



BRIEFING PAPER

Number CBP-04334, 3 July 2020

UK Prison Population Statistics

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1. England & Wales
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The underlying data to the charts are available in a separate [Excel file](#).

Cover image: [‘Wormwood Scrubs, in the borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, London, viewed from outside behind the prison walls.’](#) Julian Tysoe, 18 October 2010. Free to use under Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic licence.

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 a 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.

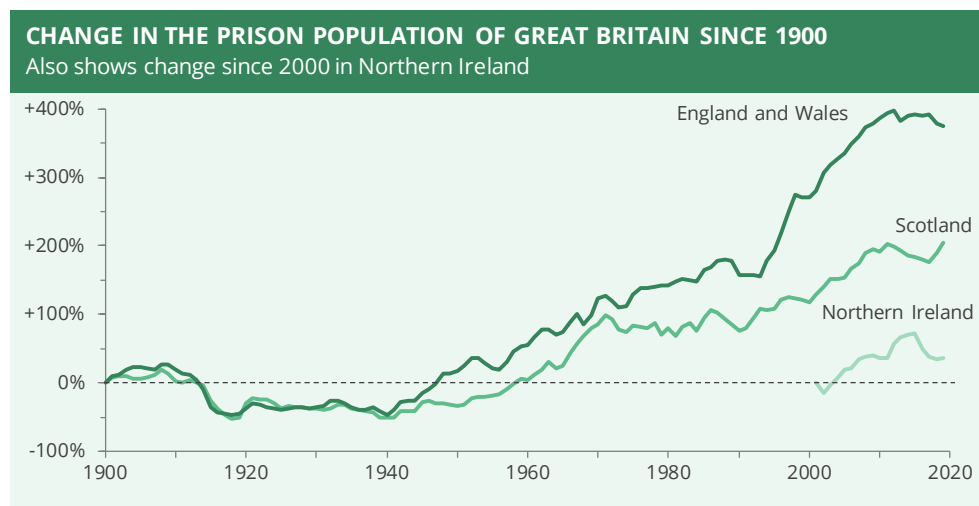
Weekly prison population data are available for England, Wales and Scotland and quarterly data are available for Northern Ireland. The latest available data show a **current prison population of approximately 87,900**, comprising

- 79,453 in England and Wales¹,
- 7,004 in Scotland², and
- 1,484 in Northern Ireland (these at the end of June 2019).³

The prison population has fallen since lockdown measures were introduced in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the end of February, the UK prison population has shrunk by around 5,500 people or 6%.⁴

In addition to these snapshots, all jurisdictions publish the average annual prison population, which was approximately 82,935 in England and Wales in 2019, and 7,789 in Scotland and 1,448 in Northern Ireland for the financial year 2018/19.

There is a general underlying, increasing trend in the number of people held in prison. The graph below shows prison population change relative to 1900 (and relative to 2000 for Northern Ireland).



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 2018/19](#).

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

¹ Ministry of Justice [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly: October to December 2019](#)

² Scottish Prison Service [Prison Population](#)

³ Department of Justice [Weekly Situation Reports](#)

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

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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 2018/19 the prison population of Northern Ireland increased by 36%, although the prison population is currently lower than at its peak of around 1,800 in 2014/15.

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

- **173 prisoners per 100,000 of the population in England and Wales** in 2019
- **162 per 100,000 in Scotland** (2018/19) and
- **96 per 100,000 in Northern Ireland** (2018/19).⁵

In each jurisdiction, prison population projections are made on a regular basis. At the most recent estimate, the prison population in 2022 is projected to be around 81,400 in England and Wales, 7,800 in Scotland, and 2,251 in Northern Ireland (approximately 96,000 in total).⁶

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 are that, at March 2020:

- The prison population is ageing: in 2002, 16% were under the age of 21 compared with 6% in 2020 and the number over the age of 50 went from 7% in 2002 to 17% in 2020;
- Prison sentences were longer in 2020 than in 2010, with 48% being over 4 years compared with 33% in 2019⁷;
- Foreign nationals made up 11% of the prison population;
- People of minority ethnicities made up 27% of the prison population compared with 13% of the general population.

In May 2020,

- 49% of prisons in England and Wales were over-crowded.⁸

Each jurisdiction also publishes data on the **cost per prisoner or prison place**. In 2017/18, the average cost per prison place was £39,385 in England and Wales, £35,601 in Scotland, and £54,893 in Northern Ireland.⁹

⁵ These are based on the population aged 15 and over.

⁶ Ministry of Justice [Prison population projections 2019-24](#), Scottish Government [Prison statistics and population projections Scotland 2013/14](#), Northern Ireland Prison Service [FOI Case No. 13:454](#)

⁷ Excludes indeterminate-length sentences

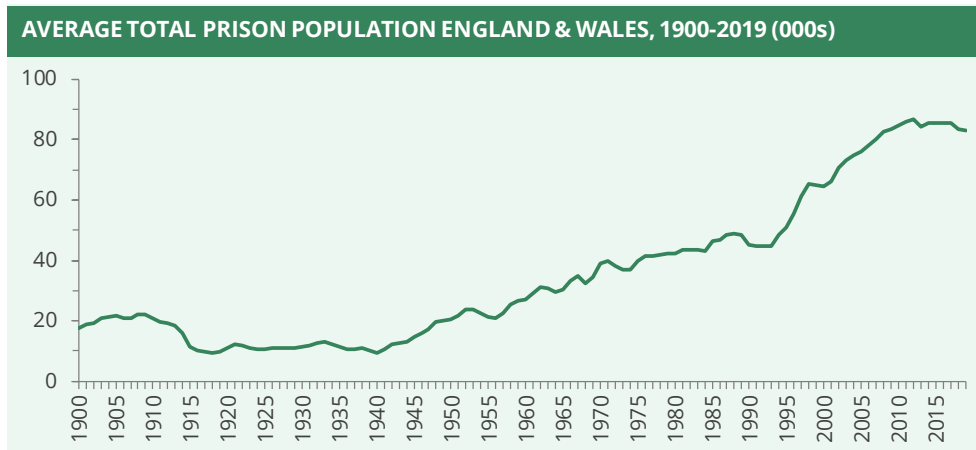
⁸ MoJ, [Population bulletin: monthly May 2020](#)

⁹ MoJ, [Prison performance statistics 2018/19](#); Scottish Prison Service, [Annual report and accounts 2017/18](#), appendix 8a; Northern Ireland Prison Service, [Annual Report and Accounts 2018/19](#), p.14

1. England & 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 2019, going from just over 17,400 to around 82,900. The prison population was relatively stable between 1915 and 1945. From 1940 the prison population grew steadily, although there was a small period in the early 1990s when it decreased for four consecutive years before rising steeply again in the subsequent decade. Since 2010, the average prison population has remained relatively stable.

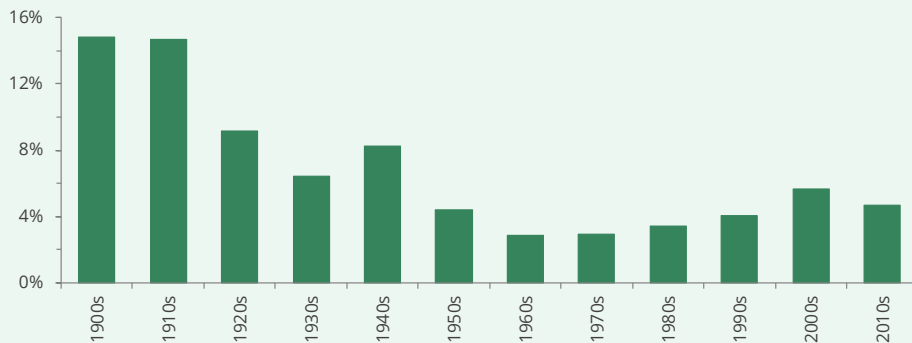
The UK general population also grew during this time. To put the numbers in context, in 1900 there were 86 prisoners per 100,000 people in the general population and in 2018 there were 173 per 100,000. The lowest rate recorded was at the start of the 1940s when there were around 33 prisoners per 100,000 people.

Gender

In 2019, 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.

FEMALES AS A PROPORTION OF THE PRISON POPULATION

Decade averages



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 336 per 100,000 in 2019. There were 27 female prisoners per 100,000 head of female population in 1900. In 2019, this rate had decreased to 15 per 100,000.¹⁰

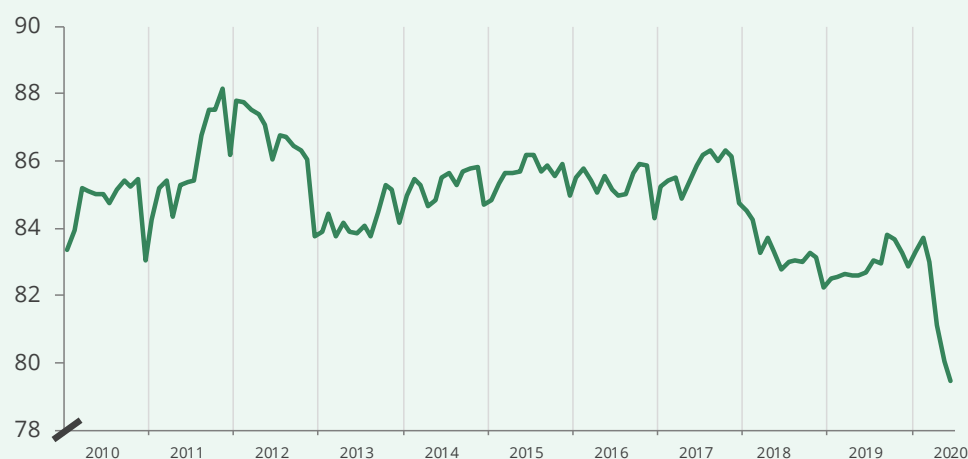
1.2 Recent trends and projections

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 at 26 June 2020, the total prison population was 79,453, having fallen sharply since April. This is likely the result of fewer receptions into prison 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.

PRISON POPULATION AT MONTH END

England and Wales, 2010-2020 (000s)



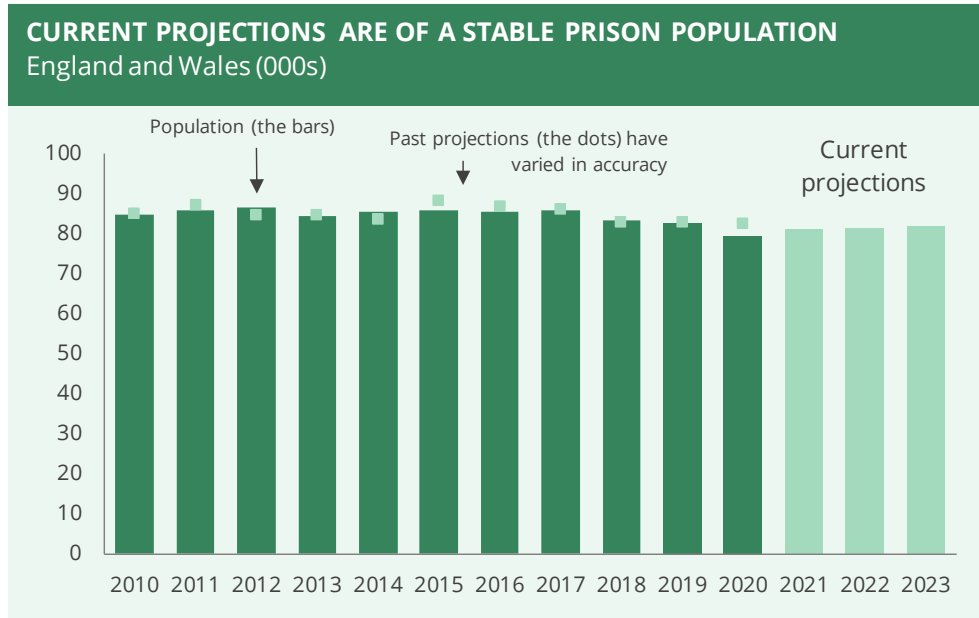
Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), various years

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

¹⁰ MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly October-December 2013](#), 24 April 2014; MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), various years

the riots in England in August 2011.¹¹ The population in 2017 peaked in November (86,327) which was the highest since September 2012. The latest figure, for June 2020, is the lowest point in the series.

The latest prison **population projections** were released in August 2019 and are shown below.



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 projections forecast that the prison population will be around 81,700 by June 2023. The projections include a rise due to expected longer determinate sentences and a fall in the number of prisoners aged over 50. They also take into account the continuing decline in the number of prisoners serving indeterminate sentences (imprisonment for the public protection (IPP)).¹²

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.

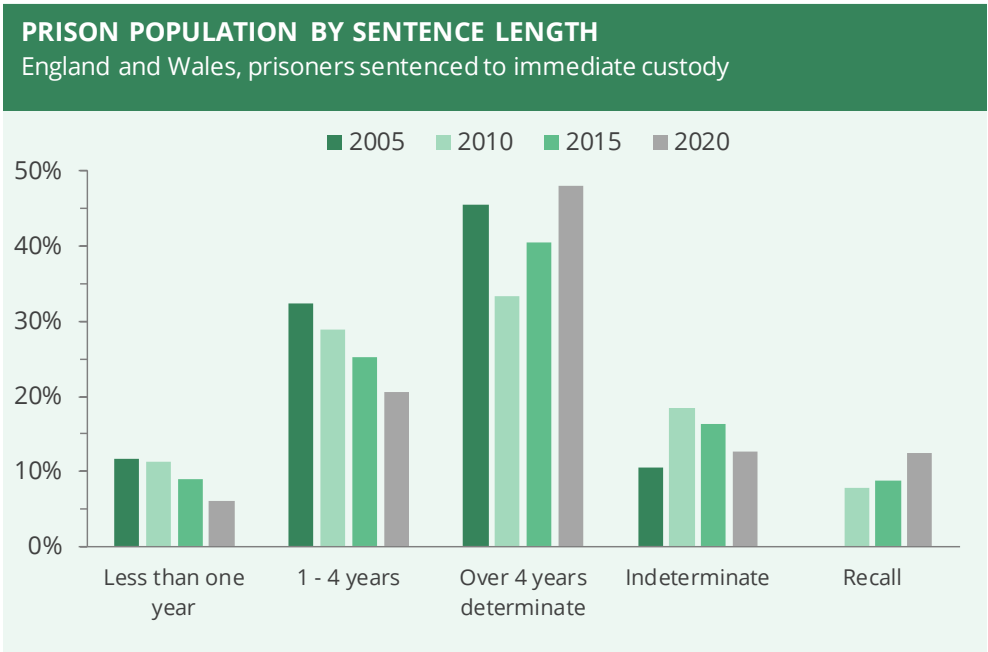
1.3 Sentence length and offences

As at the end of March 2020 the most frequent length of sentence being served was a determinate¹³ sentence of over 4 years. Around 48% of the sentenced population were serving this length of sentence. About a quarter of prisoners were serving sentences ranging between 1-4 years and around 13% had indeterminate sentences.

¹¹ See MoJ [Statistical bulletin on the public disorder of 6th-9th August 2011](#), 13 September 2012.

¹² The House of Commons Library has a [briefing paper on IPP sentences](#).

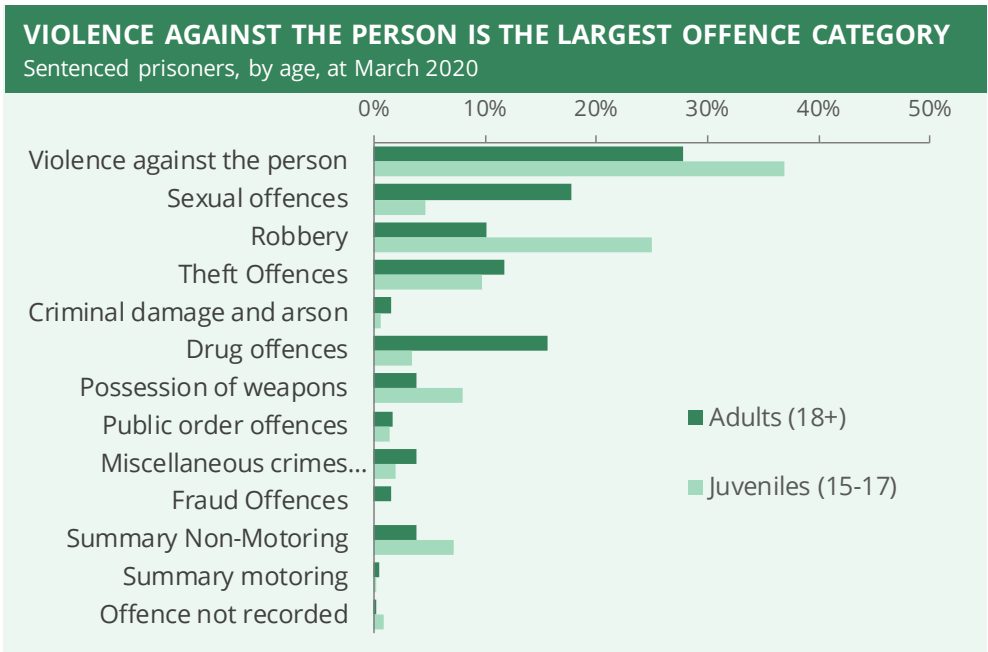
¹³ A 'determinate' prison sentence is for a fixed length of time. An 'indeterminate' prison sentence doesn't have a fixed length.



Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Caseload Statistics 2010 Tables](#); [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), Various Years
 Notes: Data at end of June in 2005 and 2020, and September in 2010 and 2015. Excludes those where sentence length was not recorded.

Prisoners in custody for violence against the person (VATP) offences accounted for the highest proportion of prisoners at the end of March 2020 (28%). Sexual, theft and drug offences each accounted for between 12% and 18% of the reason offenders were in prison.

As shown in the chart below, VATP accounted for the largest share of adult and juvenile offenders in custody. However, a smaller proportion of juvenile offenders were in prison for sexual offences and a larger proportion were in for drug offences, robbery, and possession of weapons.



Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly: October-December 2019](#), table 1.2b
 Notes: Only includes offenders sentenced to immediate custody. 'Miscellaneous crimes...' = miscellaneous crimes against society.

1.4 Prisoner demographics

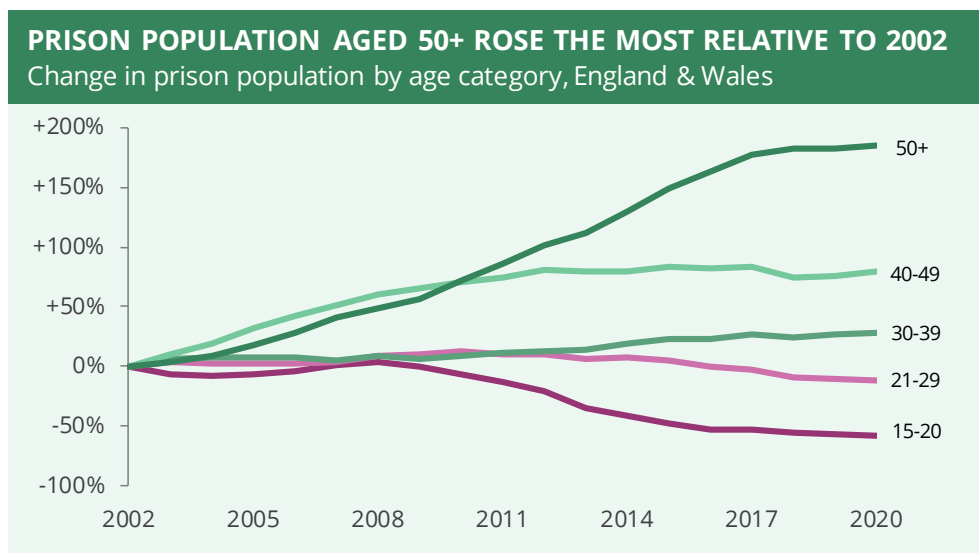
Age profile of prisoners

The current data series on prisoner age goes back to 2002. 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 2020, under 21s accounted for 6% of the prison population – a decrease of approximately 6,000 since 2002.

AGE PROFILE OF PRISONERS, MARCH 2020		
England & Wales		
Age	Number	Percentage
15-17	544	1%
18-20	4,049	5%
21-24	9,106	11%
25-29	14,375	17%
30-39	26,118	31%
40-49	15,034	18%
50-59	8,588	10%
60+	5,176	6%
Total	82,990	100%

The proportion of offenders aged between 21 and 29 also decreased over the last 5 years, accounting for 34% of the prison population in 2012 and 28% in March 2020. The proportion of 30-39 year olds has remained relatively stable (around 30%) except for a small dip in 2010. The proportion of prisoners aged over 50 increased from 7% in 2002 to 17% in March 2020.

The chart below shows the change in the age profile of prisoners over the last 15 years looking at comparative data from June each year.



Sources: MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), various years, (currently table 1.3)

Notes: Data at June 2002-2018 and March 2020; age groups combined

Nationality

At the end of March 2020 there were just over 9,000 foreign nationals within the prison population. Foreign nationals came from 163 different countries.¹⁴

¹⁴ MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly, table 1.7](#)

NATIONALITY OF PRISONERS		
England and Wales, at 31 March 2020		
	Total	%
British Nationals	73,454	89%
Foreign Nationals	9,283	11%
Nationality not recorded	253	0.3%
All nationalities	82,990	100%
EEA Europe	4,144	45%
Africa	1,633	18%
Non-EEA Europe	1,206	13%
Asia	1,014	11%
West Indies	565	6%
Middle East	469	5%
Central and South America	160	2%
North America	63	1%
Oceania	29	0%
All foreign nationals	9,283	100%

Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), October to December 2019. Table 1.7

Foreign nationals from Europe accounted for the greatest proportion of all foreign nationals within the prison population (45% from EEA countries and a further 13% from non-EEA European countries).¹⁵ Those from Africa (18%) and Asia (11%) contributed the second and third largest proportion respectively. Prisoners originating from the EEA made up just under 5% of the total prison population.

The top ten countries foreign nationalities accounted for 56% of all foreign nationals.

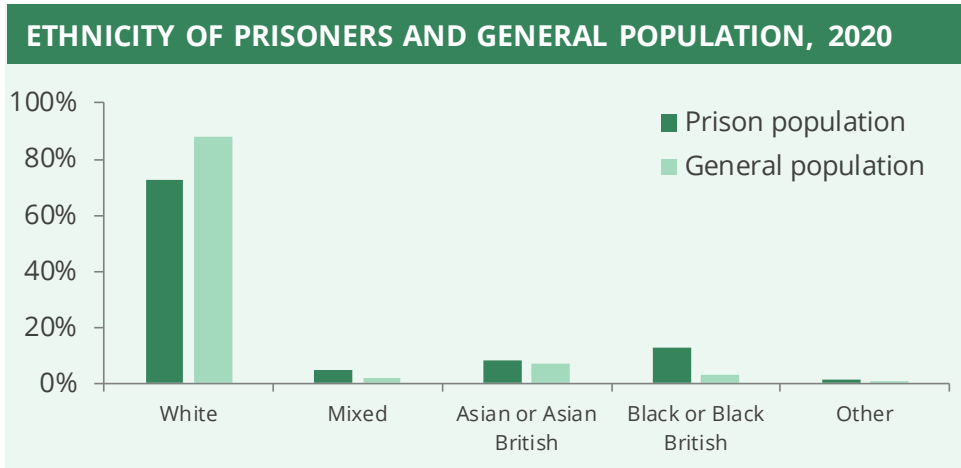
TOP TEN NATIONALITIES AMONG FOREIGN PRISONERS		
England and Wales, at 31 March 2020		
Nationality	Number	% of foreign national prisoners
Albanian	999	11%
Polish	835	9%
Romanian	806	9%
Irish	721	8%
Jamaican	440	5%
Lithuanian	414	4%
Somalian	288	3%
Pakistani	272	3%
Portuguese	234	3%
Nigerian	218	2%
Other foreign nationals	4,056	44%
All foreign nationals	9,283	100%

Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), October to December 2019. Table 1.7

¹⁵ The European Economic Area (EEA) is the EU plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

Ethnicity

As at the end of March 2020, just over a quarter of the prison population was from a minority ethnic group – this figure has stayed relatively constant since 2005.



Source: MoJ [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), table 1.4; NOMIS, Census 2011. **Note:** 1% of prison population does not have a recorded ethnicity.

As the chart illustrates, 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 13% in the general population.

Religion

At the end of March 2020, just under half of the prison population was of a Christian faith (47%) – a decrease of just over 10 percentage points compared to June 2002. The proportion of Muslim prisoners has increased from 8% in 2002 to 16% in 2020. The proportion of prisoners with no religion in 2020 (31%) was down slightly from 31.5% in 2002.

England and Wales		% point		
	Number	Prison population	change on 2002	General population
Christian	38,800	47%	-10.6	61%
Muslim	13,563	16%	8.4	4%
Hindu	354	0%	0.0	2%
Sikh	588	1%	0.1	1%
Buddhist	1,658	2%	1.0	1%
Jewish	521	1%	0.3	1%
No religion	25,398	31%	-1.2	24%
Other recorded	1,984	2%	1.8	1%
Other	124	0%	0.1	7%
Total	82,990	100%	..	100%

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

1.5 Prison overcrowding

A prison is classified as overcrowded if the number of prisoners held exceeds the establishments Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA). The CNA is the

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Prison Service's own measure of accommodation and represents the decent standard of accommodation that the Prison Service aspires to provide all prisoners.

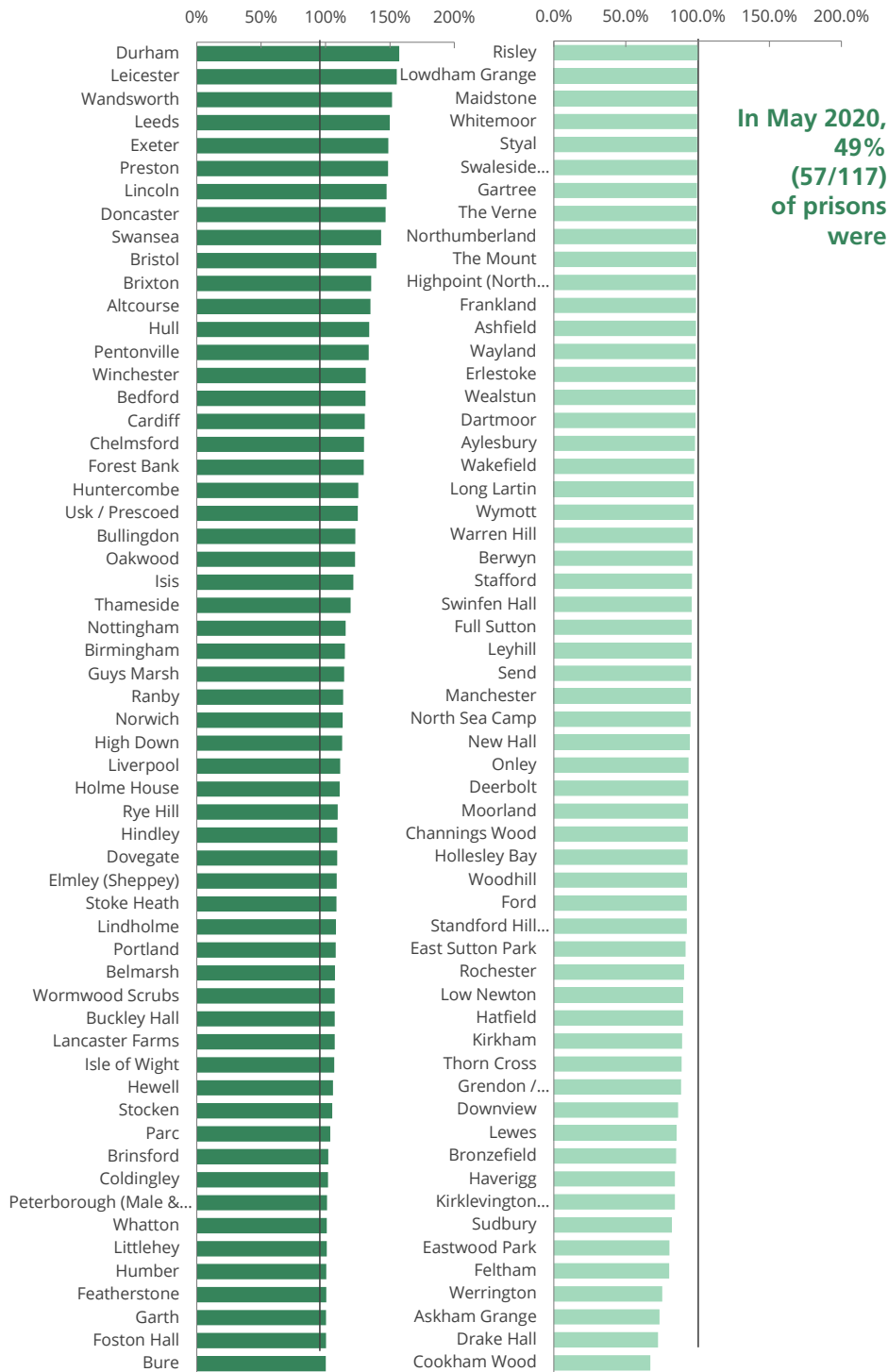
As at May 2020,¹⁶ 49% (57) of prison establishments were overcrowded.¹⁷ In total, overcrowded prisons held 6,900 more prisoners than the CNA of these establishments.

The chart below shows in use CNA for each establishment at May 2020. Those exceeding the CNA are shown in the darker colour.

¹⁶ MoJ, [Prison population figures: 2020](#)

¹⁷ Excludes Blantyre House and The Verne, which are listed but closed and excludes HMPPS Operated Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs).

PRISON POPULATION RELATIVE TO CERTIFIED NORMAL ACCOMMODATION



Source: MoJ Prison population figures: monthly bulletin, May 2020.

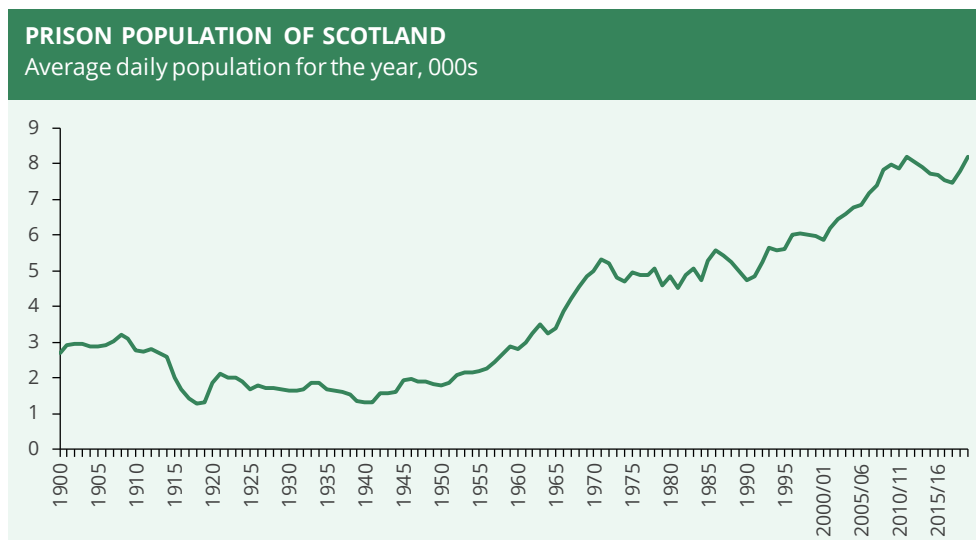
2. Scotland

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.

On-going technical difficulties have led to substantial delays in the publication of detailed Scottish prisons data. Data for 2013/14 are the latest available from the Scottish Government¹⁸ but [Scottish Prisons Service annual reports](#) and the weekly and annual [Prison population data](#) provide some basic information up to the end of 2019/20.

2.1 Long term trends

The Scottish Government has produced the average daily number of prisoners in the Scottish prison system as far back as 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 – 2018/19](#).

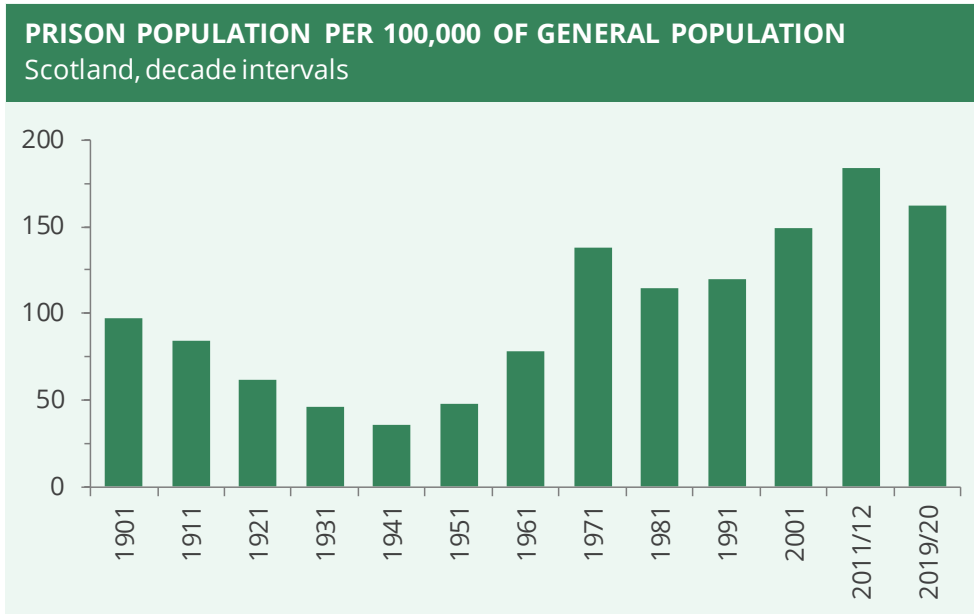
The average daily prison population increased from just under 2,700 in 1900 to just under 8,200 in 2017/18 (more than double). As in England and Wales, from the mid-1940s the prison population increased steadily until the 1970s where it remained relatively stable. Since 1990 the prison population again increased by 58%, reaching 8,179 in 2011/12 and its highest ever point of 8,198 in 2019/20.¹⁹

The average daily prison population increased by 204% between 1900 and 2019/20. 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%).²⁰

¹⁸ Scottish Prison Service, [Annual report and accounts, 2017/18](#)

¹⁹ See Table 10a in Appendix

²⁰ See table 10b in Appendix



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 – 2019/20](#);

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

In 1901 there were around 98 prisoners per 100,000 head of population in Scotland, dropping to around 36 per 100,000 in 1941.²¹ By 1971 this rate had risen to around 138 per 100,000. In 2019/20 there were 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 10% overall between 2011/12 and 2019/20. Over the period as a whole, the number of male and female prisoners both increased by around 21%. The proportion of female prisoners averaged around 5% of the average daily prison population over the period.

²¹ This relates to the population aged 15 or over.

AVERAGE DAILY PRISON POPULATION IN SCOTLAND				
By sex 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%

Source: Scottish Government, Prison statistics and population projections Scotland 2013/14; Scottish Prison Service, Annual Report and Accounts 2014/15 – 2018/19.

The current projections for the Scottish prison population were made by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) in December 2013.²² 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 prison population data from 2015/16 to 2017/18 were slightly lower than projected, although the latest year surpassed the main projection.

2.3 Current average daily population

The average daily prison population for 2019/20 was 8,198. Of those, 1,669 (20%) were prisoners on remand – either awaiting trial or sentencing.²³ Just over 6,500 (80%) were sentenced prisoners. The latest available data on sentence length is for 2018/19. In that year, 53% of sentenced prisoners were serving sentences of less than 4 years in length.

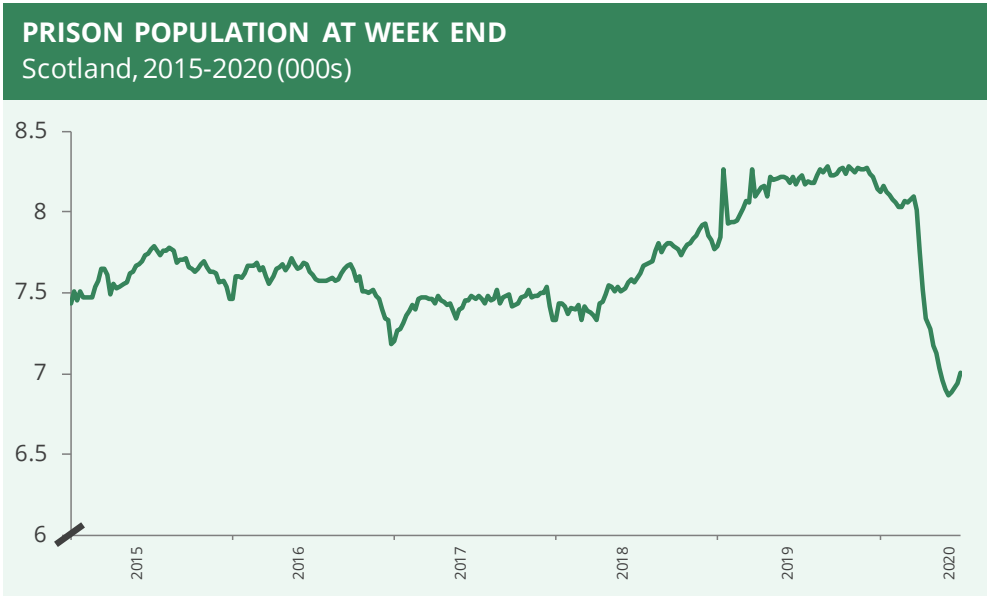
The SPS also publishes a weekly count of the prison population, which shows that the prison population has fallen considerably since mid-March. This is likely the result of fewer people entering custody during lockdown.

On 26 June 2020, there were 7,005 prisoners in custody.²⁴

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

²³ Scottish Prison Service, *SPS Prison Population: Annual population*

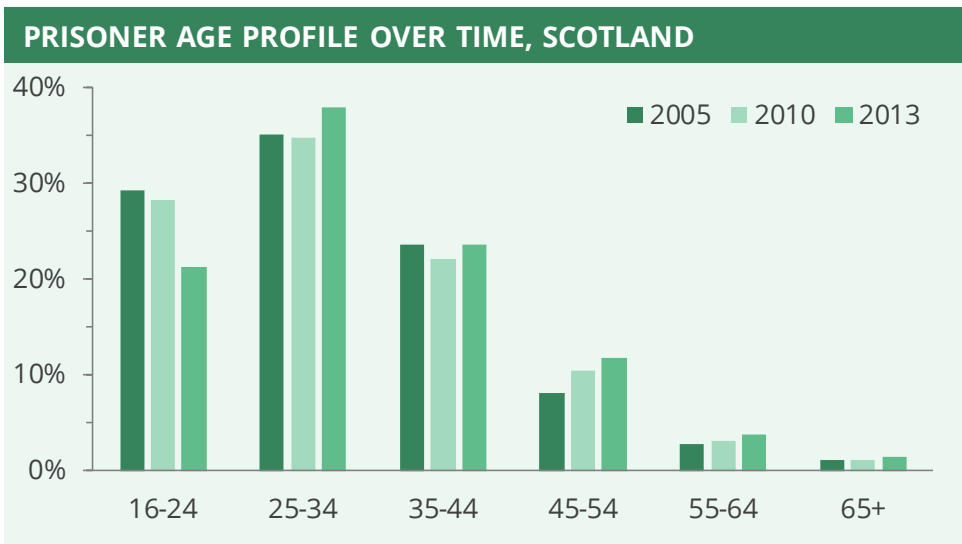
²⁴ Scottish Prison Service, *SPS Prison Population: Weekly population*



Source: Scottish Prison Service, *SPS Prison Population: Weekly population*

2.4 Age profile of prisoners

Detailed information about the age of prisoners has not been available since 2013. At 30 June 2013 (the latest available data) around 59% of prisoners were under the age of 35. Just over one-fifth of prisoners were under the age of 25:



Source: Scottish Government, Prison statistics and population projections Scotland 2013/14, accessed 6 June 2016

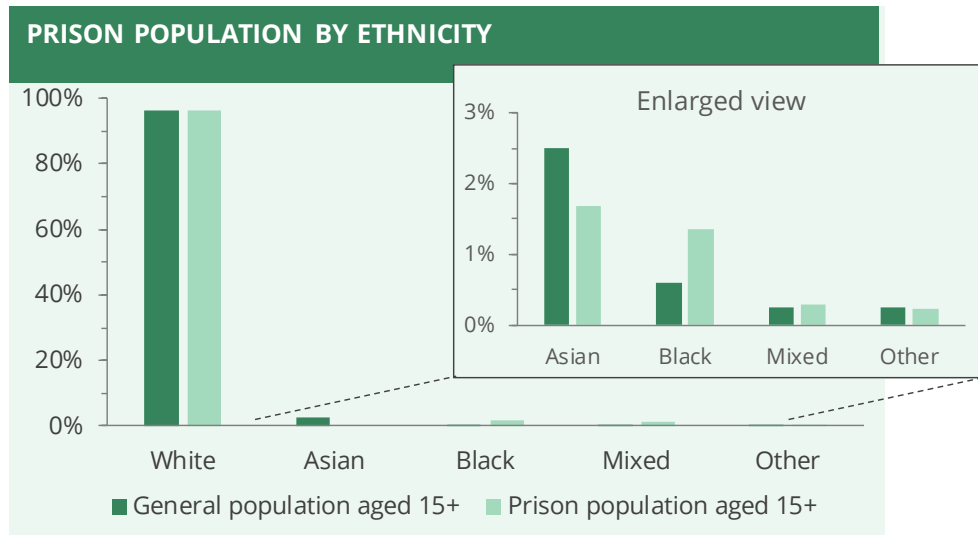
Notes: As at 30 June. Age groups combined. 16-24 includes under 16 year olds.

Between 2005 and 2013 the proportion of 16-24 year olds in prison reduced by 8 percentage points. The proportion aged 25-34 increased by 3 percentage points, accounting for just over 3,000 prisoners. The proportion of 35-44 year olds in 2013 was the same as in 2005. The proportion of those aged 45-54 increased by 4 percentage points compared to 2005. The proportion of those in categories 55-64 or 65+ increased by a small amount compared to 2005.

2.5 Ethnicity and Religion

Ethnicity

The latest statistics show that in June 2013 the Scottish prison population was just over 96% white. Asian or black ethnicities accounted for just over 3% of the prison population. Around 0.5% of prisoners were from mixed or other ethnicities.



Source: Scottish Government, [Prison statistics and population projections Scotland 2013/14](#), accessed 6 June 2016

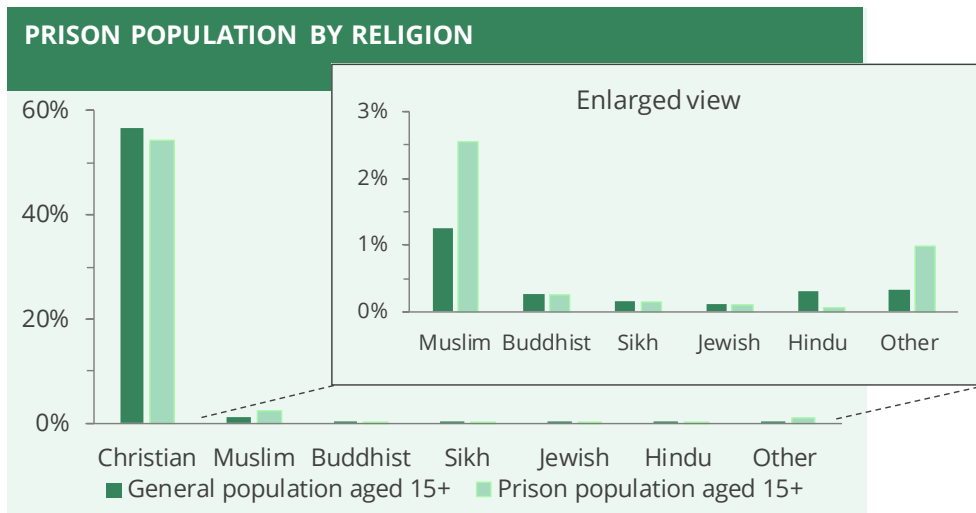
Notes: Prison population as at June 30. General population from Scotland Census 2011.

The Scotland Census 2011 suggests that the proportion of prisoners classified as being from a white ethnicity is the same proportion found among the general population. The proportion of people from Asian or Black ethnicities within the general population differed from the rate of the prison population. 2.5% of the general population was from an Asian ethnicity, whereas 1.7% of the prison population were reported as Asian. People from black ethnicities accounted for 0.6% of the general population and 1.4% of the prison population.²⁵

Religion

As at 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.

²⁵ Scotland Census, [Census 2001-2011](#)



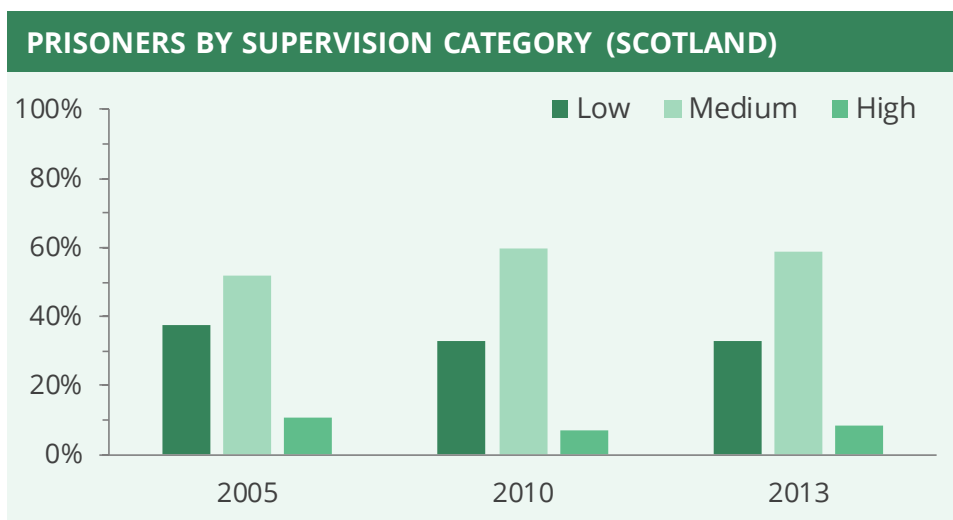
Source: Scottish Government, [Prison statistics and population projections Scotland 2013/14](#), accessed 6 June 2016

Notes: Prison population as at June 30. General population from Scotland Census 2011.

The proportion of Muslims among the prison population was greater than that amongst the general population. According to the 2011 Census²⁶, 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.

2.6 Supervision level

Prisoners in Scotland are rated as to the level of supervision they require whilst in custody. A prisoner with high supervision requires all activities and movements authorised, supervised and monitored by a prison officer. Prisoners rated as requiring medium supervision are subject to limited supervision. Prisoners with low supervision are subject to minimum supervision and may also be allowed to participate in activities within the wider community.²⁷



²⁶ Scotland Census, [Census 2001-2011](#)

²⁷ Offenders Families Helpline, [Prisoner Category](#), accessed 1 July 2016.

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Source: Scottish Government, [Prison statistics and population projections Scotland 2013/14](#), accessed 6 June 2016

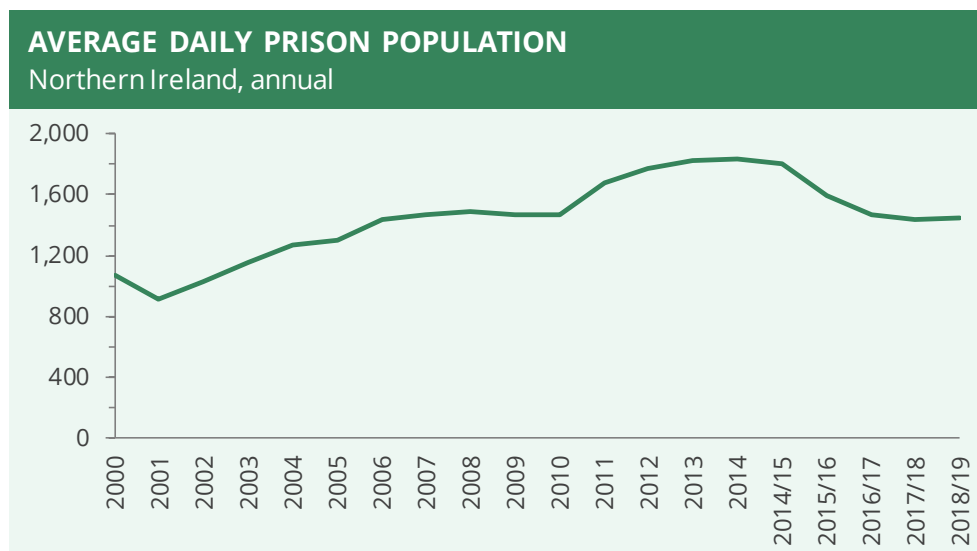
At 30 June 2013 just under 60% of prisoners were classified as requiring a medium level of supervision whilst in custody. Just over a third were considered to be a low risk and under 10% were considered to be a high risk.

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 are published by financial year.

In the year ending March 2019, the average daily prison population in Northern Ireland was 1,448. This was 1% higher than in the year ending March 2018 and 36% 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.



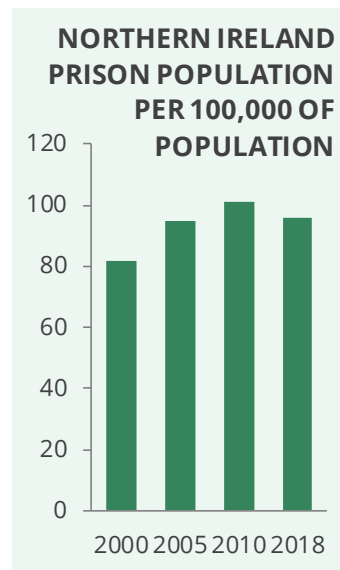
Source: Northern Ireland Department of Justice, [The Northern Ireland Prison Population](#), various years

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 2018/19, the average daily population was 21% lower than in 2014.

In 2000 there were around 82 prisoners per 100,000 head of population. In 2018/19, this had increased to 96 per 100,000 although that was the lowest level since 2005.



The DoJ does not routinely publish **prison population projections** however it does produce them and has released them under Freedom of Information (Fol) 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 2022.²⁸ 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.

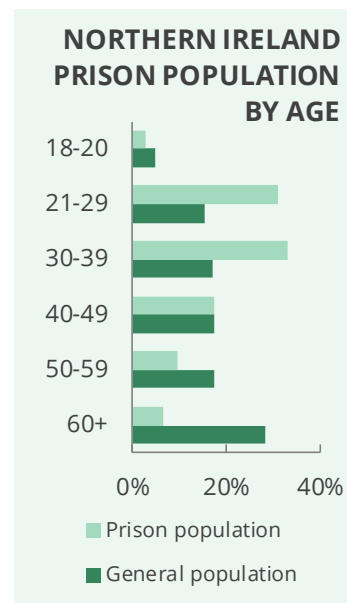
3.2 Age profile of prisoners

People aged 21-29 accounted for 31% of the prisoner population in 2018/19 compared to 15% amongst the general population.^{29,30}

Prisoners aged 30-39 accounted for 33% of the prison population and 40-49 and 50-59 year olds accounted for 17% and 10% respectively.

Prisoners aged 60 years and older accounted for 6% of the prison population, compared to 28% of the general population.

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



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

²⁹ DoJ, [The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2018/19](#). Please note that these figures are only for the prison population sentenced to immediate custody and do not include those on remand.

³⁰ [NISRA, NI mid-year population estimates 2018](#)

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 2018/19 figures show that in **England and Wales:**

- The average direct cost per prisoner in was £26,133 but taking into account all resource expenditure the overall cost per prisoner was £39,385.³¹
- The average direct cost *per prison place* in was £28,088 but taking into account all resource expenditure the overall cost per place was £39,922.

In **Scotland**, the Prison Service publishes the annual cost of prison in its [Annual Report and Accounts](#). In 2018/19, the average annual cost *per prison place* in Scotland was £35,601³² It is not clear whether this includes all expenditure or direct resource expenditure only.

In **Northern Ireland**, the Prison Service also publishes an annual figure of the cost per prison place in its [Annual Report and Accounts](#). In 2018/19 the annual cost per prison place in Northern Ireland was £54,893.³³ The costs should not be compared across jurisdictions since they are calculated in different ways.

³¹ 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)

³² Scottish Prison Service [Annual Report and Accounts 2018-19](#), Appendix 8a.

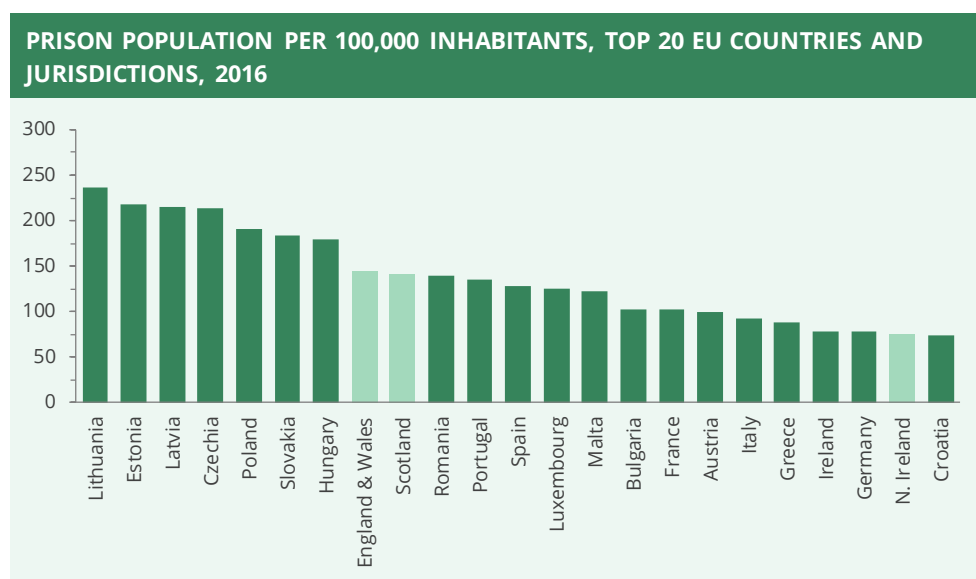
³³ Northern Ireland Prison Service [Annual Report and Accounts 2018/19](#), p.14.

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 2016. 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 12 July 2019

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.³⁴ Scotland had the 9th highest with 141 prisoners per 100,000. Northern Ireland had 76 prisoners per 100,000 of population and was ranked 22nd.

Outside of Europe, the data on prison population are more patchy and harder to compare across jurisdictions. Nonetheless, the Institute for Criminal Policy Research keeps a database – the [World Prison Brief](#) – containing broadly comparable data on prison indicators.

The chart below shows the prison population per 100,000 inhabitants in OECD countries and in Russia and China in 2018.³⁵ England and Wales ranks the 17th highest among these countries, Scotland the 16th, and Northern Ireland the 31st.

³⁴ 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.

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



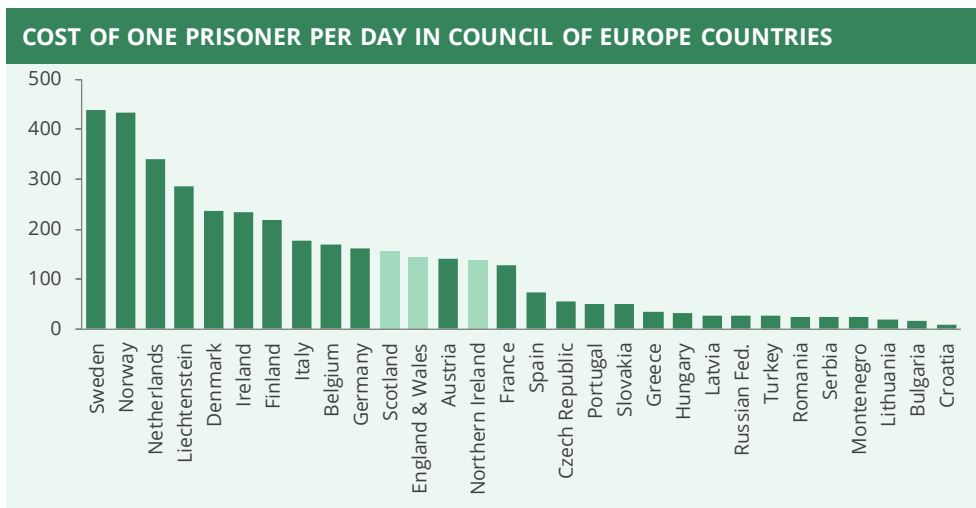
[Link to source.](#)

5.2 Cost

The Council of Europe's (CoE), annual penal statistics publish the cost per inmate figures for selected countries.³⁶ 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 = £1.2411.³⁷

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

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



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.

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