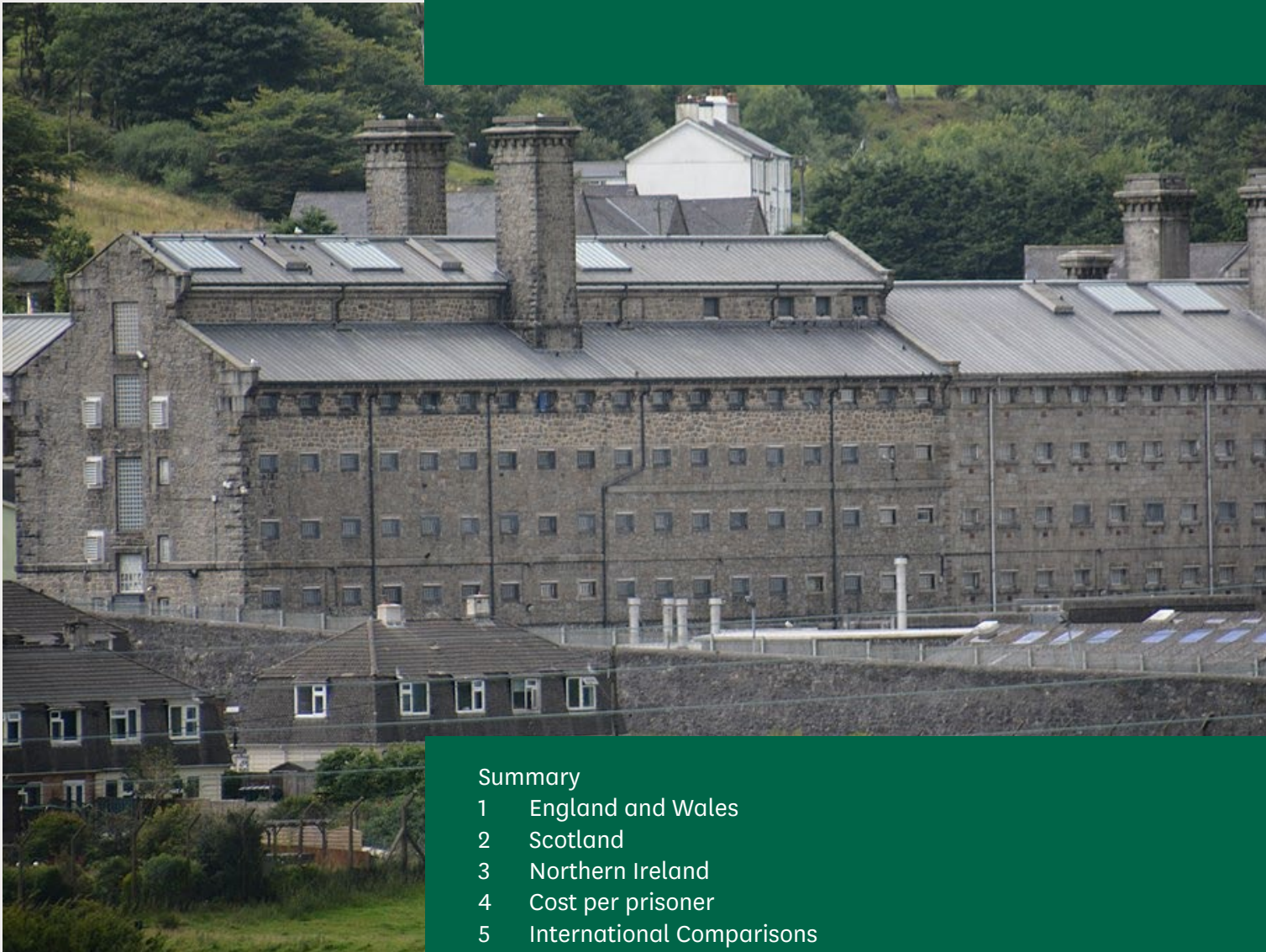


By Georgina Sturge

8 July 2024

UK Prison Population Statistics



Summary

- 1 England and Wales
- 2 Scotland
- 3 Northern Ireland
- 4 Cost per prisoner
- 5 International Comparisons

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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 March 2024, the UK had a total **prison population of approximately 97,700 people**, comprising

- 87,900 in England and Wales¹,
- 8,000 in Scotland², and
- 1,900 in Northern Ireland.³

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%.⁴ It has steadily grown since then 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, 7,422 in Scotland and 1,685 in Northern Ireland in 2022/23.

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.

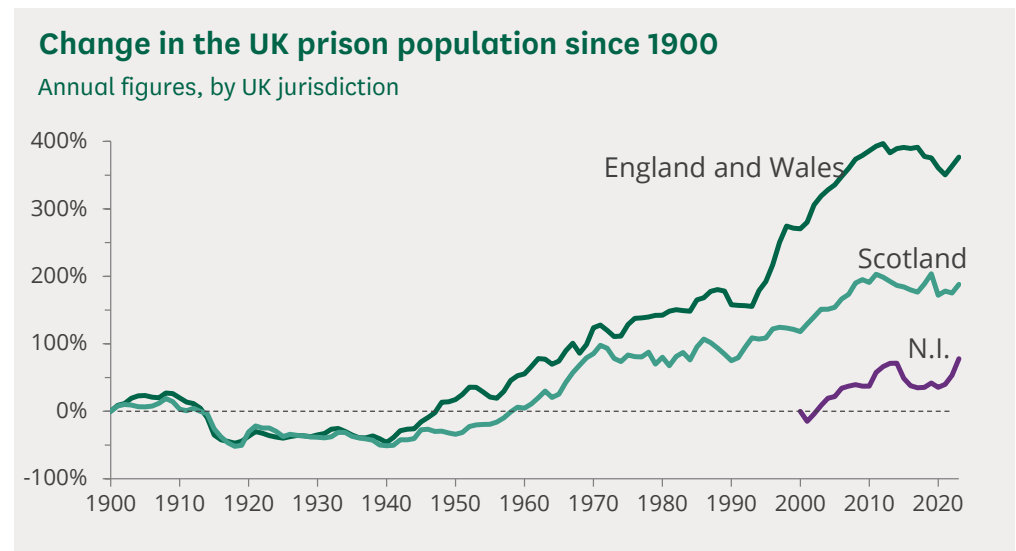
The graph below shows prison population change relative to 1900 (and relative to 2000 for Northern Ireland).

¹ Ministry of Justice [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), figure for end of March 2024.

² Scottish Prison Service [Prison Population](#), figure for 29 March 2024.

³ Department of Justice [Weekly Situation Reports](#), figure for week ending 29 March.

⁴ 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 2022/23](#)

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 2022/23 the prison population of Northern Ireland increased by 58%. As of March 2024, it was around 1,900 which was historically high.

To put the prison population in context, it is possible to calculate the number of prisoners per 100,000 people in the general population. As of March 2024, there were approximately:

- 134 prisoners per 100,000 of the population in England and Wales
- 136 per 100,000 in Scotland.
- 88 per 100,000 in Northern Ireland.⁵

Prison population projections are made separately for the three jurisdictions. Those for England and Wales are the most long-term and project a prison population of between 95,100 and 114,200 by 2027.

There are many other statistics on the prison population available for England and Wales which are published in the Ministry of Justice's [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#). The key findings of the most recent annual figures are that,

⁵ The general population here includes people of all ages, although elsewhere in this briefing the population aged 15 and over is sometimes used. Population figures are 2022 mid-year estimates and prison population figures are from the last week in March.

- The prison population is ageing: in 2002, 15% were under the age of 21 compared with 4% in 2024 and the number over the age of 50 went from 7% in 2002 to 18% in 2024.
- Prison sentences have been lengthening, with 57% of determinate prison sentences being over 4 years in 2024 compared with 40% in 2013⁶,
- Foreign nationals made up 12% of the prison population, and
- People of minority ethnicities made up 27% of the prison population compared with 18% of the general population.

As of May 2024,

- 60% of prisons in England and Wales were classified as crowded.⁷

Each jurisdiction also publishes data on the **cost per prisoner or prison place**. The average cost per prison place was £33,628 in England and Wales, £44,620 in Scotland in 2020-21, and £47,927 in Northern Ireland in 2022-23.⁸

⁶ Excludes indeterminate-length sentences

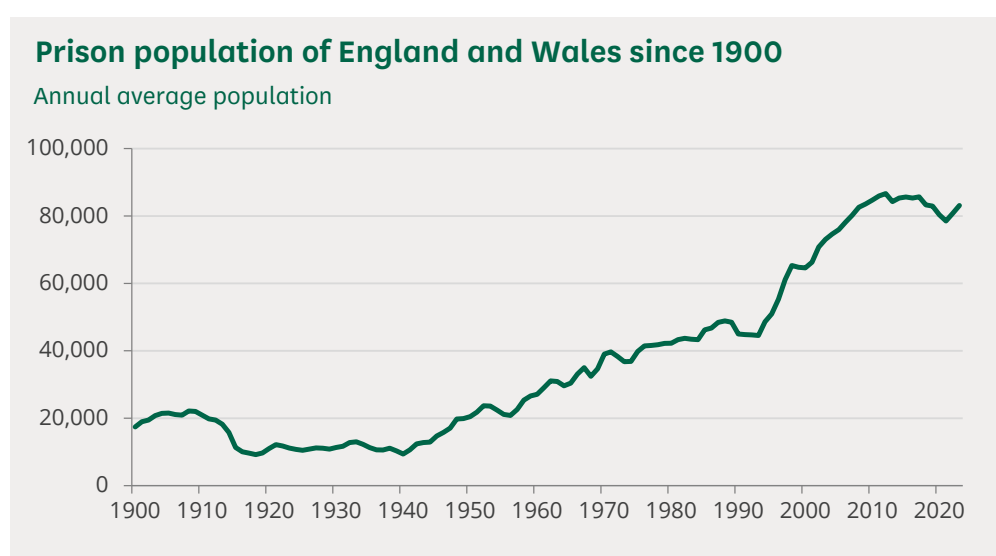
⁷ MoJ, [Population bulletin: monthly May 2024](#)

⁸ MoJ, [Prison performance statistics 2022-23](#); 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 the present. Since 2014, it has also published quarterly bulletins on the prison population which also contain some demographic breakdowns and other information.



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

Since 1900, the prison population has quadrupled in size, going from just over 17,400 to around 83,100 in 2023.⁹ During the same time, the adult* population of England and Wales just over doubled in size, so the rate of imprisonment relative to the population has increased.¹⁰

The prison population was relatively stable between 1915 and 1945, after which point it began to grow steadily. In the mid-1990s, it began to rise steeply, with the prison population going on to double in size between 1992 and 2012. Over the most recent decade, the prison population shrunk temporarily – in part due to the pandemic – before returning to the same level as in the early-2010s.

To put the numbers in context, in 1901 there were around 86 prisoners per 100,000 people aged 15 and over in the general population and in 2021 there

⁹ The 2023 figure is for the year ending June.

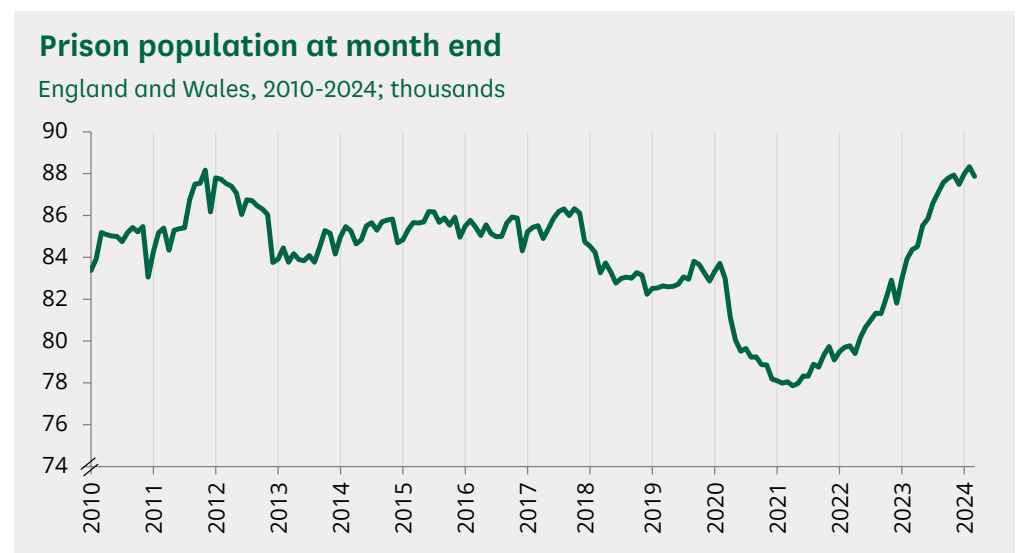
¹⁰ *Based on census figures from 1901 and 2021, the population aged 15 and above grew from around 22 million to 49 million. Fifteen is the age at which boys can be placed in a young offenders institution.

were 159 per 100,000.¹¹ The lowest rate recorded was at the start of the 1940s when there were around 33 prisoners per 100,000 people aged 15 and over.

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 February 2024, the prison population reached the highest end-of-month level ever recorded, which was just over 88,300. As of the end of March 2024, the total prison population stood at around 87,900, which was slightly lower than in the previous two months.

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



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

Prior to 2024, the highest end-of-month population recorded had been in November 2011, when it was around 88,200. The rise in the prison population over the last months of that year can be partially explained by the remanding and sentencing of individuals following the riots in England in August 2011.¹²

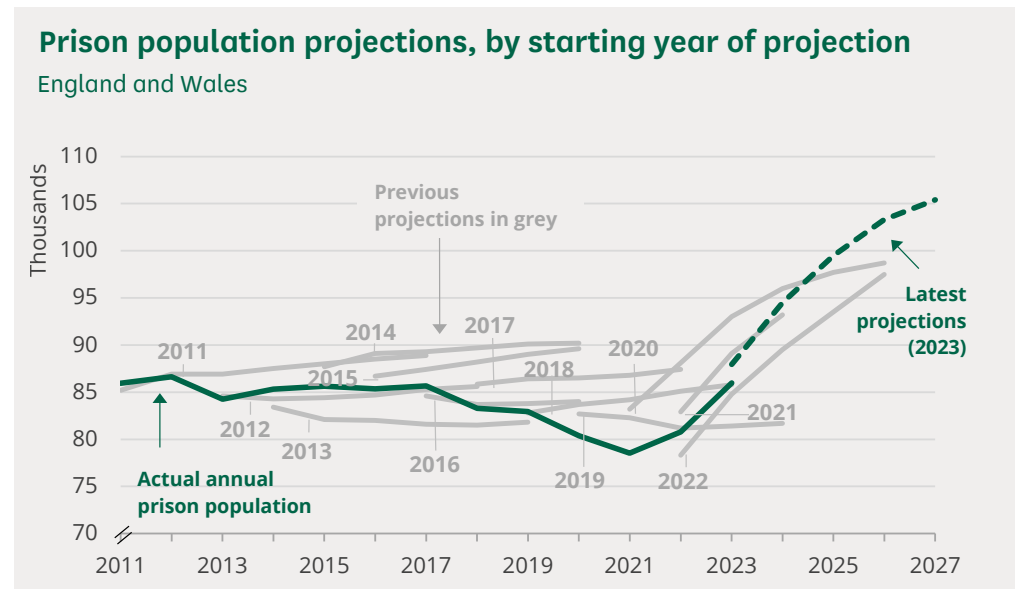
The prison population stayed relatively stable after that point until 2017, when it started to decline, its lowest point since 2008 in 2018, of around 82,200. At the start of 2020, the population fell sharply as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. During the pandemic the prison population reduced by nearly 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.

¹¹ 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.

¹² See MoJ [Statistical bulletin on the public disorder of 6th-9th August 2011](#), 13 September 2012.

Since early 2021, the population has been growing. There was an overall rise in the end-of-month prison population of around 5,000 people between the beginning and end of 2023.

This rise is expected to continue. The latest prison **population projections** were released in February 2024 and project a rise to 94,500 prisoners by November 2024 (this would be a rise of over 7,000 on the population recorded at the end of May 2024).¹³ The latest projections expect the prison population to grow to between 95,100 and 114,200 by November 2027.¹⁴



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.

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.

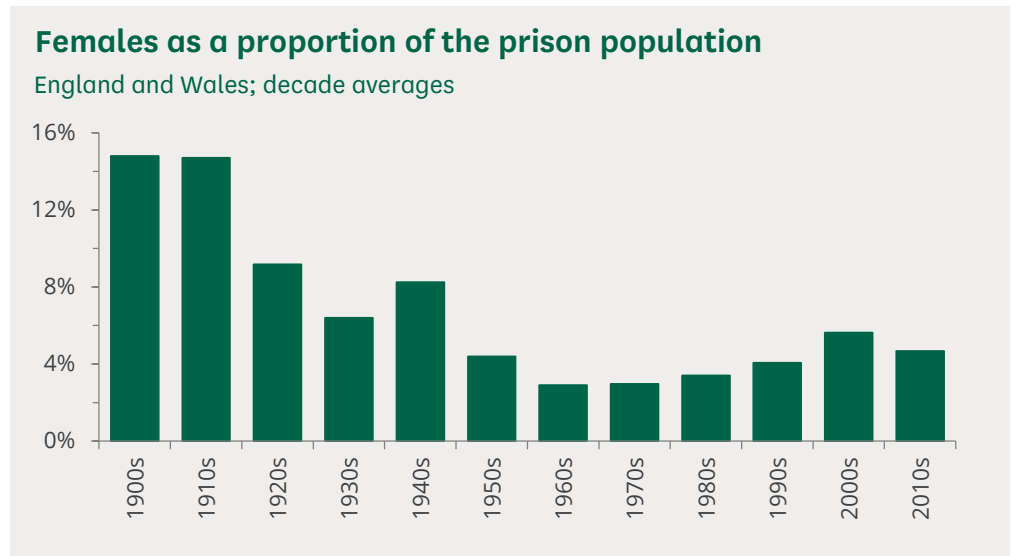
1.3 Sex and gender

In 2023, 4% of the prison population was female, down from 17% in 1900. The chart below shows that this decline all took place in the first half of the twentieth century, with the proportion having risen again slightly in recent

¹³ MoJ, [Population bulletin: monthly May 2024](#)

¹⁴ MoJ, [Prison Population Projections: 2023 to 2028](#), 29 February 2024

decades. The time the female proportion of the prison population was lowest was in 1968 and 1969, when it was around 2%.



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 100,000.¹⁵

Transgender prisoners

In the [Offender Management Statistics](#), prisoners are grouped into male and female without 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 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.”¹⁶

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ A local case board is a meeting convened within 14 days of arrival into custody for “individuals who seek to live permanently and consistently in a different gender to the sex registered at birth” to

Prisoners who possess a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) are excluded from the detailed data on transgender prisoners. As of 31 March 2023, 13 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.” Reasons for not having a local case board include people not being in prison for long enough to consider it worthwhile, and people not considering it necessary in general.

The latest [HMPPS report](#) indicates that on 31 March 2023,

- There were 268 transgender prisoners in England and Wales, not including those with a GRC.
- Of these, 225 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.
- 220 of these individuals were in male prisons and 48 in female prisons.
- 80 out of 119 prisons had at least one prisoner who identified as transgender.

1.4

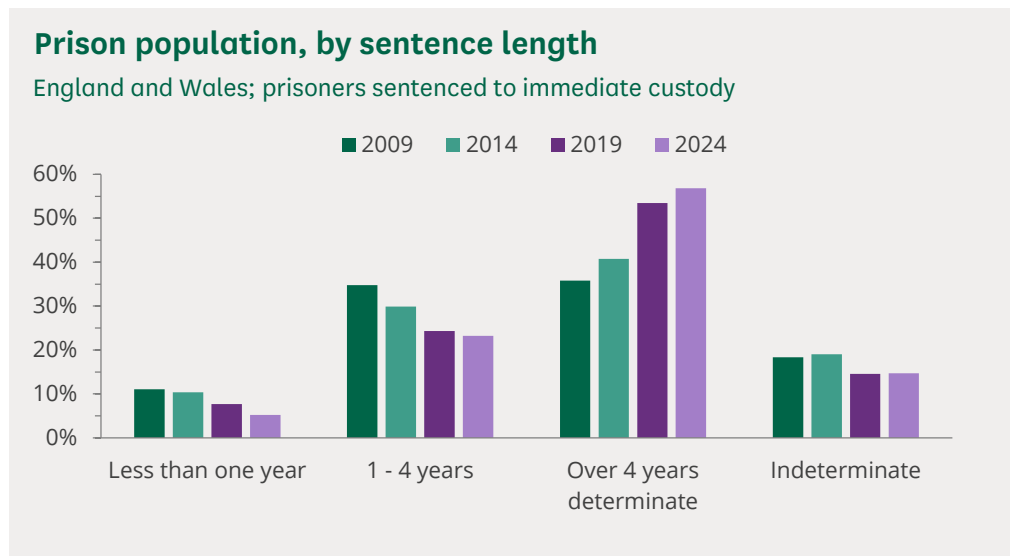
Sentence length and offences

As at the end of March 2024, the most frequent length of determinate sentence being served was ‘4 years or more’.¹⁷ Around 57% of the sentenced population were serving this length of sentence. Just under a quarter of prisoners (23%) were serving sentences ranging from 1-4 years and around 15% were serving indeterminate sentences.

As the chart below shows, over the past fifteen years, people serving short sentences of less than one year and sentences of 1-4 years have accounted for a shrinking proportion of the prison population. The proportion serving determinate sentences of over 4 years, meanwhile, has risen.

consider their care and management. Where a Local Case Board considers that the safest arrangements both for the transgender person and the safety of others in custody would be best served by allocation to another part of the estate a referral must be made to a Complex Case Board. See [‘The care and management of individuals who are transgender’](#) (15 January 2024).

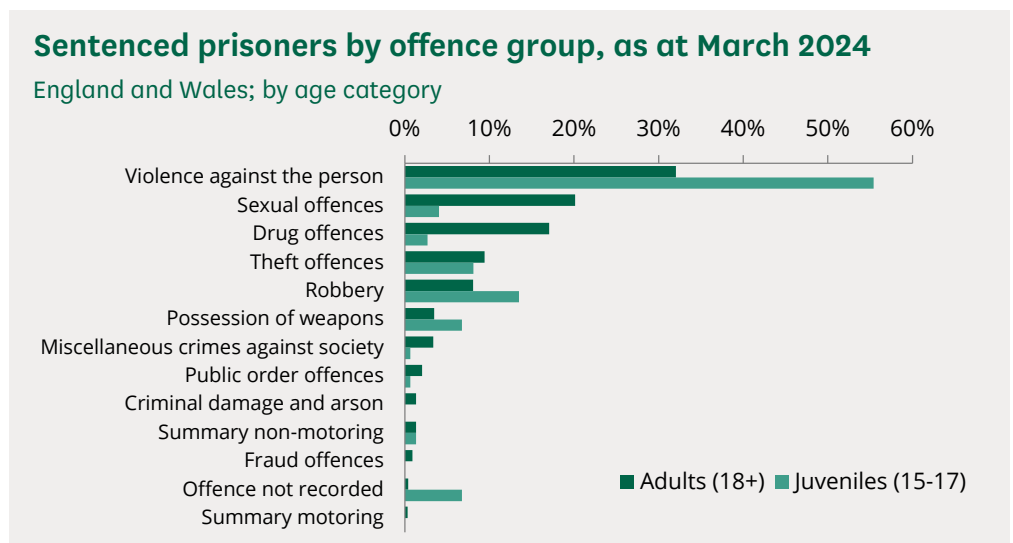
¹⁷ A ‘determinate’ prison sentence is for a fixed length of time. An ‘indeterminate’ prison sentence doesn’t have a fixed length.



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

Notes: Figures are as of end of March except for 2009 which is end of June.

Prisoners in custody for violence against the person offences accounted for the highest proportion of prisoners at the end of March 2024 (32%). Sexual offences was the second highest category for adults (20%) while for juveniles this was robbery (14%).



Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#); October to December 2023, table 1.Q.5

Notes: Only includes offenders sentenced to immediate custody.

1.5

Prisoner Demographics

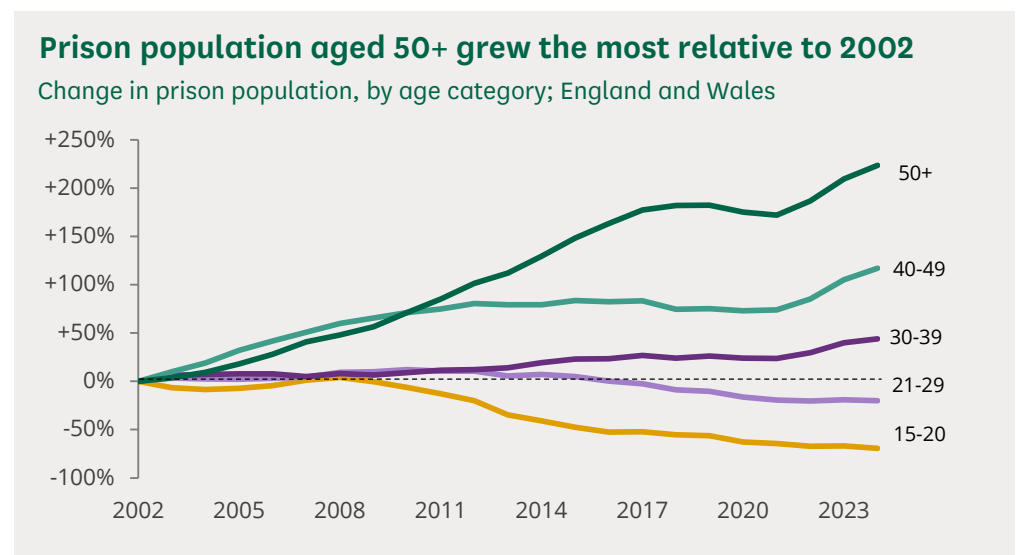
Age Profile of Prisoners

The current data series on prisoner age goes back to 2002.¹⁸ 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 March 2024, under 21s accounted for 4% of the prison population – a decrease of approximately 7,500 since 2002.

Age Profile of Prisoners England and Wales, March 2024		
Age	Number	%
15-17	264	0.3%
18-20	3,090	4%
21-24	8,155	9%
25-29	13,226	15%
30-39	29,339	33%
40-49	18,175	21%
50-59	9,391	11%
60+	6,229	7%

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 24% in 2024. 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 2024.

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



Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), various years up to March 2024

Nationality

At the end of March 2024 there were 10,400 foreign nationals within the prison population. Foreign nationals came from 168 different countries.¹⁹

¹⁸ The latest figures can be found in table 1.3 of the MoJ’s [Offender Management Statistics](#), ‘Prison Population’ tables.

¹⁹ MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), 1.Q.12. This includes some overseas territories which are not sovereign states.

Nationality of prisoners

England and Wales, at 31 March 2024

	Total	%
British nationals	76,869	87%
Foreign nationals	10,422	12%
Nationality not recorded	578	0.7%
All nationalities	87,869	100%
EEA Europe	4,203	40%
Africa	1,831	18%
Non-EEA Europe	1,545	15%
Asia	1,260	12%
Middle East	677	6%
West Indies	527	5%
Central and South America	192	2%
North America	160	2%
Oceania	27	0%
All foreign nationals	10,422	100%

Source: MoJ, [Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2023](#), tables 1.Q.11 and 1.Q.12

Foreign nationals from Europe accounted for the greatest proportion of all foreign nationals within the prison population (40% from EEA countries and a further 15% from non-EEA European countries).²⁰ Those from Africa (17%) and Asia (12%) contributed the second and third largest proportions respectively. Prisoners originating from the EEA made up just under 5% of the total prison population.

The top ten countries foreign nationalities, as shown in the table below, accounted for 52% of all foreign nationals.

²⁰ The European Economic Area (EEA) is the EU plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. Switzerland is also included in this category since, although it is not an EEA member, its nationals have the same rights to live in the UK.

Top ten nationalities among foreign prisoners

England and Wales, at 31 March 2024

Nationality	Number	% of foreign
		national prisoners
Albanian	1,273	12%
Polish	906	9%
Romanian	750	7%
Irish	649	6%
Jamaican	381	4%
Lithuanian	361	3%
Pakistani	313	3%
Portuguese	290	3%
Indian	271	3%
Iraqi	259	2%
Other foreign nationals	4,969	48%
All foreign nationals	10,422	100%

Source: MoJ, [Offender management statistics quarterly: October to December 2023](#), table 1.Q.12

Ethnicity

As at the end of March 2024, just over a quarter of the prison population was from a minority ethnic group – this figure has stayed relatively constant since 2004.

Compared with the general population, people from ethnic minorities are over-represented within the prison population. In the prison population, 27% identified as an ethnic minority in 2024, compared with 18% in the general population.

Ethnicity of prisoners and the general population

England and Wales; March 2024

	Number	Prison population	% point change on 2004	Share of the general population
White	63,103	72%	3.0	82%
Mixed	4,188	5%	2.3	3%
Asian or Asian British	7,067	8%	2.9	9%
Black or Black British	10,624	12%	-1.4	4%
group	1,794	2%	1.1	2%
Not stated/Unrecorded	1,083	1%	-7.9	.
Total	87,859	100%	..	100%

Source: MoJ [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), table 1.Q.7; NOMIS, Census 2021.

Religion

At the end of March 2024, 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 2024 (31%) was roughly the same as in 2002.

Religion of prisoners and the general population				
England and Wales; March 2024				
	Number	Prison population	% point change on 2002	Share of the general population
Christian	39,068	44%	-13.6	46%
Muslim	15,909	18%	10.4	7%
Hindu	348	0%	0.0	2%
Sikh	578	1%	0.0	1%
Buddhist	1,656	2%	0.9	1%
Jewish	511	1%	0.3	1%
No religion	27,122	31%	-0.6	37%
Other	2,342	3%	2.1	1%
Not recorded	335	0%	0.4	6%
Total	87,869	100%	..	100%

Source: MoJ [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), table 1.Q.8; NOMIS, Census 2021

1.6 Prison crowding

A prison is classified as crowded 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 May 2024,²¹ 60% (71) of prison establishments were crowded. In total, crowded prisons held 9,600 more prisoners than the CNA of these establishments.

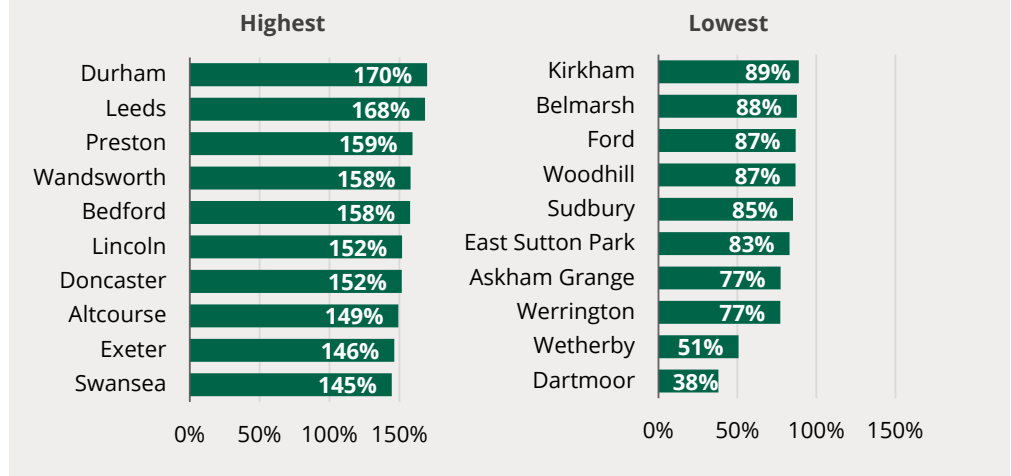
The chart below shows the establishments with the highest and lowest occupancy rate, relative to their CNA. HMP Durham was the most crowded, at 170% occupancy, followed by HMP Leeds and HMP Preston. The prisons with the lowest occupancy relative to their capacity were HMP Dartmoor (at 38%) capacity, HMP Wetherby, and HMP Werrington. HMP Dartmoor was partly vacated in March 2024 due to the discovery of "higher-than-normal" levels of radon gas.²²

²¹ MoJ, [Prison population figures: 2021](#)

²² BBC, 'Dartmoor Prison inmates moved over radon gas levels', 27 February 2024

Prison population relative to certified normal standard

Highest and lowest ratios; England and Wales, May 2024



Source: MoJ, [Prison population: 2024 monthly figures - May](#)

2 Scotland

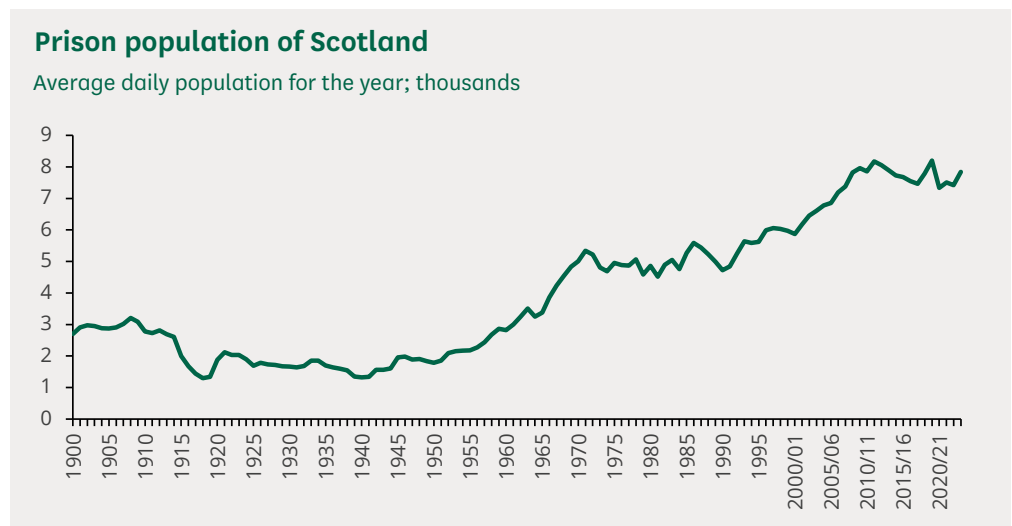
The Scottish Government publishes a statistical bulletin on Scottish prison statistics annually as part of a series on different aspects of the criminal justice system.

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.²³ 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 2022/23, 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 – 2022-23](#).

²³ Scottish Prison Service, [SPS Prison Population](#)

In 1900 the average daily prison population in Scotland was around 2,700 and it remained below 4,000 per year until 1967. During the late 1960s and 1970s it grew to an annual average of around 5,000, where it remained until the late 1990s when it began to consistently rise again.

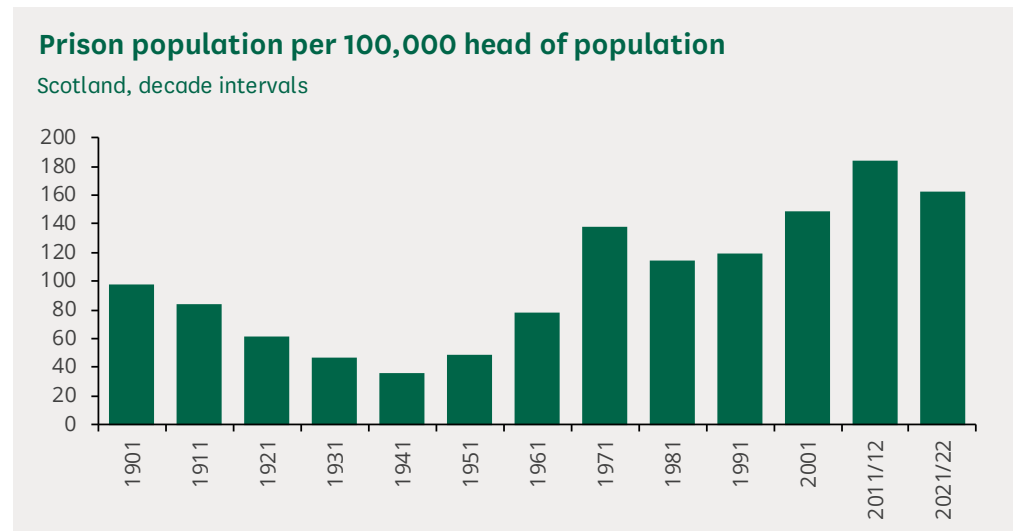
The highest annual average prison population recorded was 8,198 in 2019/20. During the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020/21, it dropped to an annual average of 7,339 which was the lowest it had been since 2006/07.

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 (2022/23) has seen a decline in the female prison population to its lowest point in the series (282 female prisoners).

Average daily prison population in Scotland				
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	7,506	283	7,221	3.9%
2022/23	7,426	282	7,143	3.9%

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

The average daily prison population increased by 175% between 1900 and 2022/23. 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 1941.²⁴ 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.

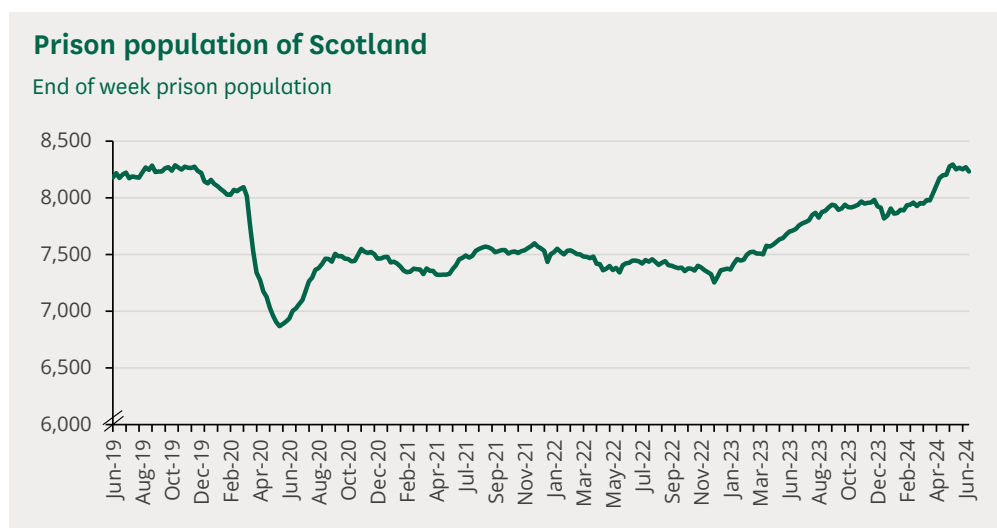
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Recent trends and projections

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 and rising again from 2021/22 onwards.

The chart below shows weekly figures since June 2019. The highest recorded figure in this series was 8,294 on Friday 17 May 2024. The chart shows the steep, temporary drop in the prison population which occurred between March and June 2020 as a result of the pandemic. Note that the y axis is truncated to make small changes more visible.

²⁴ This relates to the population aged 15 or over.



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

The last time long-term prison population projections were made for Scotland was in 2013.²⁵ Those projected a population of around 7,800 by 2022/23, which ended up being slightly higher than the true recorded annual average of around 7,400. More recent, short-term modelling suggests that the average daily prison population could be between 7,650 and 9,150 in October 2024.²⁶

Prison population projections and actual population figures				
Scotland				
	High variant	Main variant	Low variant	Actual
Projections made in 2013:				
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	7,845
Latest short-term projections				
Mar-24	8,650	.	7,500	7,960
Jun-24	8,450	.	7,350	8,250
Oct-24	9,150	.	7,650	.

Source: Scottish Prison Service [Prison statistics and population projections Scotland: 2013-14](#); SPS, [Scottish Prison Population Projections](#), November 2023, February 2024 and June 2024 editions.

²⁵ Scottish Prison Service, [Prison statistics and population projections Scotland: 2013-14](#)

²⁶ Scottish Prison Service, [Scottish Prison Population Projections: June 2024 Edition](#), 7 June 2024

2.3 Type of custody and sentence length

According to the SPS annual prison population estimates, the average daily prison population for 2022/23 was 7,422.²⁷ Of those, 1,804 (24%) were prisoners on remand – either awaiting trial or sentencing.²⁸ The remaining 5,583 (75%) were sentenced prisoners.

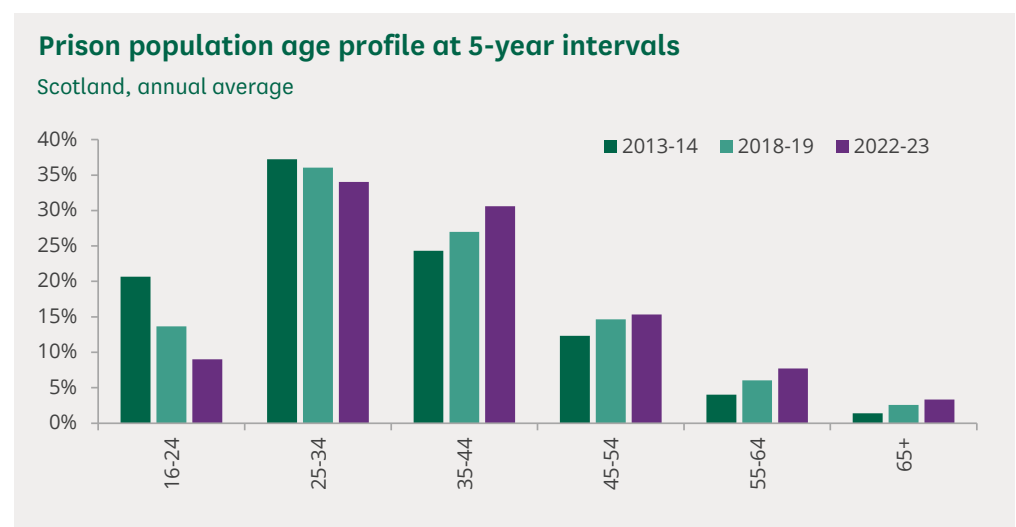
The latest available data on sentence length is from the Scottish Prison Service's [Annual report and accounts for 2022/23](#). In that year, 61% of sentenced prisoners were serving sentences of more than 4 years in length.

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 2013/14, 21% of prisoners were aged 16-24 compared with just 9% in 2021/22. The age group 25-34 reduced from 37% to 34% of the population over the decade, while the 35-44 age group grew from 24% to 31% in 2022/23.

Overall, the age group 24-44 made up around 63% of the average prison population over the past decade. For context, in 2021/22 only 28% of people in Scotland were aged 24-44²⁹.

The 55+ age group grew from around 5% of the prison population in 2010/11 to 11% in 2022/23.



²⁷ Note that this differs slightly from the total of 7,505 in the SPS Annual report and accounts.

²⁸ Scottish Prison Service, [SPS Prison Population: Annual population](#)

²⁹ [Scottish Government Mid 2021 Population Estimates](#)

Source: SPS, [Scottish Prison Population Statistics, 2022/23](#)

Notes: Annual average. Age groups combined from original.

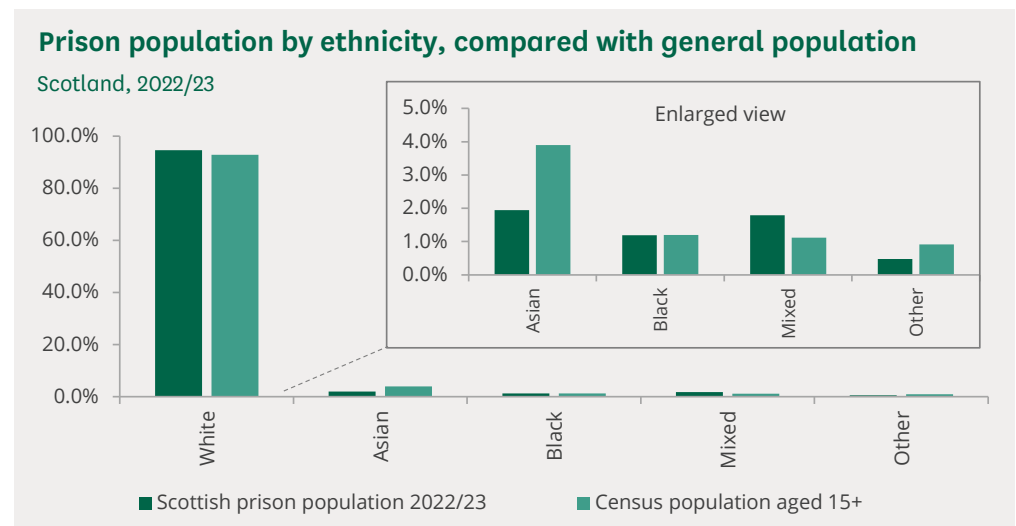
2.5

Ethnicity and Religion

The latest statistics on the ethnicity of prisoners are for the year 2022/23 and the latest on religion are for 2013/14.

Ethnicity

As of 2022/23, 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.

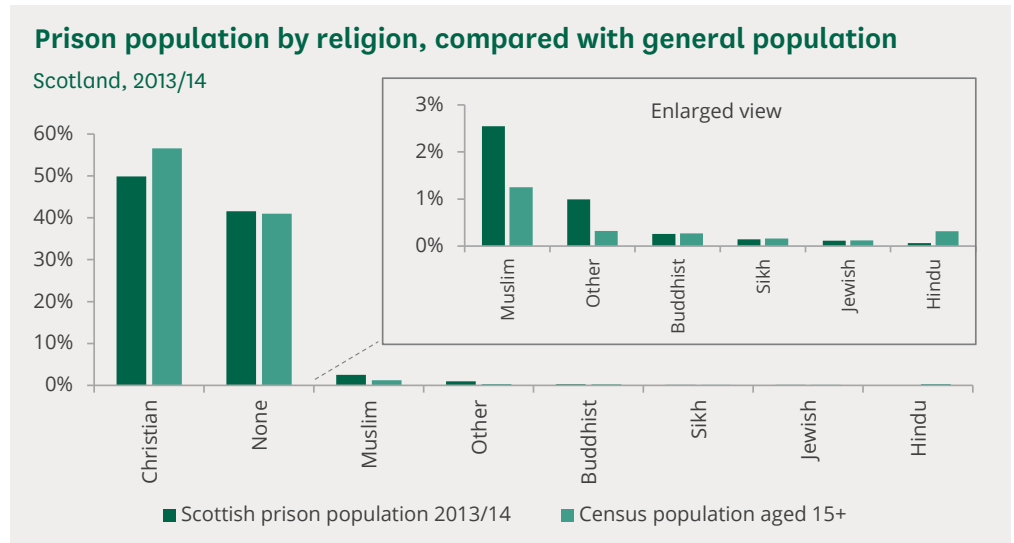


Source: Scottish Government, [Scottish Prison Population Statistics, 2022/23](#)

Notes: Prison population on average throughout 2020/21. General population from Scotland Census 2021.

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 Census³⁰, 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.

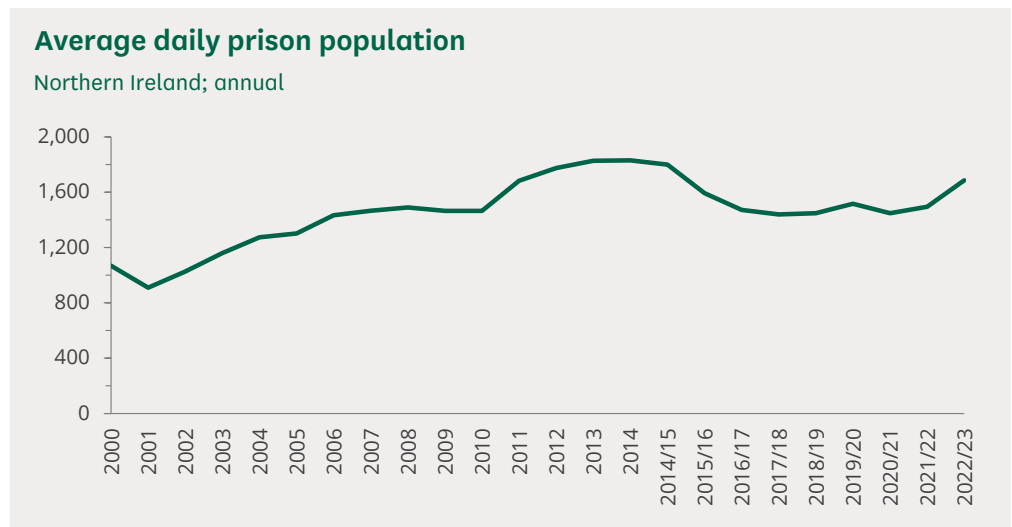
³⁰ Scotland Census, [Census 2001-2011](#)

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 2023, the average daily prison population in Northern Ireland was 1,685.³¹ This was the highest annual average since 2014/15 and continued an upwards trend since 2020/21. In that year, during the pandemic, the prison population had reduced slightly, although less noticeably than in the other UK jurisdictions.

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

³¹ DoJ, [The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2022-23](#)

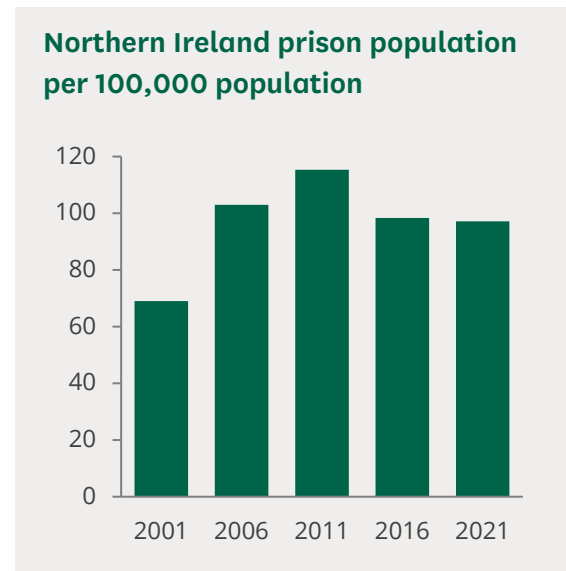
3.1

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, after which it gradually declined.

In 2014 calendar year, the average daily prison population was around 1,830. In 2022/23, the average daily population was 18% lower than this, at 1,685,

In 2001 there were around 69 prisoners per 100,000 head of population. In 2022/23, this had increased to 97 per 100,000 although that was lower than in some previous years, notably the early 2010s. The highest ratio recorded was 124 per 100,000 people in 2013.



Source: [NISRA. NI mid-year population](#) , [Northern Ireland Prison Population 2020/21](#)

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 2022.³² 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.

³² Northern Ireland Prison Service [FOI Case No. 13:454](#)

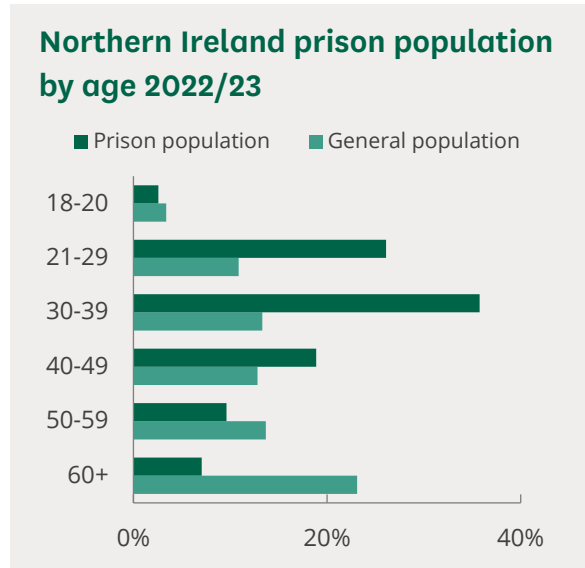
3.2

Age Profile of Prisoners

People aged 21-29 accounted for 26% of the prison population in 2022/23 compared with 11% of the general population.^{33,34}

Prisoners aged 30-39 accounted for 36% of the prison population and 40-49 and 50-59 year olds accounted for 19% and 10% respectively.

Prisoners aged 60 years and older accounted for 7% of the prison population, compared with 23% of the general population.



Source: [Northern Ireland Prison Population 2022/23](#)

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

³³ 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.

³⁴ [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 2022-23 figures show that in **England and Wales**:

- The average direct cost per prisoner in was £33,628 but taking into account all resource expenditure the overall cost per prisoner was £51,108.³⁵
- The average direct cost *per prison place* in was £34,034 but taking into account all resource expenditure the overall cost per place was £51,108.

In **Scotland**, the Prison Service publishes the annual cost of prison in its [Annual Report and Accounts](#). In 2022/23, the average annual cost *per prison place* in Scotland was £44,620. The cost per prison place on a resource accounting basis (including depreciation and impairment charges) was £50,578.³⁶

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 £47,927.³⁷ The costs should not be compared across jurisdictions since they are calculated in different ways.

³⁵ 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)

³⁶ Scottish Prison Service [Annual Report and Accounts 2022/23](#)

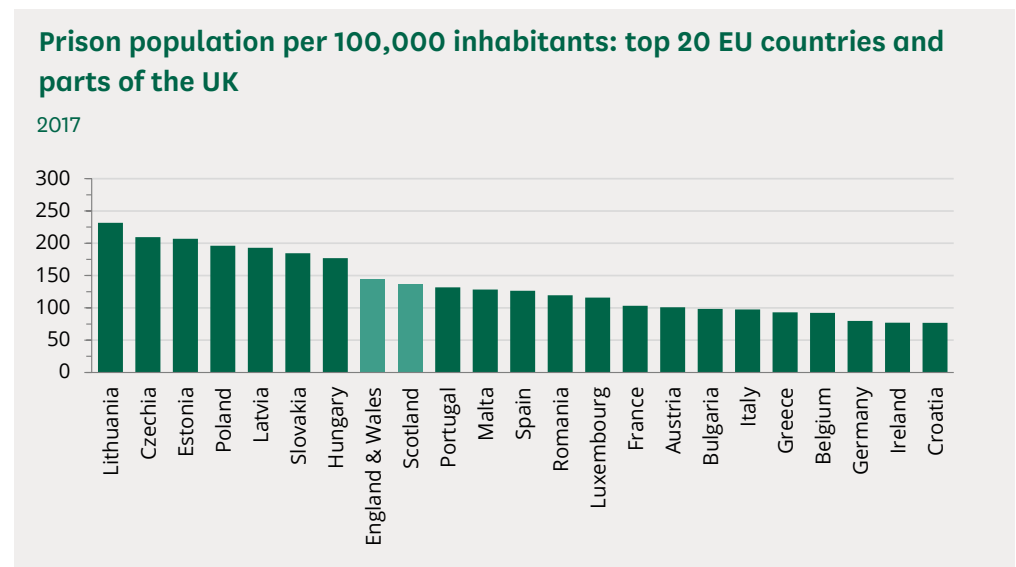
³⁷ Northern Ireland Prison Service [Annual Report and Accounts 2022/23](#), p.19.

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

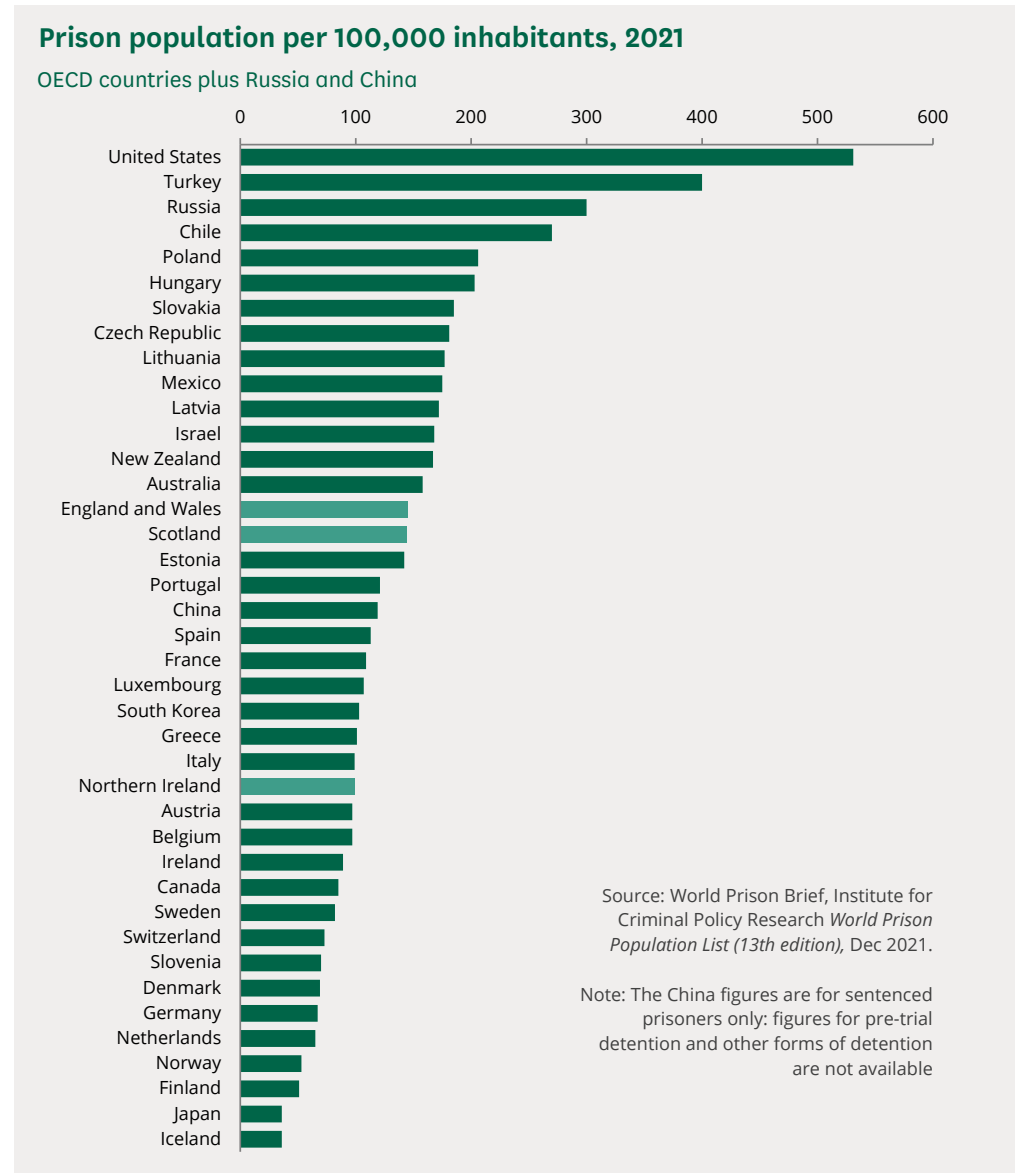
According to the Eurostat data, England and Wales had 144 prisoners per 100,000 head of population, the 8th highest rate among EU countries and the highest amongst western European jurisdictions.³⁸ Scotland had the 9th highest with 137 prisoners per 100,000. Northern Ireland had 76 prisoners per 100,000 of population and was ranked 24th.

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

³⁸ 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 2021.³⁹ England and Wales rank the 15th highest among these countries, Scotland the 16th, and Northern Ireland the 26th.



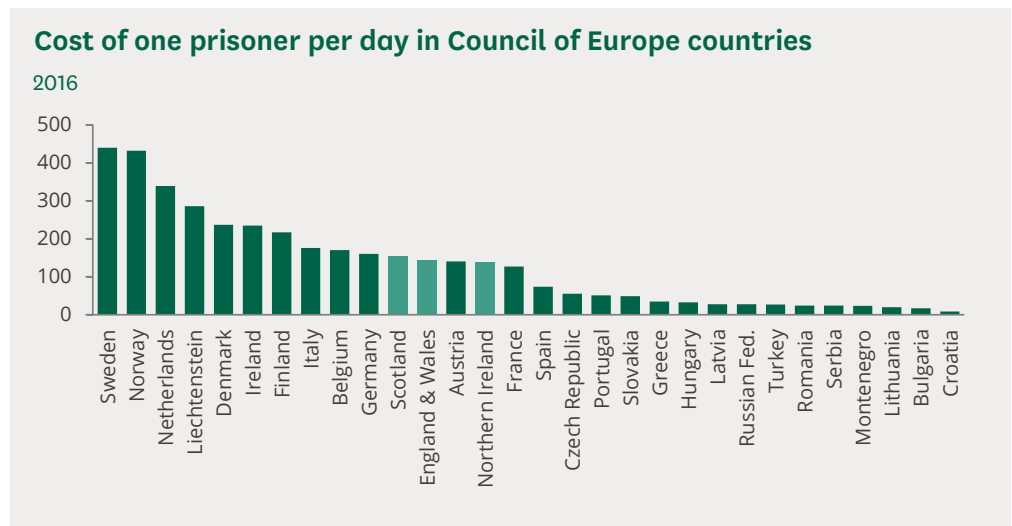
Source: [World Prison Brief 2021](#)

³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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 = £1.2411.⁴¹



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

⁴⁰ Council of Europe, annual penal statistics; *SPACE I - Prison Populations. Survey 2015 Final Report*, 14 March 2017

⁴¹ Bank of England, series XUAAERS: Annual average Spot exchange rate, Euro into Sterling, accessed 3 Jan 2017

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