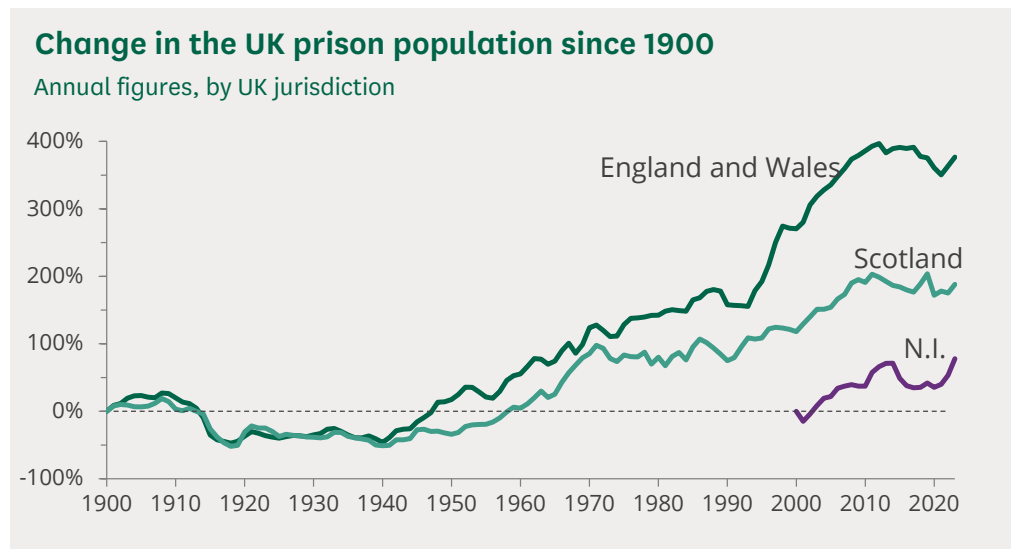
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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Justice [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), figure correct as of 30 June 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Prison Service [Prison Population](#), 30 June 2023

<sup>3</sup> Department of Justice [Weekly Situation Reports](#), 30 June 2023

<sup>4</sup> Based on end of week population: 28 Feb 2020 compared with 26 June 2020.



Source: MoJ (England and Wales) [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), various years; Scottish Government, [Prison statistics and population projections](#); DoJ (Northern Ireland) [The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2021/22](#)

The prison population of England & Wales quadrupled in size between 1900 and 2018, with around half of this increase taking place since 1990. The Scottish prison population almost doubled in size since 1900 and rose 60% since 1990.

The data series for Northern Ireland begins in 2000. Between 2000 and 2021/22 the prison population of Northern Ireland increased by 40%. As of June 2023 it was back to the level of its previous peak, at around 1,900 people.

To put the prison population in context, it is possible to calculate the number of prisoners per 100,000 people in the general population aged 15 and over. At the most recent estimate, there were:

- 159 prisoners per 100,000 of the population in England and Wales
- 162 per 100,000 in Scotland.
- 97 per 100,000 in Northern Ireland.<sup>5</sup>

In each jurisdiction, prison population projections are made on a regular basis. At the most recent estimate, the prison population in England and Wales is projected to grow to between 93,100 and 106,300 by 2027, to 7,800 in Scotland by 2022, and to 2,251 in Northern Ireland by 2022.<sup>6</sup>

There are many other statistics on the prison population available for England and Wales which are published in the Ministry of Justice's [Offender](#)

<sup>5</sup> These are based on the population aged 15 and over. The population figures are from the 2021 Census in England and Wales and Northern Ireland and the [mid-year population estimate for 2021](#). This is compared with the annual average prison population in each jurisdiction in 2021/22.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Justice [Prison population projections 2022-27](#), Scottish Government [Prison statistics and population projections Scotland 2013/14](#), Northern Ireland Prison Service [FOI Case No. 13:454](#)

[Management Statistics Quarterly](#). The key findings of the most recent annual figures are that,

- The prison population is ageing: in 2002, 15% were under the age of 21 compared with 4% in 2023 and the number over the age of 50 went from 7% in 2002 to 17% in 2023,
- Prison sentences have been lengthening, with 56% of determinate prison sentences being over 4 years compared with 40% in 2013<sup>7</sup>,
- Foreign nationals made up 12% of the prison population, and
- People of minority ethnicities made up 27% of the prison population compared with 13% of the general population.

As of June 2023

- 61% of prisons in England and Wales were classified as crowded.<sup>8</sup>

Each jurisdiction also publishes data on the **cost per prisoner or prison place**. The average cost per prison place was £31,476 in England and Wales in 2021-22, £39,350 in Scotland in 2020-21, and £44,868 in Northern Ireland in 2021-22.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Excludes indeterminate-length sentences

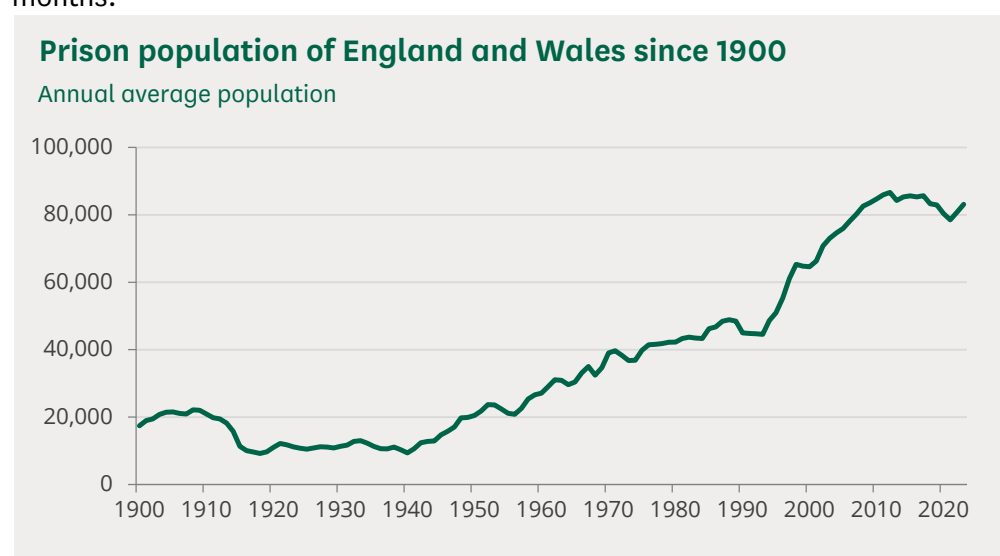
<sup>8</sup> MoJ, [Population bulletin: monthly June 2023](#)

<sup>9</sup> MoJ, [Prison performance statistics 2021-22](#); Scottish Prison Service, [Annual report and accounts 2020/21](#); Northern Ireland Prison Service, [Annual Report and Accounts 2021/22](#)

# 1 England and Wales

## 1.1 Long term trends

The Ministry of Justice has produced a time-series of annual average prison population for each year from 1900 to 2013. Since 2014, it has published a quarterly bulletin on the average prison population in the preceding 12 months.



Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), various years

The average annual prison population quadrupled between 1900 and 2023, going from just over 17,400 to around 83,100.<sup>10</sup> The prison population was relatively stable between 1915 and 1945, after which point it began to grow steadily. After a short period in the early 1990s when it decreased for four consecutive years, it rose steeply again in the subsequent decade and a half. Since 2015, the average prison population has remained relatively stable, with a decline in the last few years as a result of the pandemic.

The UK general population also grew during this time. To put the numbers in context, in 1900 there were 86 prisoners per 100,000 people in the general population and in 2022 there were 159 per 100,000.<sup>11</sup> The lowest rate recorded was at the start of the 1940s when there were around 33 prisoners per 100,000 people.

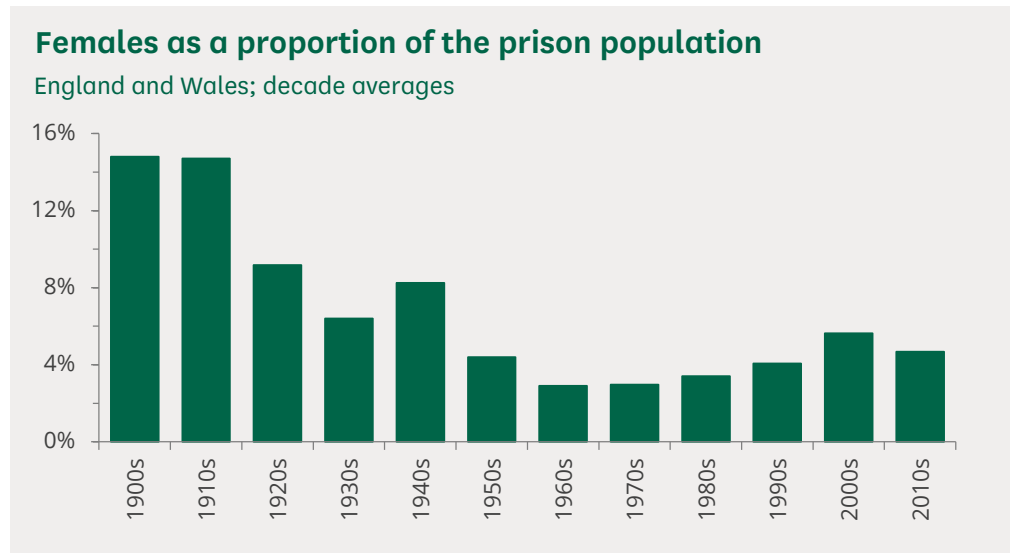
<sup>10</sup> The 2023 figure is for the year ending June.

<sup>11</sup> These figures compare the prison population with the England and Wales population aged 15 and over. The 2022 estimate uses the 2021 Census for the general population figure.



## Gender

In 2023, 4% of the prison population was female, down from 17% in 1900. The chart below shows that the decline has been relatively steady over time. The proportion of the prison population that was female 2% which occurred in 1968 and 1969.



Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), various years

In 1900 there were 152 male prisoners per 100,000 men in the population. This rate has increased to 316 per 100,000 in 2022. There were 27 female prisoners per 100,000 head of female population in 1900. In 2022, this rate had decreased to 13 per 100,000.<sup>12</sup>

## Transgender prisoners

In these [Offender Management Statistics](#), prisoners are simply grouped into male and female, with no explanation as to the policy for recording the sex or gender of transgender prisoners.

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) does collect data on transgender prisoners as part of an annual data collection exercise for its Offender Equalities Annual Report. This data represents a snapshot of the prison population on 31 March.

For the purposes of this data collection,

“transgender prisoners are defined as those individuals known within prison to be currently living in, or presenting in, a gender different to their legal

<sup>12</sup> MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly October-December 2013](#), 24 April 2014; MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), various years; 2022 estimates based on 2021 Census data. Refers to the general population aged 15 and above.



gender and who have had a local case board (as defined by ‘The Care and Management of Individuals who are Transgender’ policy framework ) and is known to the diversity and inclusion lead within the individual prison where they are housed.”

Prisoners who possess a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) are excluded from the detailed data on transgender prisoners. As of 31 March 2022, 11 individuals in prisoners in England and Wales had a GRC.

HMPPS also states that this method is “likely to underestimate the true number [of transgender prisoners]. This is because some transgender prisoners, both with and without GRCs, may not have declared that they are transgender or had a local case board.”

The latest [HMPPS report](#) indicates that on 31 March 2022,

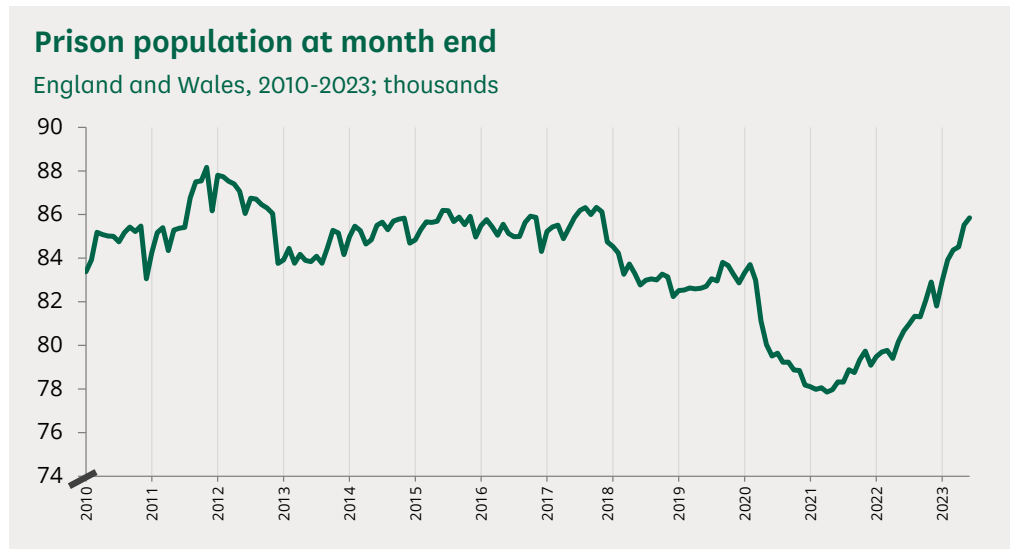
- There were 230 transgender prisoners in England and Wales, not including those with a GRC.
- Of these, 187 prisoners reported their ‘legal gender’ as male and 43 as female. For the most part this is likely to be capturing sex at birth, given that prisoners with a GRC are excluded from the analysis.
- 181 of these individuals were in male prisons and 49 in female prisons.
- 79 out of 120 prisons had at least one prisoner who identified as transgender.

## 1.2

## Recent population trends and projections

The prison population passed 80,000 for the first time in December 2006 and 85,000 in June 2010. In November 2011 the prison population reached its highest level of just over 88,000. As of the end of June 2023, the total prison population was 85,851, which was the highest level since November 2017. During the Covid-19 pandemic the prison population reduced by nearly 6,000 people at its lowest point (April 2021), as a result of courts running at lower capacity and crime being lower during the Covid-19 restrictions.

The chart shows the prison population at month end since January 2010. Note that the Y (vertical) axis is truncated to make small changes more visible.

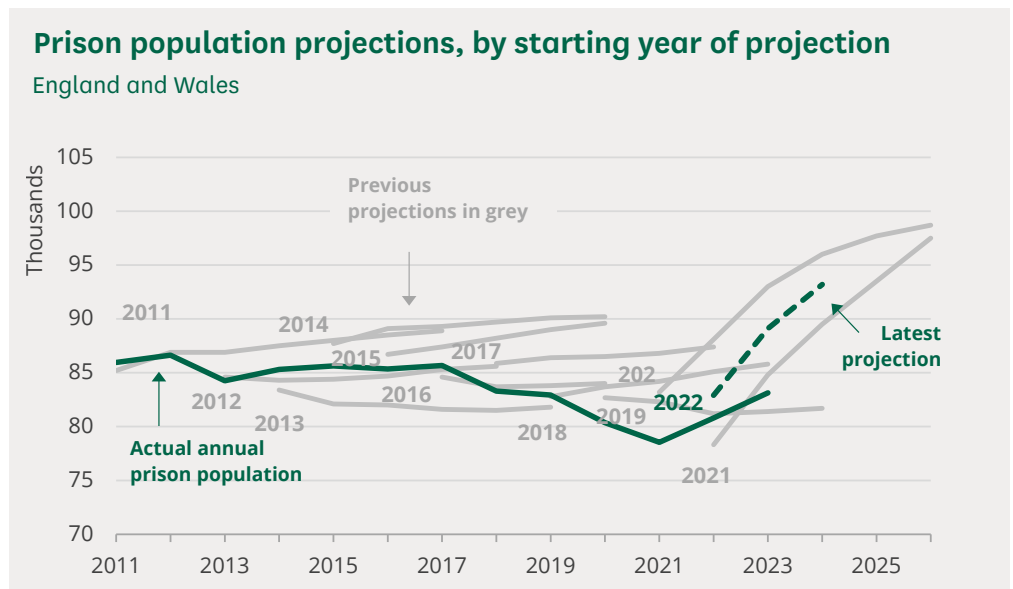


Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), various years

The rise in the prison population over the last months of 2011 can be, at least partially, explained by the remanding and sentencing of individuals following the riots in England in August 2011.<sup>13</sup>

From the end of 2017, the population gradually declined, before falling sharply in 2020 as a result of the pandemic. The lowest point in the recent series was in April 2021 (77,859).

The latest prison **population projections** were released in February 2023 and project a rise to 94,400 prisoners by March 2025 and between 93,100 and 106,300 by March 2027.



Source: Ministry of Justice [Prison population projections](#), various editions.

Notes: Population figure is at the end of June. The latest projection is shown for each year. Projections taken from the projections made in the previous year under a 'no change to sentencing rate' scenario.

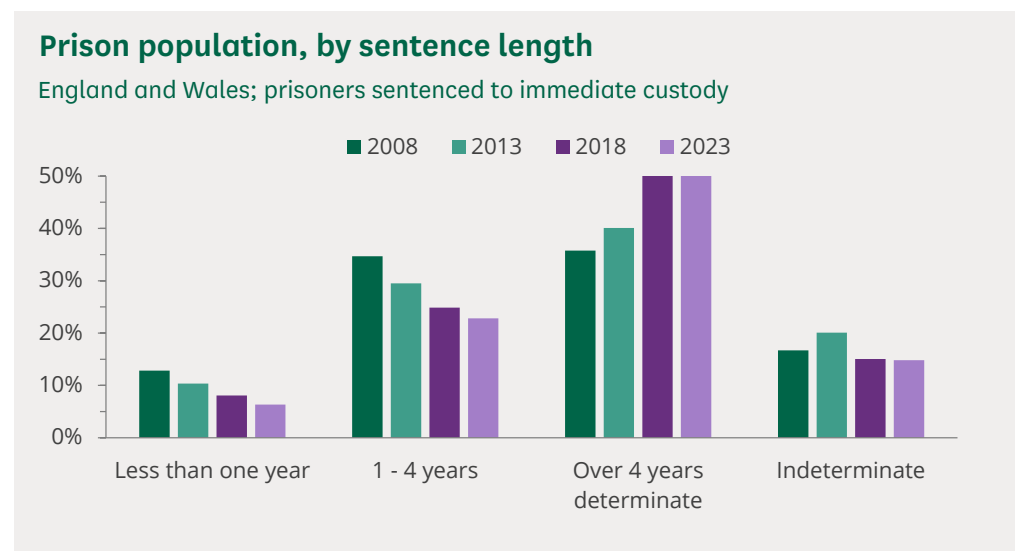
<sup>13</sup> See MoJ [Statistical bulletin on the public disorder of 6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> August 2011](#), 13 September 2012.

The populations of over 50, over 60 and over 70-year-olds in prison are projected to increase in number but estimated to remain relatively constant as proportions of the total prison population.

It should be noted that older projections forecasted a much higher prison population than is currently the case: for example, the 2014-2020 projections predicted that the prison population of England and Wales would have exceeded 90,000 by June 2019 whereas the true figure was below 83,000 and has still not reached that projected level.

## 1.3 Sentence length and offences

As at the end of June 2023, the most frequent length of determinate sentence being served was '4 years or more'.<sup>14</sup> Around 56% of the sentenced population were serving this length of sentence. About a quarter of prisoners (23%) were serving sentences ranging between 1-4 years and around 15% were serving indeterminate sentences.

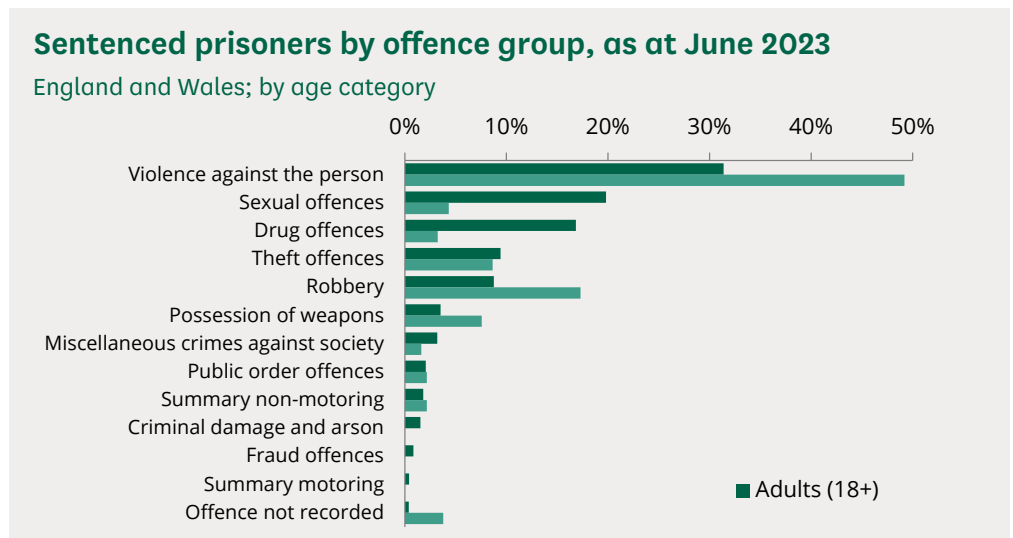


Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Caseload Statistics 2010 Tables](#); [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), Various Years

Notes: Figures are as of end of June.

Prisoners in custody for violence against the person (VATP) offences accounted for the highest proportion of prisoners at the end of June 2023 (31%). Sexual offences was the second highest category for adults (20%) while for juveniles this was drug offences (17%).

<sup>14</sup> A 'determinate' prison sentence is for a fixed length of time. An 'indeterminate' prison sentence doesn't have a fixed length.



Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), January to March 2023, table 1.2b  
 Notes: Only includes offenders sentenced to immediate custody.

## 1.4

# Prisoner Demographics

## Age Profile of Prisoners

The current data series on prisoner age goes back to 2002.<sup>15</sup> The proportion of offenders under the age of 21 has decreased since 2002 when they represented around 16% of the prison population. At the end of June 2023, under 21s accounted for 4% of the prison population – a decrease of approximately 7,000 since 2002.

The proportion of offenders aged between 21 and 29 also decreased over the last 10 years, accounting for 35% of the prison population in 2011 and 27% in 2023. The older age categories have seen the largest growth, with the proportion of prisoners aged 50 and over having gone from 10% of the prison population in 2011 to 21% in 2023.

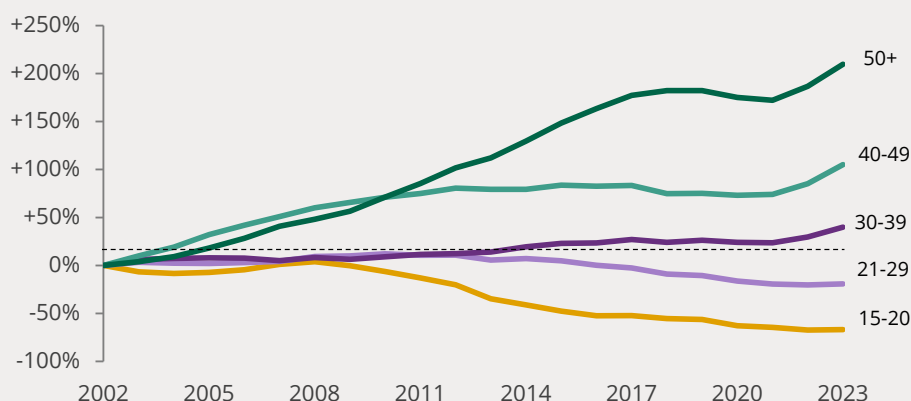
The chart below shows the change in the age profile of prisoners in each year, relative to 2002.

Age Profile of Prisoners		
England and Wales June 2023		
Age	Number	%
15-17	326	0.4%
18-20	3,299	4%
21-24	8,258	10%
25-29	13,332	16%
30-39	28,524	33%
40-49	17,174	20%
50-59	9,081	11%
60+	5,857	7%

<sup>15</sup> The latest figures can be found in table 1.3 of the MoJ’s [Offender Management Statistics](#), ‘Prison Population’ tables.

## Prison population aged 50+ grew the most relative to 2002

Change in prison population, by age category; England and Wales



Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), various years up to June 2023

## Nationality

At the end of June 2023 there were 10,321 foreign nationals within the prison population. Foreign nationals came from 168 different countries.<sup>16</sup>

### Nationality of prisoners

England and Wales, at 30 June 2023

	Total	%
British Nationals	75,181	88%
Foreign Nationals	10,321	12%
Nationality not recorded	349	0.4%
All nationalities	85,851	100%
EEA Europe	4,171	40%
Africa	1,707	17%
Non-EEA Europe	1,744	17%
Asia	1,276	12%
Central and South America	154	1%
Middle East	622	6%
North America	87	1%
Oceania	32	0%
West Indies	528	5%
All foreign nationals	10,321	100%

Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly, table 1.7](#)

Foreign nationals from Europe accounted for the greatest proportion of all foreign nationals within the prison population (40% from EEA countries and a further 17% from non-EEA European countries).<sup>17</sup> Those from Africa (17%) and Asia (12%) contributed the second and third largest proportions respectively.

<sup>16</sup> MoJ, Offender Management Statistics Quarterly, table 1.7. This includes 8 UK overseas territories, 2 French, and 1 Dutch one.

<sup>17</sup> The European Economic Area (EEA) is the EU plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

Prisoners originating from the EEA made up just over 5% of the total prison population.

The top ten countries foreign nationalities, as shown in the table below, accounted for 56% of all foreign nationals.

Top ten nationalities among foreign prisoners		
England and Wales, at 30 June 2023		
Nationality	Number	% of foreign national prisoners
Albanian	1,475	14%
Polish	856	8%
Romanian	758	7%
Irish	624	6%
Jamaican	403	4%
Lithuanian	402	4%
Pakistani	306	3%
Portuguese	300	3%
Somalian	281	3%
Iraqi	247	2%
Other foreign nationals	4,669	45%
All foreign nationals	10,321	100%

Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly, table 1.7](#)

## Ethnicity

As at the end of June 2023, just over a quarter of the prison population was from a minority ethnic group – this figure has stayed relatively constant since 2004.

Compared to the population as a whole, the BAME population is over-represented within the prison population. In the prison population, 27% identified as an ethnic minority, compared with 18% in the general population.

Ethnicity of prisoners and the general population				
England and Wales; June 2023				
	Number	Prison population	% point change on 2004	Share of the general population
White	61,823	72%	3.2	82%
Mixed	4,153	5%	2.3	3%
Asian or Asian British	6,840	8%	2.8	9%
Black or Black British	10,494	12%	-1.3	4%
Chinese or other ethnic group	1,687	2%	1.0	2%
Not stated/Unrecorded	854	1%	-8.1	.
Total	85,851	100%	..	100%

Source: MoJ [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), table 1.4; NOMIS, Census 2021.

## Religion

At the end of June 2023, just under half of the prison population was of a Christian faith (44%) – a decrease of 14 percentage points compared with June 2002. The proportion of Muslim prisoners has increased from 8% in 2002 to 18% in 2022. The proportion of prisoners with no religion in 2023 (31%) was roughly the same as in 2002.

Religion of prisoners and the general population				
England and Wales; June 2023				
	Number	Prison population	% point change on 2002	Share of the general population
Christian	38,184	44%	-13.6	46%
Muslim	15,271	18%	10.1	7%
Hindu	333	0%	0.0	2%
Sikh	552	1%	0.0	1%
Buddhist	1,718	2%	1.1	1%
Jewish	489	1%	0.3	1%
No religion	26,715	31%	-0.3	37%
Other	2,218	3%	2.0	1%
Not recorded	371	0%	0.4	6%
Total	85,851	100%	..	100%

Source: MoJ [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), table 1.5; NOMIS, Census 2011

## 1.5

### Prison crowding

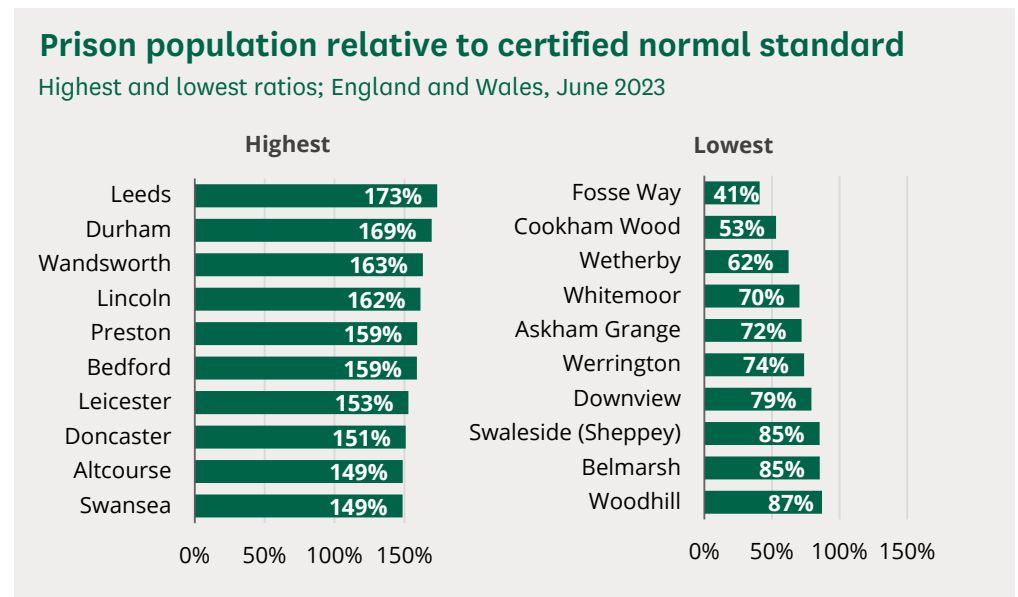
A prison is classified as overcrowded if the number of prisoners held exceeds the establishments Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA). The CNA is the Prison Service's own measure of accommodation and represents the decent standard of accommodation that the Prison Service aspires to provide all prisoners.

As of June 2023,<sup>18</sup> 61% (73) of prison establishments were overcrowded. In total, overcrowded prisons held 10,000 more prisoners than the CNA of these establishments.

The chart below shows the establishments with the highest and lowest occupancy rate, relative to their CAN. HMP Leeds was the most crowded, at 173% occupancy, followed by HMP Durham and HMP Wandsworth. HMP Fosse Way, which opened in 2023 on the site of the former HMP Glen Parva, followed by the Young Offender Institution HMP Cookham Wood.

<sup>18</sup> MoJ, [Prison population figures: 2021](#)





Source: MoJ, [Prison population: 2023 monthly figures - June](#)

## 2 Scotland

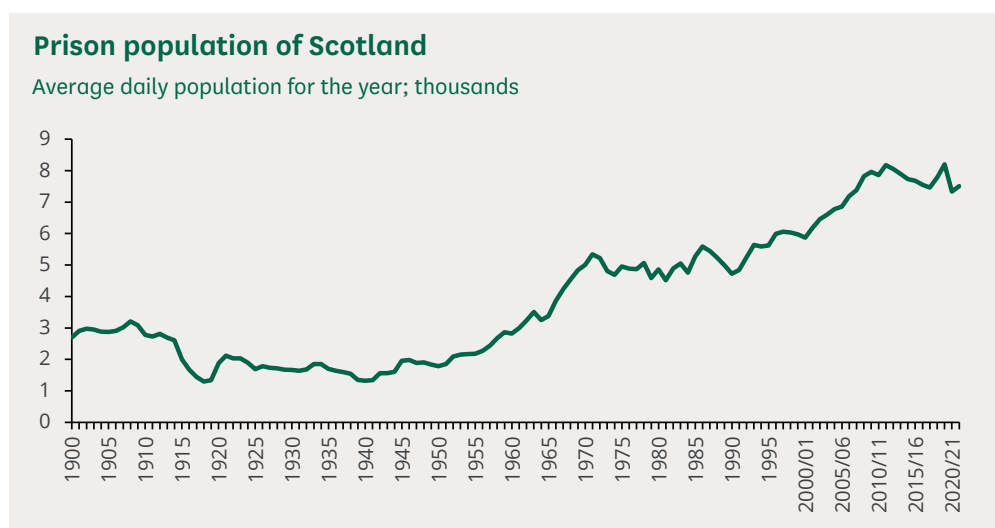
The Scottish Government publishes a statistical bulletin on Scottish prison statistics annually as part of a series on different aspects of the criminal justice system.

The Scottish Prison Service (SPS) publishes a [weekly time series of the prison population](#), including a breakdown by some basic characteristics such as custody type, gender and age. Once a year it also publishes an annual average of these figures.<sup>19</sup> Since 2020, it has also published a more detailed [annual statistical bulletin](#), which contains data going back to 2009/10.

The SPS's [Annual report and accounts](#) (latest 2021/22, at the time of writing) also provides statistics on the population by establishment and by average length of time spent in custody, as well as estimates of the cost per prison place.

### 2.1 Long Term Trends

The Scottish Government has produced the average daily number of prisoners in the Scottish prison system for each year going back to 1900.



Source: Mitchell, B. (1988) *British Historical Statistics*, p. 15-16; Scottish Government, [Prison statistics and population projections Scotland 2013/14](#), accessed 6 June 2016; Scottish Prison Service, Scottish Prison Service [Annual Report and Accounts 2014/15 – 2021/22](#).

<sup>19</sup> Scottish Prison Service, [SPS Prison Population](#)

The average daily prison population increased from just under 2,700 in 1900 to 7,504, nearly three times that number, in 2021/22. As in England and Wales, from the 1950s the prison population increased steadily until the 1970s where it remained relatively stable. Since 1990 the prison population increased by more than half again, reaching a peak of 8,287 in October 2019. During the pandemic it dropped to a low point of 6,869 in May 2020, a level not seen since 2005.

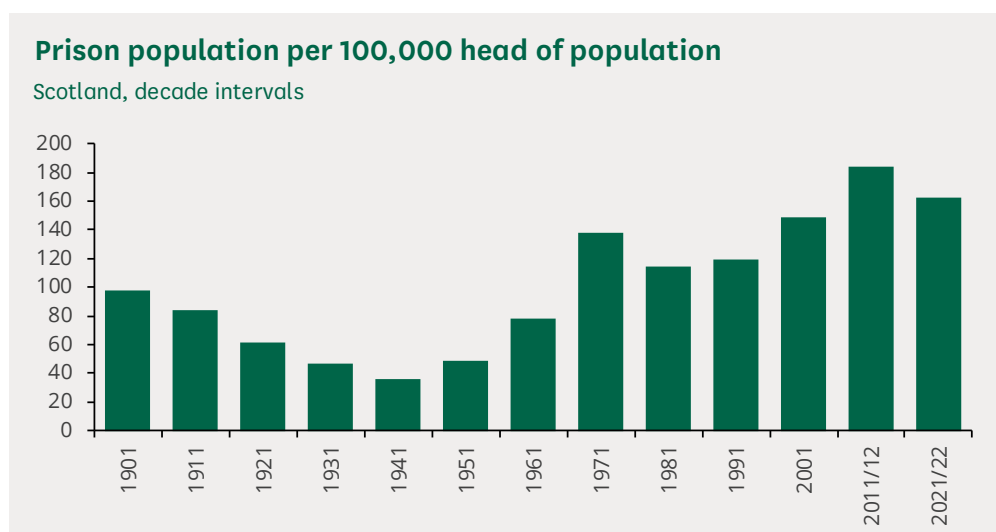
Over the whole period, female prisoners averaged 5% of the total prison population.

When the prison population was at its largest, in 2019/20, it was around a fifth larger than in 2004/05 and this proportional increase had been the same among male and female prisoners. However, the most recent year for which we have data (2021/22) has seen a decline in the female prison population to its lowest point in the series (283 female prisoners).

<b>Average daily prison population in Scotland</b>				
By gender of prisoners				
	Male	Female	Total	% Female
2004/05	6,444	332	6,776	4.9%
2005/06	6,521	335	6,856	4.9%
2006/07	6,833	354	7,187	4.9%
2007/08	7,004	372	7,376	5.0%
2008/09	7,413	414	7,827	5.3%
2009/10	7,538	426	7,964	5.3%
2010/11	7,418	436	7,854	5.6%
2011/12	7,710	469	8,179	5.7%
2012/13	7,598	459	8,057	5.7%
2013/14	7,462	432	7,894	5.5%
2014/15	7,306	425	7,731	5.5%
2015/16	7,272	404	7,676	5.3%
2016/17	7,185	366	7,552	4.8%
2017/18	7,094	370	7,464	5.0%
2018/19	7,405	384	7,789	4.9%
2019/20	7,796	402	8,198	4.9%
2020/21	7,039	300	7,339	4.1%
2021/22	7,221	283	7,504	3.8%

Source: Scottish Government, Prison statistics and population projections Scotland 2013/14; Scottish Prison Service, [Annual population](#)

The average daily prison population increased by 178% between 1900 and 2021/22. To put this increase into context the figure should be considered alongside population growth in Scotland - from approximately 3 million to 4.6 million (54%). The table below shows the size of the prison population relative to the general population, according to decade averages since 1901.



Source: Mitchell, B. (1988) *British Historical Statistics*, p. 15-16; Scottish Government, *Prison statistics and population projections Scotland 2013/14*, accessed 6 June 2016; Scottish Prison Service, *Scottish Prison Service, Annual prison population*; ONS *Mid-year population estimates (latest 2021)*.

Notes: Population of Scotland includes only those aged 15 or over

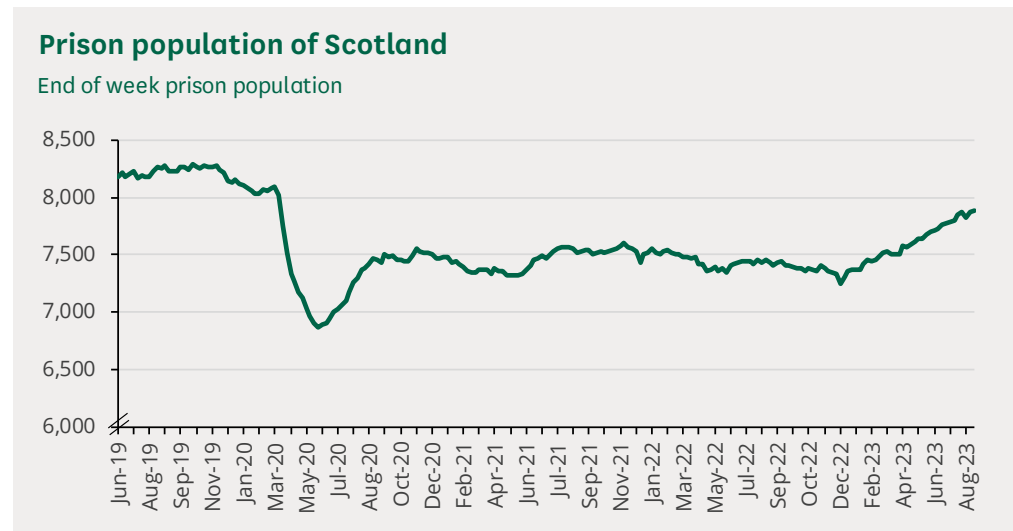
In 1901 there were around 98 prisoners per 100,000 head of population aged 15 and over in Scotland, dropping to around 36 per 100,000 in 1941.<sup>20</sup> By 1971 this rate had risen to around 138 per 100,000. In 2021/22 there were around 162 prisoners per 100,000 head of population.

## 2.2

## Recent trends and projections

The average daily prison population in Scotland increased by 21% between 2004/05 and 2011/12. After this point the prison population fell steadily, falling by 9% overall between 2011/12 and 2017/18. The prison population then rose to its highest annual average of 8,198 prisoners in 2019/20, before falling again during the pandemic. Current figures show an average prison population of 7,504 in 2021/22.

<sup>20</sup> This relates to the population aged 15 or over.



Source: Scottish Prison Service, [SPS Prison Population: Weekly population](#)

The SPS also publishes a weekly count of the prison population, which shows that the prison population fell substantially during the pandemic – the result of fewer people entering custody during lockdown. Although it rose again during the summer of 2020, it remained static at around 750 below its pre-pandemic level between late 2020 and the end of 2022. However, the weekly count of prison population has risen steadily since December 2022, reaching 7,885 as of 18 August 2023. This is the highest count since 20 March 2020, the last count before lockdowns were announced.<sup>21</sup>

The current projections for the Scottish prison population were made by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) in December 2013.<sup>22</sup> The SPS make three alternative projections based on models of different scenarios that could affect the prison in-take. The 2013 projections predict that “the daily prison population in Scotland will remain stable over the projection period with an annual average of 7,800” until 2022/23.

The actual annual prison population was slightly lower than projected between 2015/16 and 2017/18, while it exceeded its projection in 2019/20 by around 5%. In the most recent two years, 2020/21 and 2021/22, the prison population was below its projection of 7,800, as a result of the pandemic.

<sup>21</sup> Scottish Prison Service [SPS Prison Population: Weekly population](#)

<sup>22</sup> Scottish Prison Service [Prison statistics and population projections Scotland: 2013-14](#)

Prison population projections, as of December 2013				
Scotland				
	High variant	Main variant	Low variant	Actual
2013-14	.	.	.	7,894
2014-15	8,400	7,800	7,700	7,731
2015-16	8,600	7,800	7,600	7,675
2016-17	8,800	7,900	7,500	7,552
2017-18	9,100	7,800	7,400	7,464
2018-19	9,300	7,800	7,300	7,789
2019-20	9,500	7,800	7,200	8,198
2020-21	9,700	7,800	7,100	7,339
2021-22	10,000	7,800	7,000	7,504
2022-23	10,200	7,800	6,900	

Source: Scottish Prison Service [Prison statistics and population projections Scotland: 2013-14](#)

## 2.3 Type of custody and sentence length

According to the SPS annual prison population estimates, the average daily prison population for 2021/22 was 7,504.<sup>23</sup> Of those, 2,103 (28%) were prisoners on remand – either awaiting trial or sentencing.<sup>24</sup> The remaining 5,401 (72%) were sentenced prisoners.

The latest available data on sentence length is from the Scottish Prison Service's [Annual report and accounts for 2021/22](#). In that year, 41% of sentenced prisoners were serving sentences of less than 4 years in length.

## 2.4 Age profile of prisoners

The latest statistics for the age profile of prisoners over the past decade show that the most significant change in age demographic occurred in the 16-24 category. In 2011/12, 26% of prisoners were aged 16-24 compared with just 11% in 2021/22. The age group 25-34 remained stable over the decade, while the 35-44 age group grew from 23% of the prison population in 2011/12 to 29% in 2021/22.

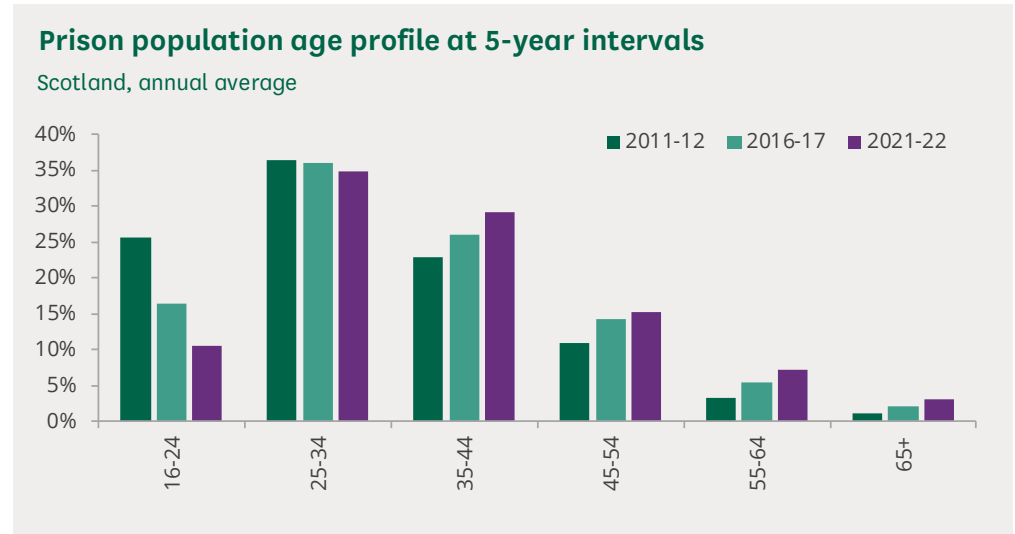
Overall, the age group 24-44 made up around 60% of the average prison population over the past decade. For context, in 2021/22 only 28% of people in Scotland were aged 24-44<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Note that this differs slightly from the total of 7,505 in the SPS Annual report and accounts.

<sup>24</sup> Scottish Prison Service, [SPS Prison Population: Annual population](#)

<sup>25</sup> [Scottish Government Mid 2021 Population Estimates](#)

The 55+ age group grew from around 4% of the prison population in 2010/11 to 10% in 2020/21.



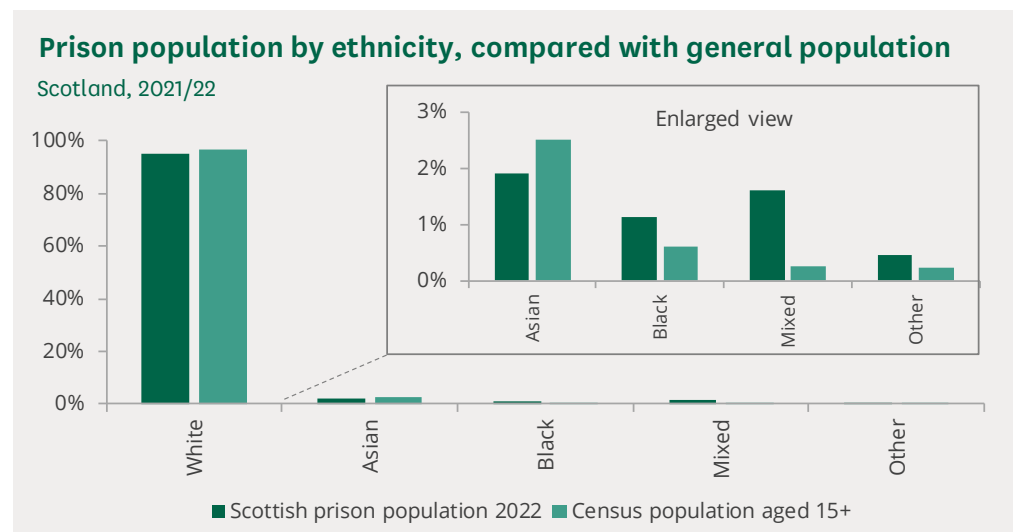
Source: SPS, [Scottish Prison Population Statistics, 2021-22](#)  
Notes: Annual average. Age groups combined from original.

## 2.5 Ethnicity and Religion

The latest statistics on the ethnicity of prisoners are for the year 2021/22 and the latest on religion are for 2013/14.

### Ethnicity

As of 2021/22, the Scottish prison population was just under 95% White. Asian ethnicities accounted for 1.9%, Black ethnicities for 1.1%, and Mixed or other ethnicities for 1.6%. As the chart shows, people of Asian ethnicities were slightly under-represented and people of Black or mixed ethnicities were over-represented in comparison with the general population.



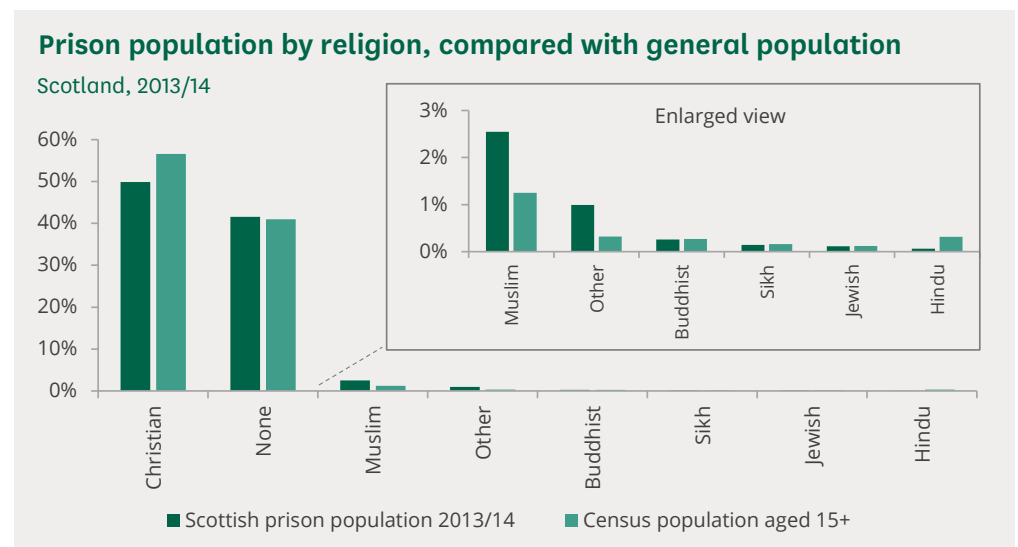


Source: Scottish Government, [Scottish Prison Population Statistics, 2021-22](#)

**Notes:** Prison population on average throughout 2020/21. General population from Scotland Census 2011.

## Religion

As of 30 June 2013 just over 4,600 prisoners (58% of the prison population) in Scotland indicated that they held religious beliefs. Of these, 93% were Christian (of various denominations). Muslim prisoners accounted for 4.4%. Together Buddhist, Sikh, Jewish, Hindu and other religions accounted for 2.7% of the religious prison population. Just over 3,270 prisoners (42% of the prison population) held no religious beliefs.



Source: Scottish Government, [Prison statistics and population projections Scotland 2013/14](#)

The proportion of Muslims among the prison population was greater than that amongst the general population. According to the 2011 Census<sup>26</sup>, Muslims accounted for around 1.2% of the Scottish population aged 15 and over. In prison the proportion was over twice that at 2.5%. Aside from the “other” grouping, no other religion had a higher proportion of representation in prisons than among the general population. Individuals with no religious identity accounted for around 41% of the general population and just over 41% of the prison population.

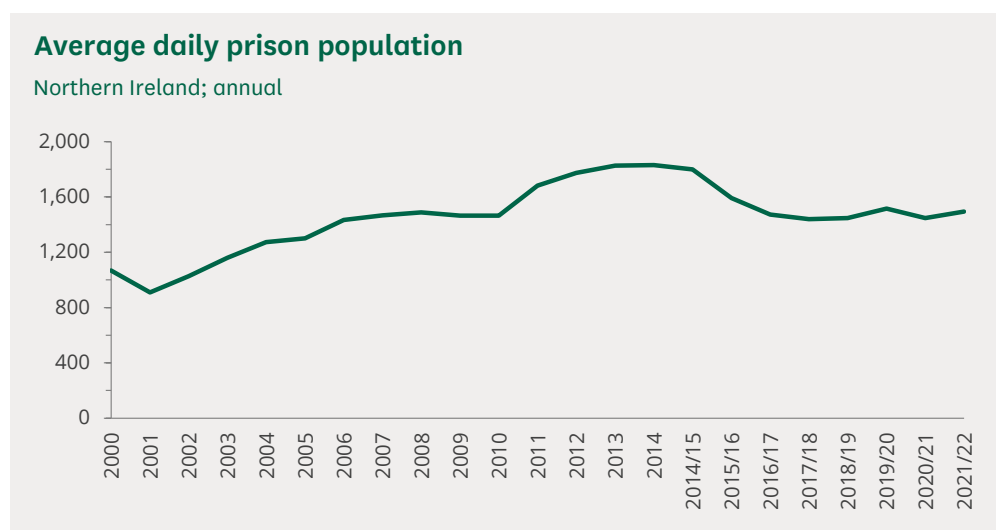
<sup>26</sup> Scotland Census, [Census 2001-2011](#)

## 3 Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Department of Justice (DoJ) has produced statistics on the prison population in Northern Ireland from 2000 onwards. From 2000-2014 these were produced by calendar year and from 2014/15 onwards they have been published by financial year.

In the year ending March 2022, the average daily prison population in Northern Ireland was 1,494.<sup>27</sup> This was marginally higher than the equivalent figure in 2020/21 but lower than the pre-pandemic average prison population of 1,516 in 2019/20. Despite the slight dip during the pandemic, the prison population in 2021/22 was still 40% higher than in the year 2000.

The chart below shows the average daily prison population since 2000 (the earliest year available). In 2014, the series switches from calendar to financial year.



Source: Northern Ireland Department of Justice, [The Northern Ireland Prison Population](#), various years

<sup>27</sup> DoJ, [The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2021-22](#)

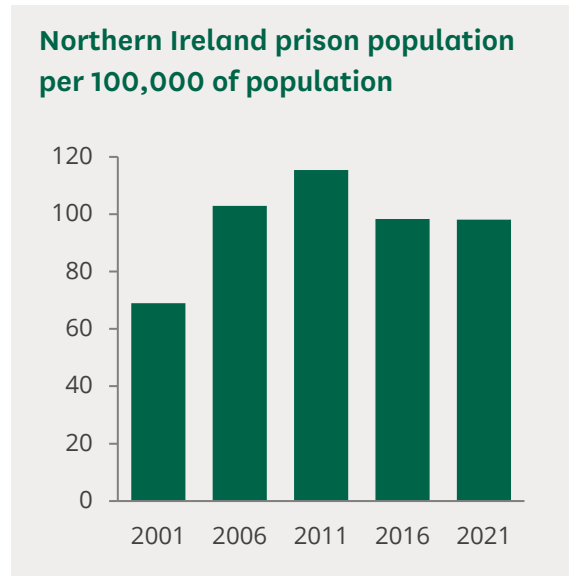
## 3.1

### Recent trends and projections

The average daily prison population in 2000 was just over 1,000. After a drop in 2001 the population increased year on year until 2008 when the population was 63% higher than in 2001. From 2011 the population again increased year on year until 2014.

In 2014 calendar year, the average daily prison population was around 1,830. The average figure for 2014 was 71% greater than for the same period in 2000. In 2021/22, the average daily population was 18% lower than in 2014.

In 2001 there were around 69 prisoners per 100,000 head of population. In 2021/22, this had increased to 98 per 100,000 although that was lower than in some previous years, notably the early 2010s.



Source: [NISRA, NI mid-year population](#), [Northern Ireland Prison Service](#)

The DoJ does not routinely publish **prison population projections** however it does produce them and has released them under Freedom of Information (FoI) requests.

The most recent projections to be disclosed were made in 2012 and predicted a rise in the prison population to around 2,250 by 2022.<sup>28</sup> However, since these projections were made, the prison population has fallen, rather than risen as predicted. In each year since 2012, the actual prison population has been lower than the 'best' case (i.e. lowest) projection made in 2012. It is highly likely that the projections have now been revised down.

<sup>28</sup> Northern Ireland Prison Service [FOI Case No. 13:454](#)

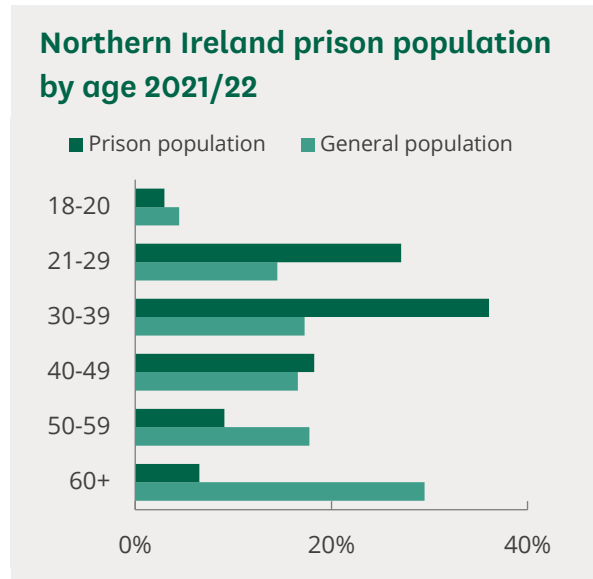
## 3.2

## Age Profile of Prisoners

People aged 21-29 accounted for 27% of the prison population in 2021/22 compared with 14% amongst the general population.<sup>29, 30</sup>

Prisoners aged 30-39 accounted for 36% of the prison population and 40-49 and 50-59 year olds accounted for 18% and 9% respectively.

Prisoners aged 60 years and older accounted for 7% of the prison population, compared to 29% of the general population.



Source: [Northern Ireland Prison Population 2021/22](#)

The graph shows the age distribution in the prison population. Please note that only prisoners sentenced to immediate custody are shown here.

<sup>29</sup> DoJ, [The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2021/22](#). Please note that these figures are only for the prison population sentenced to immediate custody and do not include those on remand.

<sup>30</sup> [NISRA, NI mid-year population estimates 2020](#)

## 4 Cost per prisoner

The cost per prison place and cost per prisoner in England and Wales are published in the Ministry of Justice's [Prison and Probation Performance Statistics](#) collection. These include the cost per prisoner at individual establishments.

The Ministry of Justice has several different methods of estimating the average cost per prisoner. The 2021-22 figures show that in **England and Wales**:

- The average direct cost per prisoner in was £31,476 but taking into account all resource expenditure the overall cost per prisoner was £47,434.<sup>31</sup>
- The average direct cost *per prison place* in was £30,987 but taking into account all resource expenditure the overall cost per place was £46,696.

In **Scotland**, the Prison Service publishes the annual cost of prison in its [Annual Report and Accounts](#). In 2021/22, the average annual cost *per prison place* in Scotland was £41,858. The cost per prison place on a resource accounting basis (including depreciation and impairment charges) was £46,892.<sup>32</sup>

In **Northern Ireland**, the Prison Service also publishes an annual figure of the cost per prison place in its [Annual Report and Accounts](#). In 2022/23 the annual cost per prison place in Northern Ireland was £47,927.<sup>33</sup> The costs should not be compared across jurisdictions since they are calculated in different ways.

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<sup>31</sup> Direct Resource Expenditure is net expenditure managed and recorded at each prison. Overall Resource Expenditure also includes net expenditure met at regional or national level and recorded in the Annual accounts of HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS)

<sup>32</sup> Scottish Prison Service [Annual Report and Accounts 2021/22, p.108](#)

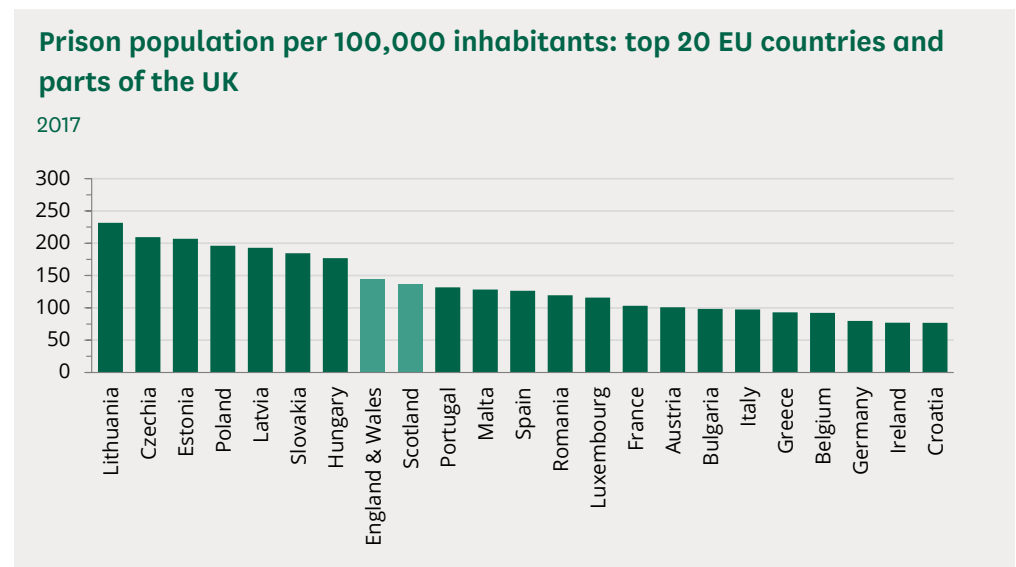
<sup>33</sup> Northern Ireland Prison Service [Annual Report and Accounts 2022/23](#), p.19.

## 5 International Comparisons

Comparisons between countries should be made with caution. All countries have different criminal justice systems and different levels and varieties of prison establishments.

### 5.1 Prison Population

Eurostat publishes the number of prisoners per 100,000 head of population for EU countries. The latest complete dataset including all the UK jurisdictions is for 2017. Rates per 100,000 head of population for the UK jurisdictions may differ from those stated earlier in this briefing as rates are for the entire population, rather than just the population aged 15 and older.



Source: Eurostat, [Prisoners by age and sex - number and rate for the relevant sex and age groups](#), Accessed September 2023

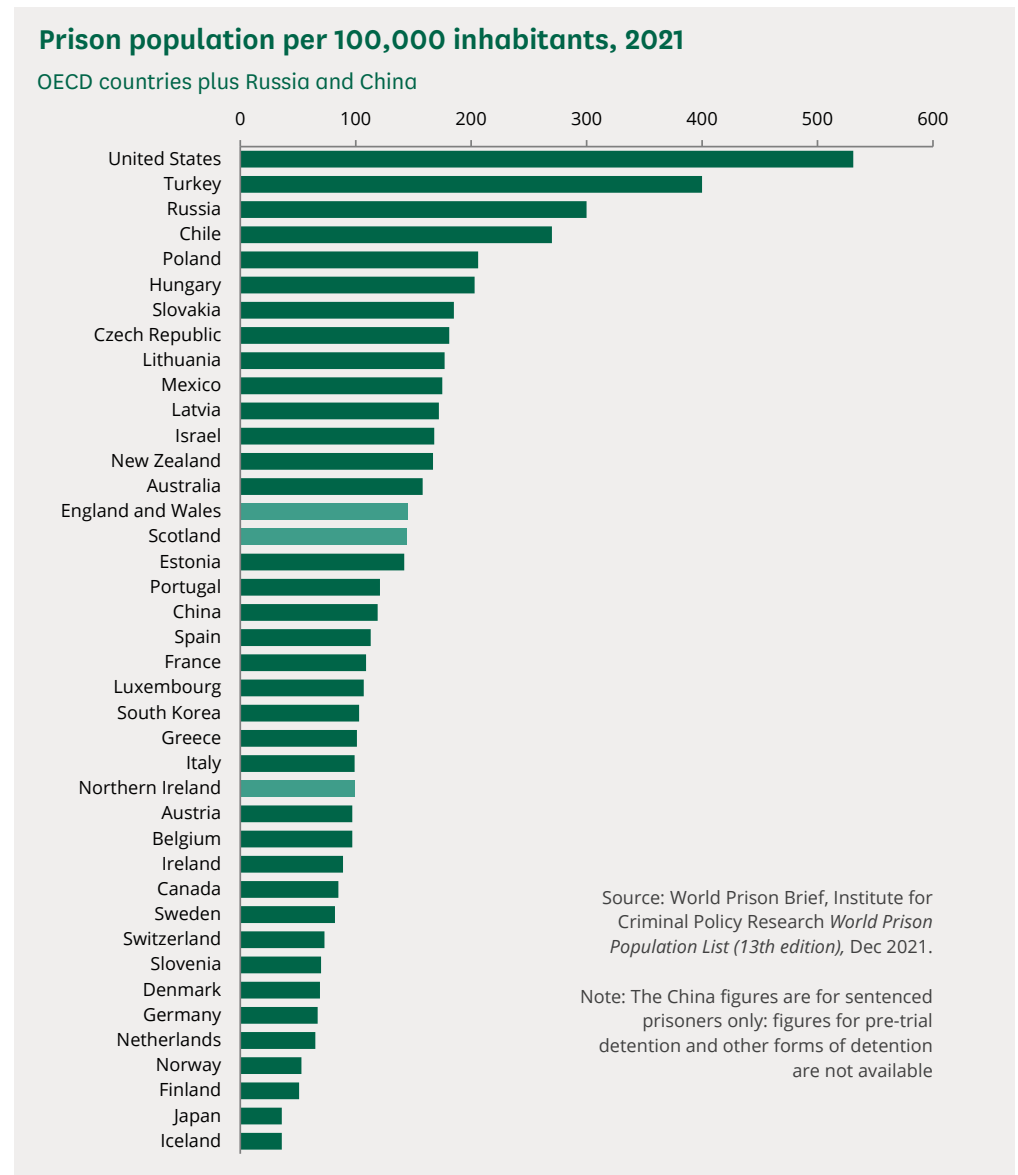
According to the Eurostat data, England and Wales had 144 prisoners per 100,000 head of population, the 8th highest rate among EU countries and the highest amongst western European jurisdictions.<sup>34</sup> Scotland had the 9th highest with 137 prisoners per 100,000. Northern Ireland had 76 prisoners per 100,000 of population and was ranked 24<sup>th</sup>.

Outside of Europe, the data on prison population are more patchy and harder to compare across jurisdictions. Nonetheless, the Institute for Criminal Policy

<sup>34</sup> Note that these figures are different to those in other sections of this briefing because they are calculated using the whole population (not just those aged 15 or over) as the denominator.

Research keeps a database – the [World Prison Brief](#) – containing broadly comparable data on prison indicators.

The chart on the overleaf shows the prison population per 100,000 inhabitants in OECD countries and in Russia and China in 2021.<sup>35</sup> England and Wales rank the 15<sup>th</sup> highest among these countries, Scotland the 16<sup>th</sup>, and Northern Ireland the 26<sup>th</sup>.



Source: [World Prison Brief 2021](#)

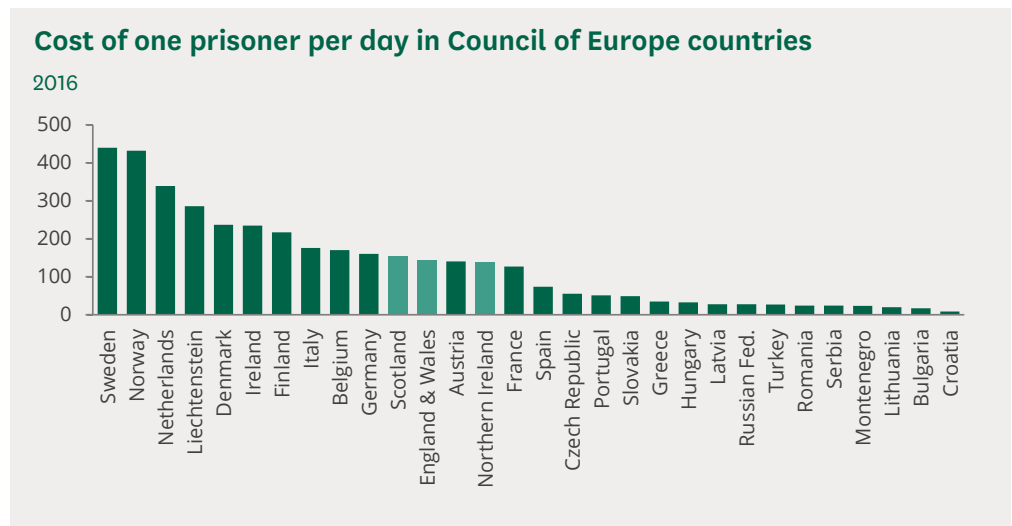
<sup>35</sup> The OECD is the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#)



## 5.2

## Costs

The Council of Europe's (CoE), annual penal statistics publish the cost per inmate figures for selected countries.<sup>36</sup> The most recent data are for 2015 but are incomplete. The figures for 2014 are complete and are shown in the graph below, having been converted from Euros to Pounds using the exchange rate of €1 = £1.2411.<sup>37</sup>



Source: Council of Europe, *SPACE I - Prison Populations. Survey 2015 Final Report*, 14 March 2017; Bank of England, series XUAAERS: Annual average Spot exchange rate, Euro into Sterling, accessed 3 Jan 2017

Notes: Average amount spent per day for the detention of one person in 2014.

The CoE table is denominated in Euros, Exchange rate 2014: €1 = £1.2411 The available data for European countries in 2014 show that Sweden and Norway spent the most per prisoner, at £439 and £432 respectively. Figures for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are all around £150 a day.

The figures are not directly comparable across countries since in some cases different expenses are included in the calculation of prisoner cost

<sup>36</sup> Council of Europe, annual penal statistics; *SPACE I - Prison Populations. Survey 2015 Final Report*, 14 March 2017

<sup>37</sup> Bank of England, series XUAAERS: Annual average Spot exchange rate, Euro into Sterling, accessed 3 Jan 2017

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