

By Georgina Sturge

29 October 2021

# UK Prison Population Statistics



## Summary

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‘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. Image cropped.

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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 2021, the UK had a total **prison population of approximately 87,550 people**, comprising

- 78,756 in England and Wales<sup>1</sup>,
- 7,417 in Scotland<sup>2</sup>, and
- 1,377 in Northern Ireland (average daily prison population for the financial year 2020/21).<sup>3</sup>

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%.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to these snapshots, all jurisdictions publish the average annual prison population, which was approximately 80,366 in England and Wales in the 2020, and 8,198 in Scotland in 2019/20 and 1,448 in Northern Ireland in 2020/21.

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).

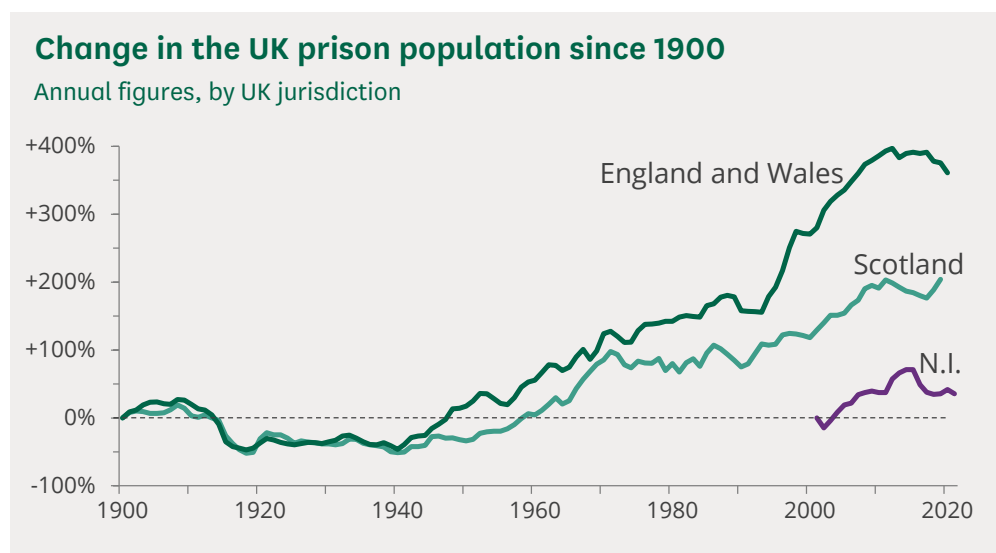
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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Justice [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), figure correct as of 30 June 2021

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Prison Service [Prison Population](#), 25 June 2021

<sup>3</sup> Department of Justice [Weekly Situation Reports](#), 25 June 2021

<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 2020/21](#)

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 2020/21 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.

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:

- 167 prisoners per 100,000 of the population in England and Wales (2020)
- 178 per 100,000 in Scotland.(2020)
- 96 per 100,000 in Northern Ireland.(2020/21)<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 98,700 by 2026, to 7,800 in Scotland by 2022, and to 2,251 in Northern Ireland by 2022.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> These are based on the population aged 15 and over.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Justice [Prison population projections 2020-26](#), Scottish Government [Prison statistics and population projections Scotland 2013/14](#), Northern Ireland Prison Service [FOI Case No. 13:454](#)

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 2021:

- The prison population is ageing: in 2002, 15% were under the age of 21 compared with 5% in 2021 and the number over the age of 50 went from 7% in 2002 to 17% in 2021;
- Prison sentences were longer in 2020 than in 2010, with 48% being over 4 years compared with 33% in 2010<sup>7</sup>;
- Foreign nationals made up 13% of the prison population;
- People of minority ethnicities made up 27% of the prison population compared with 13% of the general population.

As of June 2021,

- 44% 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**. In 2019/20, the average cost per prison place was £30,312 in England and Wales, £38,213 in Scotland, and £43,029 in Northern Ireland.<sup>9</sup>

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

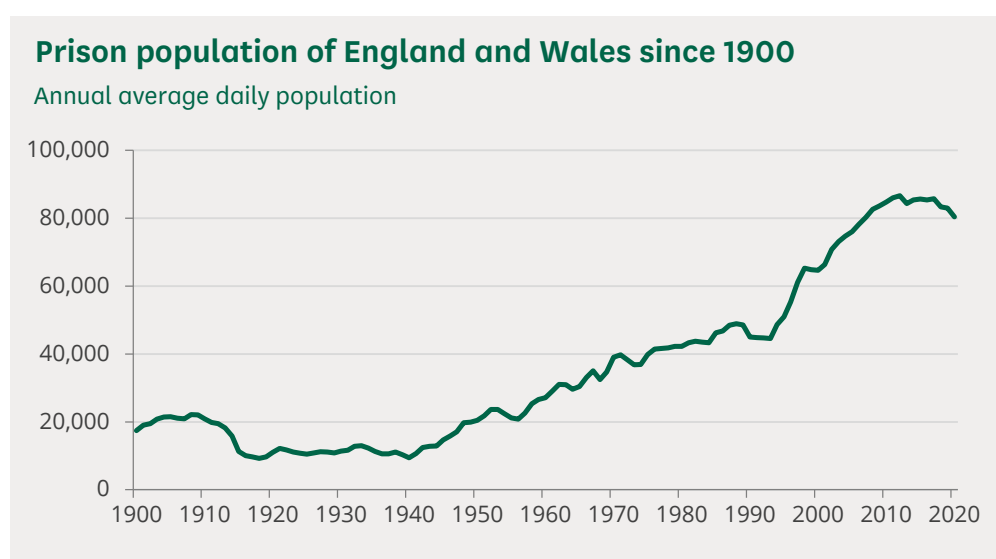
<sup>8</sup> MoJ, [Population bulletin: monthly June 2021](#)

<sup>9</sup> MoJ, [Prison performance statistics 2019/20](#); Scottish Prison Service, [Annual report and accounts 2019/20](#), appendix 8a; Northern Ireland Prison Service, [Annual Report and Accounts 2019/20](#), p.14

# 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.



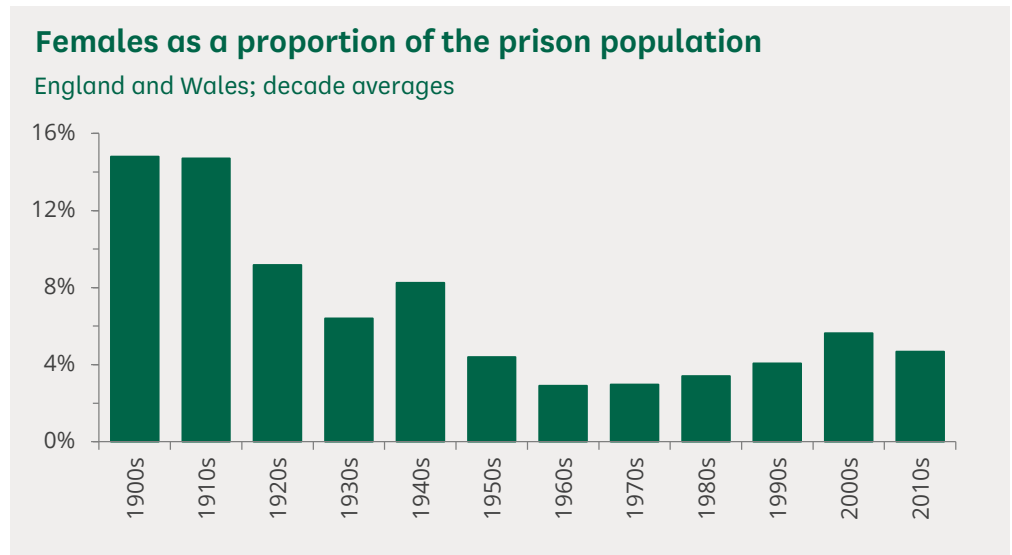
Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), various years

The average annual prison population quadrupled between 1900 and 2020, going from just over 17,400 to around 80,000. 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 2020 there were 135 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 2020, 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 327 per 100,000 in 2020. There were 27 female prisoners per 100,000 head of female population in 1900. In 2020, this rate had decreased to 14 per 100,000.<sup>10</sup>

## 1.2

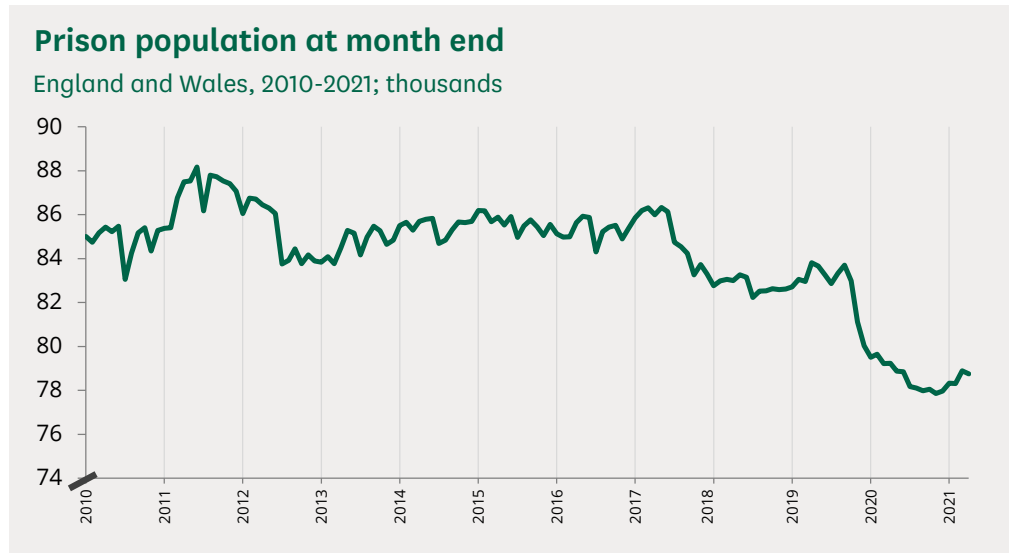
### Recent trends and projections

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 of the end of September 2021, the total prison population was 78,756, having fallen overall since February 2020. This is 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

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

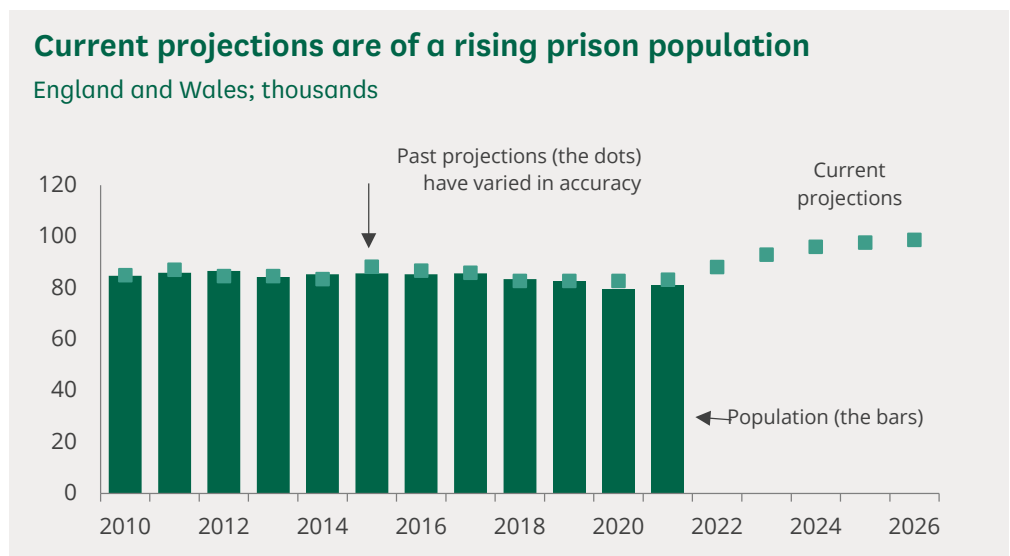




Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), various years

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>11</sup> The population in 2017 peaked in November (86,327) which was the highest since September 2012. The latest figure for June 2020 (79,514) is the lowest point in the series.

The latest prison **population projections** were released in November 2020 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.

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

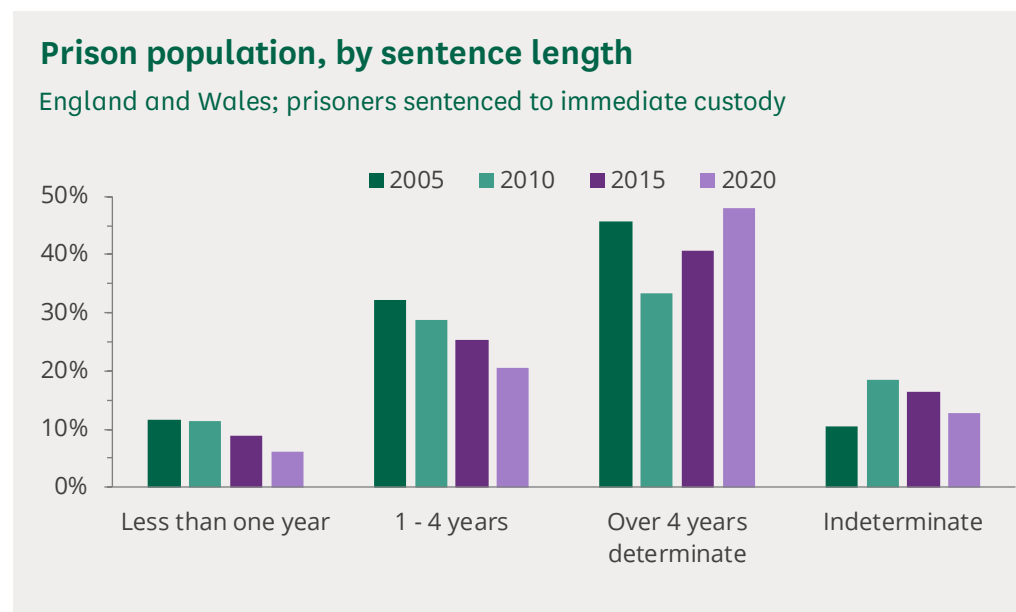
The projections forecast that the prison population will be around 98,700 by June 2026. The projections include a rise due to expected longer determinate sentences and a fall in the number of prisoners aged over 50. They also take into account the continuing decline in the number of prisoners serving indeterminate sentences (imprisonment for the public protection (IPP)).<sup>12</sup>

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 determinate<sup>13</sup> 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.



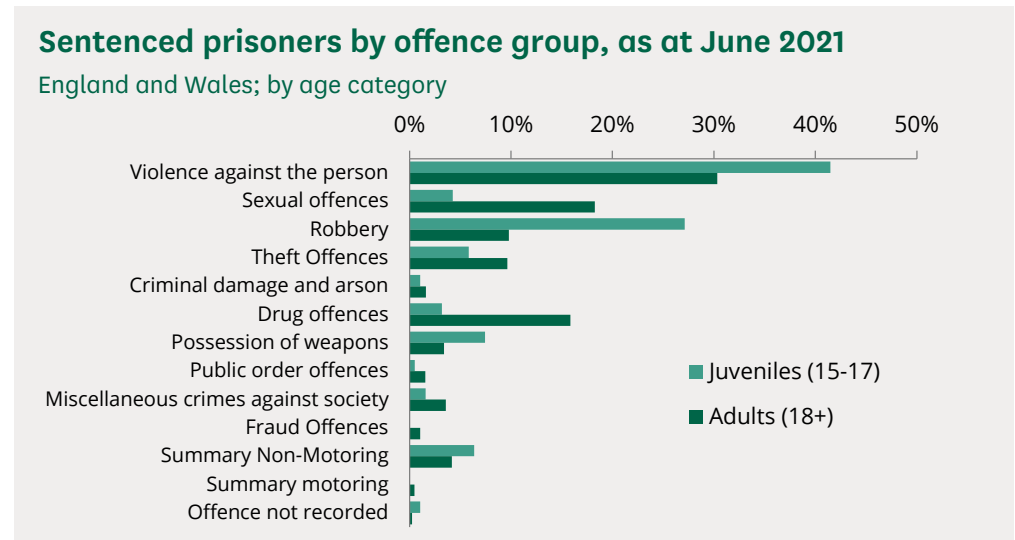
Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Caseload Statistics 2010 Tables](#); [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#), Various Years

Notes: Data at end of June in 2005 and 2020, and September in 2010 and 2015. Excludes those where sentence length was not recorded.

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

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

Prisoners in custody for violence against the person (VATP) offences accounted for the highest proportion of prisoners at the end of June 2021 (30%). Sexual offences was the second highest category for adults (18%) while for juveniles this was robbery (27%).



Source: MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly](#): January to March 2021, 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>14</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 2021, under 21s accounted for 5% of the prison population – a decrease of approximately 7,000 since 2002.

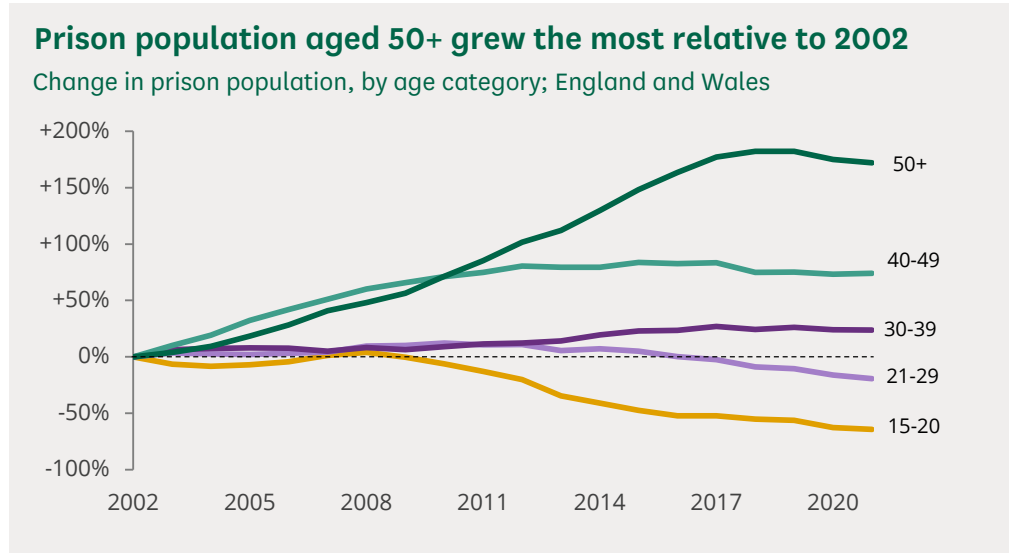
The proportion of offenders aged between 21 and 29 also decreased over

Age Profile of Prisoners		
England and Wales June 2021		
Age	Number	%
15-17	363	0.5%
18-20	3,520	4.5%
21-24	8,392	10.7%
25-29	13,138	16.8%
30-39	25,211	32.2%
40-49	14,569	18.6%
50-59	8,140	10.4%
60+	4,991	6.4%

<sup>14</sup> The latest figures can be found in table 1.3 of the MoJ’s [Offender Management Statistics](#), ‘Prison Population’ tables.

the last 10 years, accounting for 35% of the prison population in 2011 and 27% in 2021. 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 17% in 2021.

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 June 2021

## Nationality

At the end of June 2021 there were just under 10,000 foreign nationals within the prison population. Foreign nationals came from 176 different countries.<sup>15</sup>

Nationality of prisoners England and Wales, at 30 June 2021		
	Total	%
British Nationals	68,239	87%
Foreign Nationals	9,815	13%
Nationality not recorded	270	0.3%
All nationalities	78,324	100%
EEA Europe	4,564	47%
Africa	1,627	17%
Non-EEA Europe	1,219	12%
Asia	1,161	12%
West Indies	518	5%
Middle East	479	5%
Central and South America	158	2%
North America	65	1%
Oceania	24	0%
All foreign nationals	9,815	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 (47% from EEA countries and a further 12% from non-EEA European countries).<sup>16</sup> Those from Africa (17%) and Asia (12%) 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 57% of all foreign nationals. As shown in the table on the overleaf

<sup>15</sup> MoJ, [Offender Management Statistics Quarterly, table 1.7](#)

<sup>16</sup> The European Economic Area (EEA) is the EU plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

## Top ten nationalities among foreign prisoners

England and Wales, at 30 June 2021

Nationality	Number	% of foreign national prisoners
Albanian	1,528	16%
Polish	868	9%
Romanian	732	7%
Irish	617	6%
Jamaican	403	4%
Lithuanian	401	4%
Pakistani	271	3%
Somalian	268	3%
Portuguese	255	3%
Vietnamese	234	2%
Other foreign nationals	4,238	43%
All foreign nationals	9,815	100%

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

## Ethnicity

As at the end of June 2021, just over a quarter of the prison population was from a minority ethnic group – this figure has stayed relatively constant since 2004.

## Ethnicity of prisoners and the general population

England and Wales; June 2021

	Number	Prison population	% point change on 2004	Share of the general population
White	56,275	72%	3.0	88%
Mixed	3,832	5%	2.4	2%
Asian or Asian British	6,451	8%	3.1	7%
Black or Black British	9,994	13%	-0.7	3%
group	1,153	1%	0.5	1%
Not stated/Unrecorded	619	1%	-8.3	.
Total	78,324	100%	..	100%

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

Compared to the population as a whole, the BAME population is over-represented within the prison population. In the prison population, 28%

identified as an ethnic minority, compared with 13% in the general population.

## Religion

At the end of June 2021, just under half of the prison population was of a Christian faith (45%) – a decrease of 13 percentage points compared with June 2002. The proportion of Muslim prisoners has increased from 8% in 2002 to 18% in 2021. The proportion of prisoners with no religion in 2021 (31%) was the same as in 2002.

Religion of prisoners and the general population				
England and Wales; June 2021				
	Number	Prison population	% point change on 2002	Share of the general population
Christian	35,255	45%	-13.0	61%
Muslim	13,724	18%	9.8	4%
Hindu	329	0%	0.0	2%
Sikh	491	1%	0.0	1%
Buddhist	1,481	2%	0.9	1%
Jewish	467	1%	0.3	1%
No religion	24,540	31%	-0.1	24%
Other	1,863	2%	1.8	1%
Not recorded	174	0%	0.2	7%
Total	78,324	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.

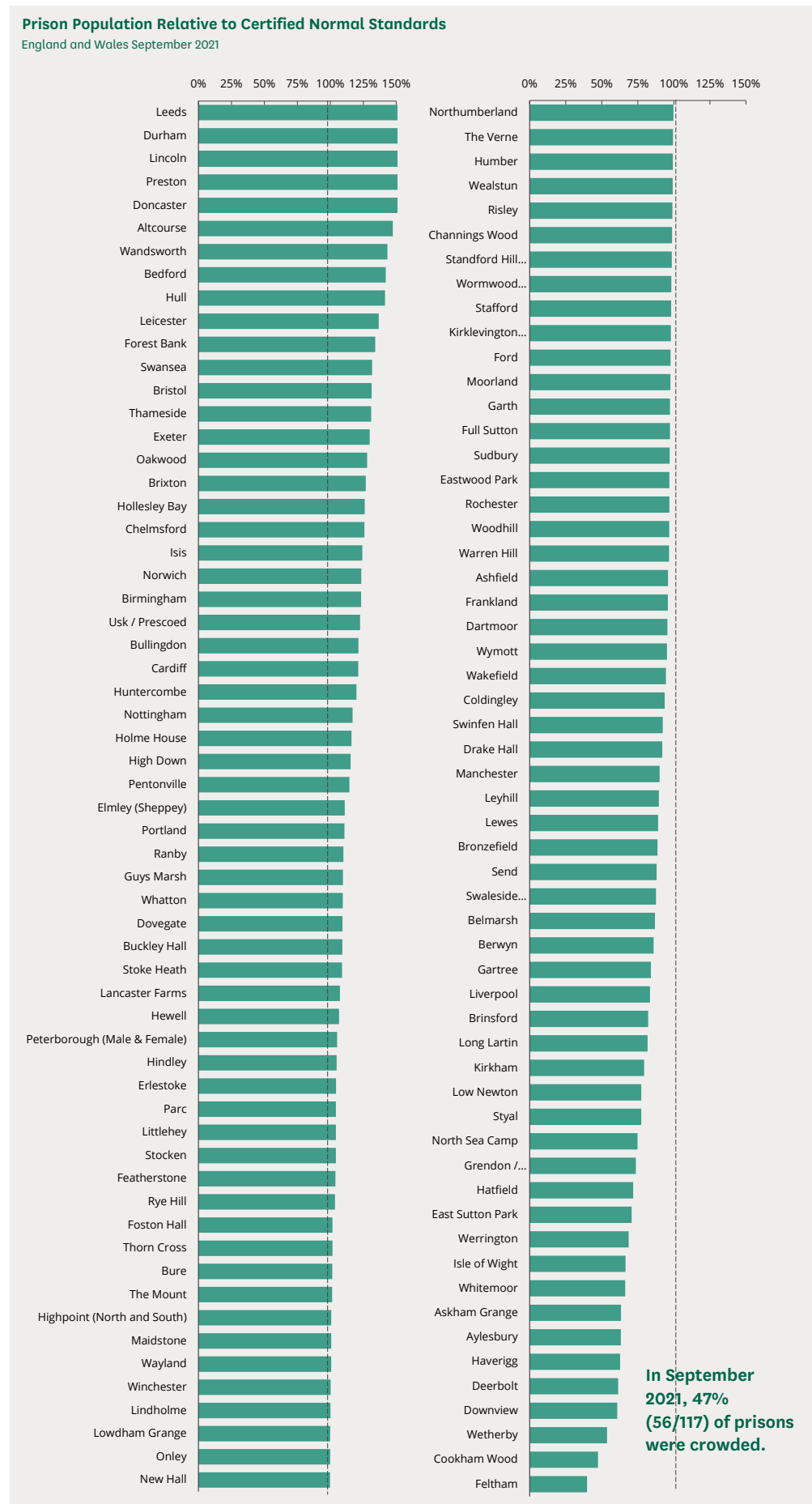
As of September 2021,<sup>17</sup> 47% (56) of prison establishments were overcrowded.<sup>18</sup> In total, overcrowded prisons held 7,150 more prisoners than the CNA of these establishments.

The chart on the overleaf shows in use CNA for each establishment<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> MoJ, [Prison population figures: 2021](#)

<sup>18</sup> Excludes Blantyre House and The Verne, which are listed but closed and excludes HMPPS Operated Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs).

<sup>19</sup> Chart Source: MoJ [Prison Population figures 2021: Monthly Bulletin September](#)





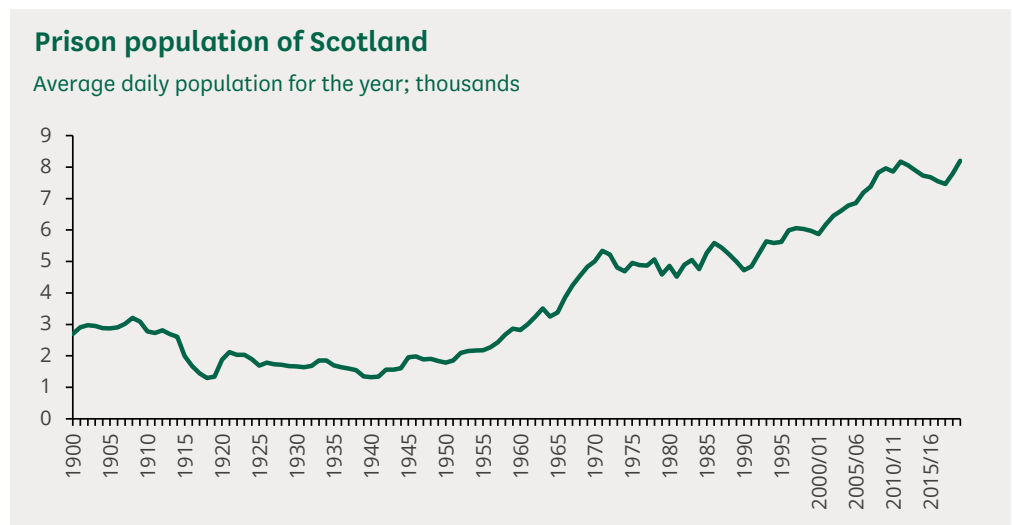
## 2 Scotland

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 Government<sup>20</sup> but [Scottish Prisons Service annual reports](#) and the weekly and annual [Prison population data](#) provide some basic up to date information

### 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.



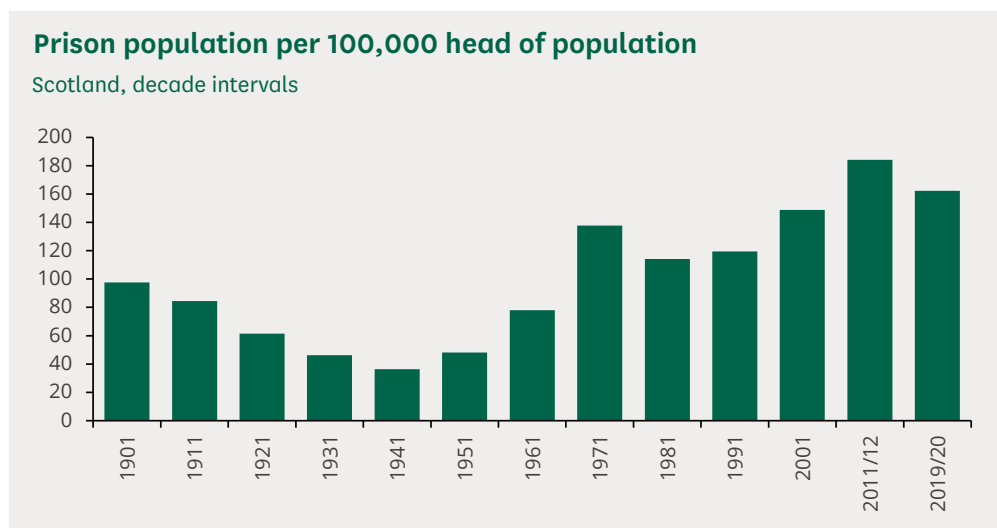
Source: Mitchell, B. (1988) *British Historical Statistics*, p. 15-16; Scottish Government, [Prison statistics and population projections Scotland 2013/14](#), accessed 6 June 2016; Scottish Prison Service, [Scottish Prison Service Annual Report and Accounts 2014/15 – 2019/20](#).

The average daily prison population increased from just under 2,700 in 1900 to just under 8,200 in 2019/20 (more than double). 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 again

<sup>20</sup> Scottish Prison Service, [Annual report and accounts, 2019/20](#)

increased by 58%, reaching 8,179 in 2011/12 and its highest ever point of 8,198 in 2019/20.<sup>21</sup>

The average daily prison population increased by 171% 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%).<sup>22</sup>



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.<sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> See Table 10a in Appendix

<sup>22</sup> See table 10b in Appendix

<sup>23</sup> This relates to the population aged 15 or over.

## 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 reached record levels in 2019/20 at 8,198 prisoners. Current figures show a daily prison population of 8198. Over the whole period, the proportion of male prisoners increased by around 10%, whilst the proportion of females remained largely consistent. Female prisoners averaged 5% of the total prison population over this period.

### 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. [Scottish Prison Service PR2 management information system 2014-Oct 2021](#)

The current projections for the Scottish prison population were made by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) in December 2013.<sup>24</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 prison population data from 2015/16 to 2017/18 were slightly lower than projected, whilst 2019/20 exceeded the 2013 projection by around 5%. The most recent population,

<sup>24</sup> Scottish Prison Service [Prison statistics and population projections Scotland: 2013-14](#)

8,198, lies above the median projection of 7,800, again by around 5% however is well within the upper boundary of 9,500.

Prison population projections; 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	
2021-22	10,000	7,800	7,000	
2022-23	10,200	7,800	6,900	

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

## 2.3

### Current average daily population

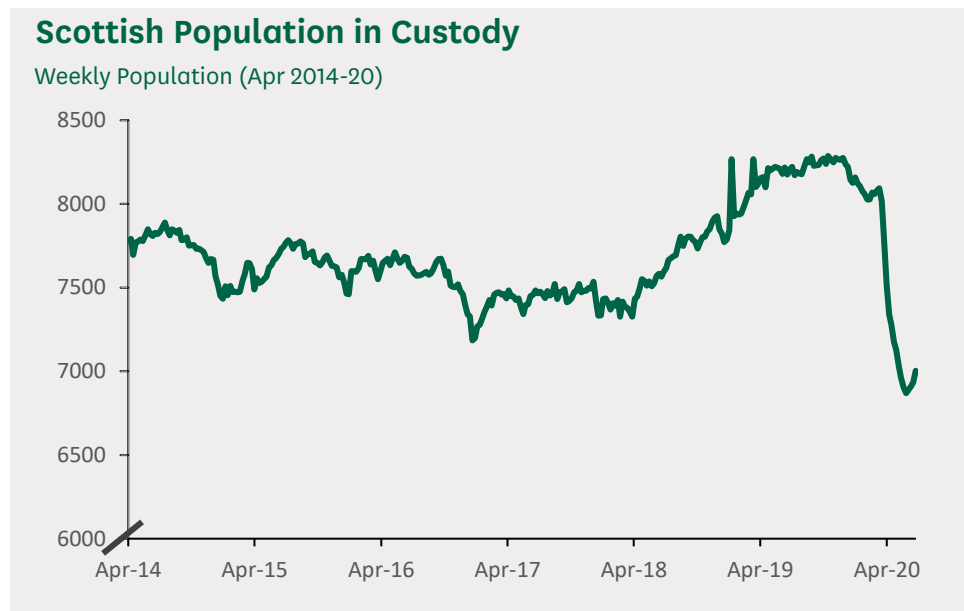
The average daily prison population for 2019/20 was 8,198. Of those, 1,669 (20%) were prisoners on remand – either awaiting trial or sentencing.<sup>25</sup> Just over 6,500 (80%) were sentenced prisoners. The latest available data on sentence length is for 2018/19. In that year, 53% of sentenced prisoners 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 March 2019. This is likely the result of fewer people entering custody during lockdown

On 15 October 2021 there was 7,527 people in custody<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Scottish Prison Service, [SPS Prison Population: Annual population](#)

<sup>26</sup> Scottish Prison Service [SPS Prison Population: Weekly population](#)



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

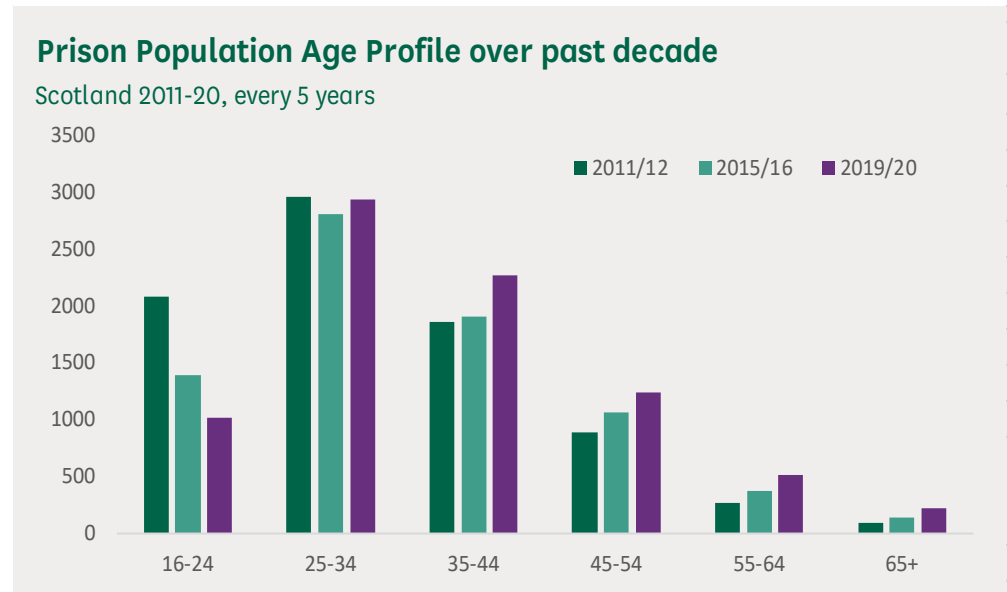
## 2.4 Age profile of prisoners

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 to just 12% in 2019/20. The age group 25-34 remained stable over the decade, while the 35-44 age group grew from 23% of the population in 2011/12 to 28% in 2019/20.

Overall, the age group 24-44 made up around 60% of prisoners across all three time intervals. For context, in 2019/20 only 33% of people in Scotland were aged 24-44<sup>27</sup>.

The 55+ age group grew from around 4% of the prison population in 2011/12 to 9% in 2019/20.

<sup>27</sup> [Scottish Government Mid 2019 Population Estimates](#)



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

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

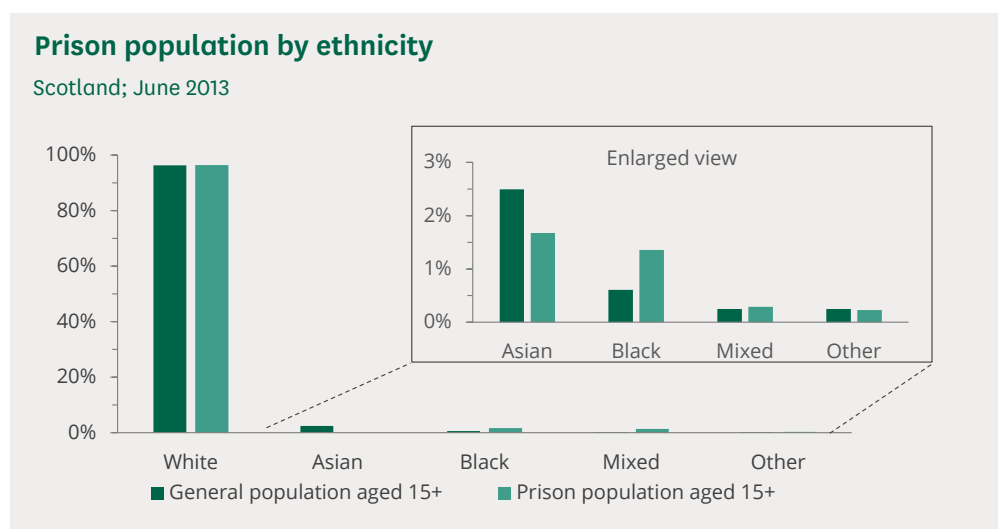
## 2.5

## Ethnicity and Religion

Statistics for Ethnicity and religion are only available up to 2013/14.

### 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

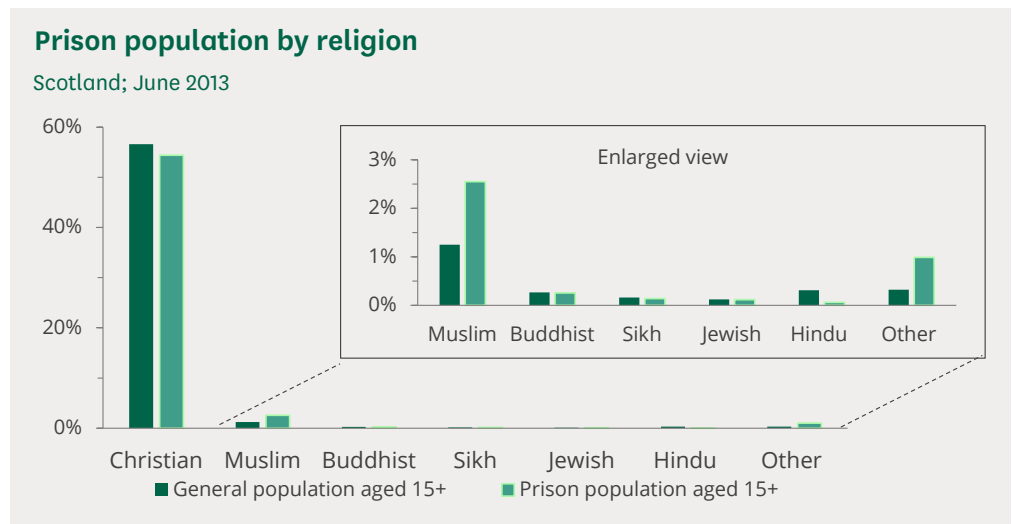
**Notes:** Prison population as at June 30. General population from Scotland Census 2011.

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.<sup>28</sup>

## 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.

<sup>28</sup> Scotland Census, [Census 2001-2011](#)



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>29</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.

## 2.6

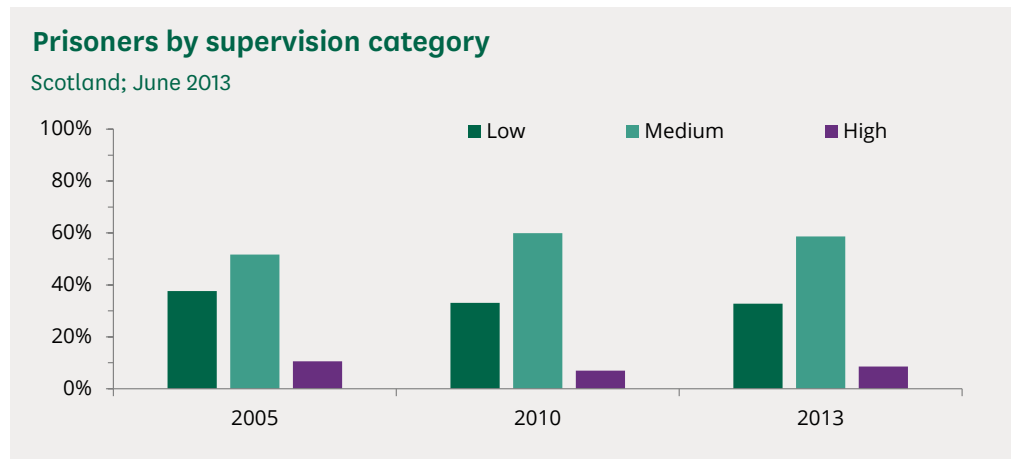
## Supervision Level

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.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Scotland Census, [Census 2001-2011](#)

<sup>30</sup> Offenders Families Helpline, [Prisoner Category](#), accessed 1 July 2016.





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

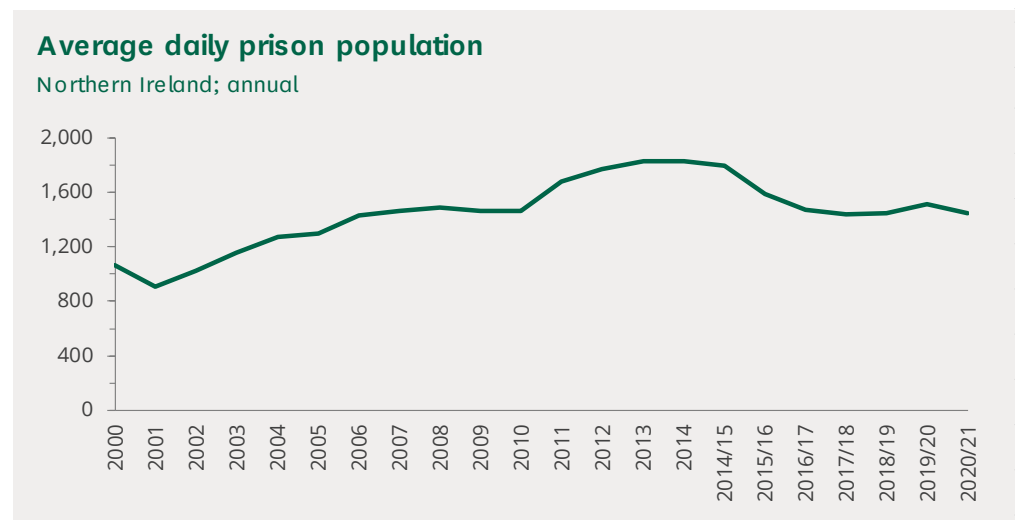
At 30 June 2013 just under 60% of prisoners were classified as requiring a medium level of supervision whilst in custody. Just over a third were considered to be a low risk and under 10% were considered to be a high risk.

## 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 2021, the average daily prison population in Northern Ireland was 1,448. This was 4.5% lower than in the year ending March 2020, a likely result of the lockdown caused by the Pandemic. However, this still represents a 36% increase on 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.



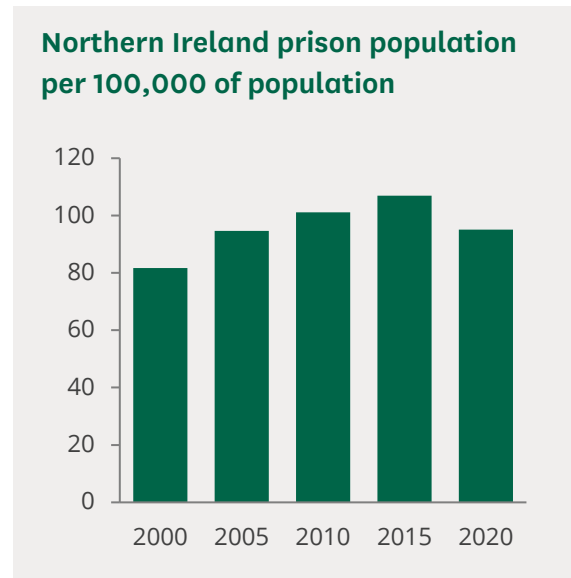
Source: Northern Ireland Department of Justice, [The Northern Ireland Prison Population](#), various years

## 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 2020/21, the average daily population was 21% lower than in 2014.



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

In 2000 there were around 82 prisoners per 100,000 head of population. In 2019/20, this had increased to 95 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.<sup>31</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>31</sup> Northern Ireland Prison Service [FOI Case No. 13:454](#)

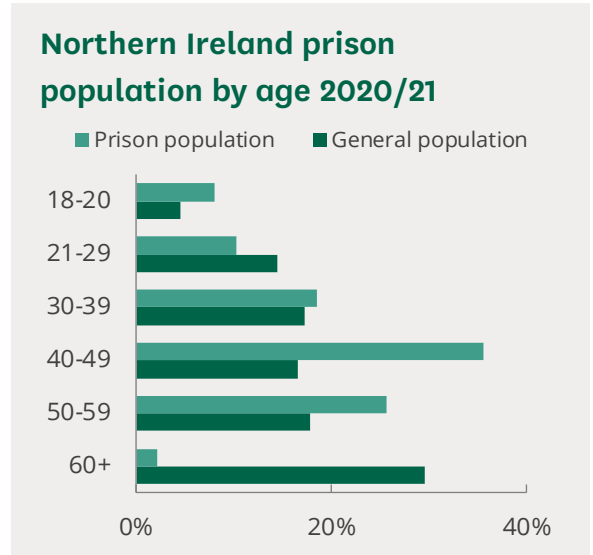
## 3.2

## Age Profile of Prisoners

People aged 21-29 accounted for 26% of the prison population in 2020/21 compared to 14% amongst the general population.<sup>32,33</sup>

Prisoners aged 30-39 accounted for 36% of the prison population and 40-49 and 50-59 year olds accounted for 18% and 10% respectively.

Prisoners aged 60 years and older accounted for 8% of the prison population, compared to 29% of the general population.



Source: [Northern Ireland Prison Population 2020/21](#)

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

<sup>32</sup> 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.

<sup>33</sup> [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 2019/20 figures show that in **England and Wales**:

- The average direct cost per prisoner in was £28,974 but taking into account all resource expenditure the overall cost per prisoner was £42,670.<sup>34</sup>
- The average direct cost *per prison place* in was £30,312 but taking into account all resource expenditure the overall cost per place was £44,640.

In **Scotland**, the Prison Service publishes the annual cost of prison in its [Annual Report and Accounts](#). In 2019/20, the average annual cost *per prison place* in Scotland was £38,213. The cost per prison place on a resource accounting basis (including depreciation and impairment charges) was £40,175.<sup>35</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 2019/20 the annual cost per prison place in Northern Ireland was £43,029.<sup>36</sup> The costs should not be compared across jurisdictions since they are calculated in different ways.

<sup>34</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>35</sup> Scottish Prison Service [Annual Report and Accounts 2019/20](#), Appendix 8a.

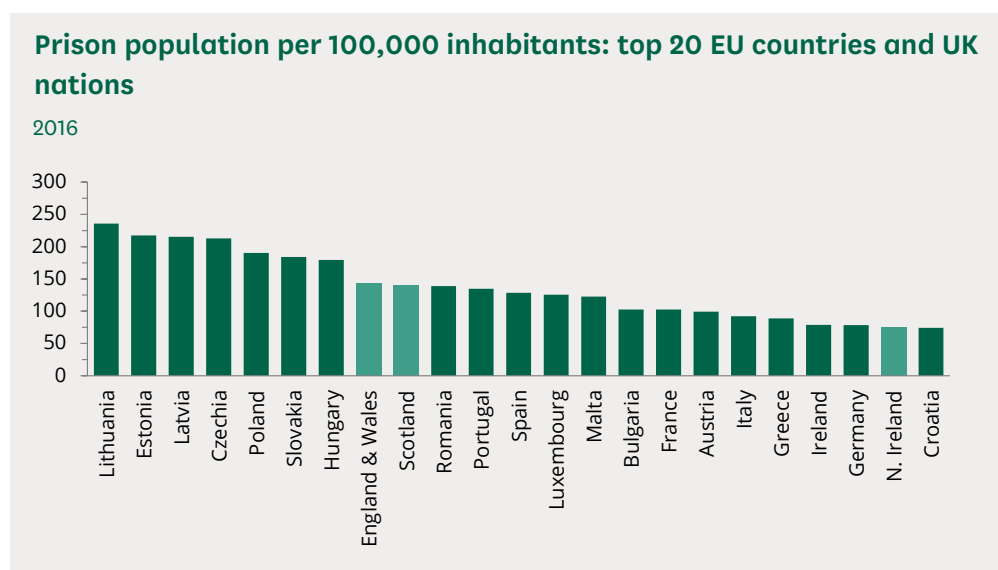
<sup>36</sup> Northern Ireland Prison Service [Annual Report and Accounts 2019/20](#), p.14.

## 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](#), 25 October 2021

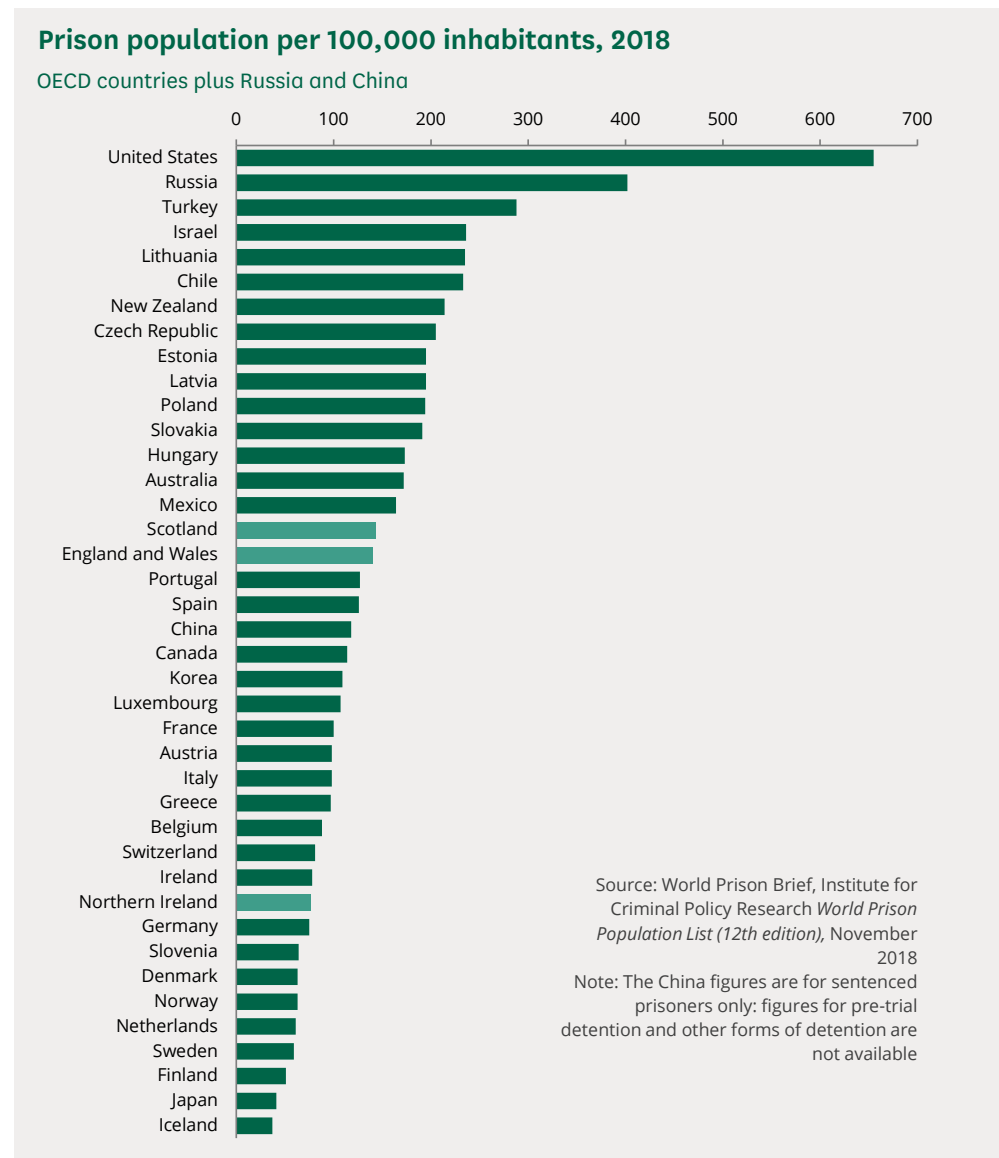
According to the Eurostat data, England and Wales had 144 prisoners per 100,000 head of population, the 8th highest rate among EU countries and the highest amongst western European jurisdictions.<sup>37</sup> Scotland had the 9th highest with 144 prisoners per 100,000. Northern Ireland had 76 prisoners per 100,000 of population and was ranked 20<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>37</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 2018.<sup>38</sup> England and Wales rank the 17<sup>th</sup> highest among these countries, Scotland the 16<sup>th</sup>, and Northern Ireland the 31<sup>st</sup>.



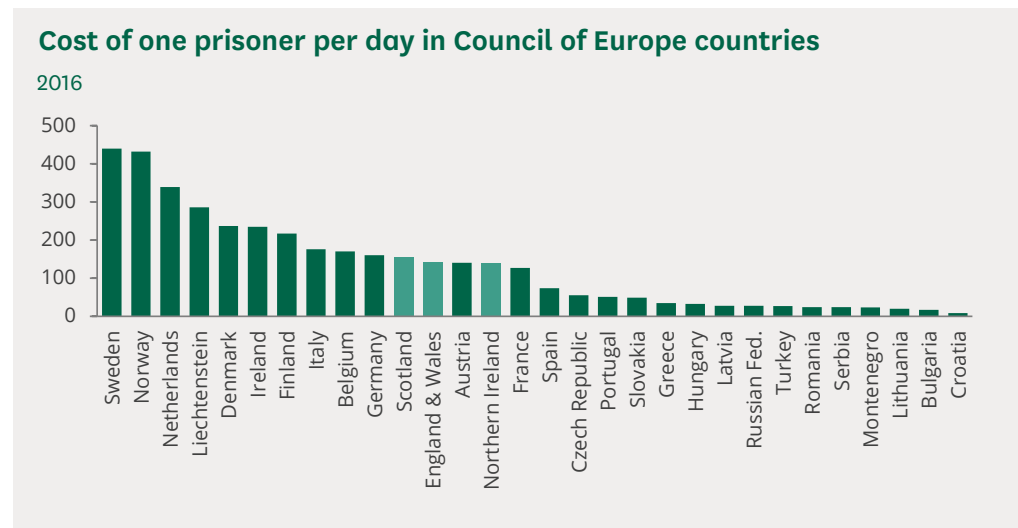
Source: [World Prison Brief November 2018](#)

<sup>38</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>39</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>40</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>39</sup> Council of Europe, annual penal statistics; [SPACE I - Prison Populations, Survey 2015 Final Report](#), 14 March 2017

<sup>40</sup> Bank of England, series XUAAERS: Annual average Spot exchange rate, Euro into Sterling, accessed 3 Jan 2017



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