



Prison Population Projections 2023 to 2028, England and Wales

This bulletin presents prison population projections for England and Wales from December 2023 to March 2028. It is produced to aid policy development, capacity planning and resource allocation within the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS).

Main points

Long-term prison population is expected to increase due to a combination of factors

The prison population is projected to increase to between 94,600 and 114,800 by March 2028, with a central estimate of 105,800. This projected long-term increase is predicated on several factors, including continued growth in police charging and prosecutorial activity and falling Crown Court outstanding caseloads (both of which could increase inflows into the prison system and in turn the prison population), and changes in sentencing policy and behaviour to keep the most serious offenders in prison for longer.

There is considerable uncertainty around the presented projection

The projections account for the best available evidence, but there is considerable uncertainty around how the courts will reduce the outstanding caseload and the impact of police charging activity on future crime mix and incoming demand into the system. Any differences in assumptions for other factors such as sentencing behaviours and future changes in policy will all result in variation from these projections.

The projected population in the central scenario is higher than that in the previously published 2022-2027 projection from Summer 2024 onwards

The total prison population for March 2025 is now (in the central scenario) estimated to be about 1,800 higher than in the 2022-2027 publication. The difference is predominantly driven by a higher starting remand population that is expected to begin falling later than previously projected.

Populations of adult males, adult females and those over 50 years old are all projected to increase

The prison population of adult males, adult females and offenders aged 50 years and over are all expected to increase over the projection period due to the same underlying factors.

Introduction

This bulletin presents prison population projections for England and Wales from December 2023 to March 2028. It is produced to aid policy development, capacity planning and resource allocation within the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). The latest published useable operational capacity¹ (23rd February 2024) is **89,041**².

The projections are produced using a model of flows of offenders into and out of prison which estimates the resulting prison population each month. A key driver for future prison population (and a major source of uncertainty for these projections) is the volume and composition of cases entering the criminal courts, i.e. upstream demand. To illustrate the impact of these upstream demand assumptions, three plausible scenarios have been agreed between the MoJ, the Home Office and the Crown Prosecution Service, and this publication presents the prison population projection as a range based on these scenarios. The projected prison population range presented here only estimates the impact of differing upstream demand assumptions and therefore does not represent the full range of uncertainty surrounding the projections. All three scenarios are presented from December 2023 to March 2028 and are considered to be plausible outcomes of the growth of the prison population over the next five years. This differs from the previous publication which only presented the central scenario over a three-year horizon.

Alongside incoming demand, the size of the prison population over 2023 to 2028 is also expected to increase due to courts addressing growth in the outstanding caseload that has been seen since 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns restricted the courts' ability to process cases through 2020 and 2021 and the Criminal Bar Association disruptive action between April and October 2022 also affected court proceedings, leading to further growth in the outstanding caseload. Over the first three quarters of 2023, Crown Court disposal volumes increased but remained below receipts, meaning the outstanding caseload continued to increase³.

The projections also incorporate the estimated impacts of agreed sentencing policies, including the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act⁴, and the Release of Prisoners Order 2020⁵ which include provisions to increase custody time for violent and sexual offenders sentenced to a standard determinate sentence of 4 to 7 years and over 7 years, respectively.

Since there is considerable uncertainty around the assumptions in these areas, the prison population will likely differ from what has been projected – there is a more detailed discussion regarding uncertainty in Section 2.

The latest statistics and commentary on the current and historic prison population are published in the Offender Management Statistics Quarterly publication. This is available online on GOV.UK at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/offender-management-statistics-quarterly>.

¹ The operational capacity of a prison is the total number of prisoners that an establishment can hold, considering control, security and the proper operation of the planned regime. It is determined by Prison Group Directors based on operational judgement and experience.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prison-population-statistics>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-court-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2023>

⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/32/contents/enacted>

⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/158/made>

Prison population actuals for November 2023 used in this publication are published at:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65b107b8160765001118f7cc/Population_31Dec2023.ods

The Story of the Prison Population provides a summary of what happened to the prison population between 1993 and 2020 and the major factors contributing to these changes:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/story-of-the-prison-population-1993-to-2020>.

1. Total prison population projection and custody type breakdown

The prison population in England and Wales was 87,973⁶ as of Friday 23rd February. It is projected to increase steadily to between 94,600 and 114,800 by March 2028, with a central estimate of 105,800.

In the first few years of the projection period, the projected rise in the prison population is primarily due to an increase in receptions of determinate sentenced offenders. This increase in receptions reflects observed increases in police and prosecutorial activity over 2023 continuing to feed through the courts, further increases in police and prosecutorial activity over this period, as well as efforts to address the outstanding Crown Court caseload. Changes in sentencing policy and behaviour, which will keep the most serious offenders in prison for longer, contribute to projected increases in the long-term.

There are several sources of uncertainty for the future prison population, particularly around future levels of demand entering the Criminal Justice System (CJS). This publication presents three prison population projections to assess the impact of differing potential upstream demand scenarios which have been agreed between the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the Home Office and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

These projections reflect three equally plausible scenarios for future police and prosecutorial activity, and the likely impacts on the CJS. All three scenarios take account of the observed demand over the first part of 2023 and assume police officer numbers⁷ are stable over the projection but vary factors such as; the future capacity of officers to bring criminal charges, accounting for factors such as officer experience as it takes time for officers recruited under the Police Uplift Programme (PUP)⁸ to complete training programmes and become fully operational; and average custodial sentence lengths (ACSLs):

- **Low upstream demand:** assumptions on police and CPS crime mix and charges per officer stay at levels observed in the most recently available data. Demand broadly remains at the level observed over this period, with a small increase as the final cohorts of PUP recruits complete training. ACSLs reflect 2022 to 2023 levels.
- **High upstream demand:** police and CPS crime mix and charges per officer start to return to pre-COVID (2019) levels, unless recently observed demand has already exceeded this level, in which case it is held constant. This scenario additionally captures the risk that the full anticipated impact of the growth in police officer numbers over the PUP is yet to affect the system. Together this results in an increase in the volume of cases coming into court. Additionally, ACSLs return to 2019 levels.
- **Central upstream demand:** overall upstream demand is assumed to be between levels in the low and high scenarios: police, CPS crime mix and charge per officer return to March – November 2021 levels unless recently observed demand has already exceeded this level, in which case it is held constant. This scenario additionally captures some of the risk that the full anticipated impact of the growth in

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prison-population-statistics>

⁷ Police FTE at March-23 stands at 147,430 – see <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-workforce-england-and-wales>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-officer-uplift-quarterly-update-to-march-2023/police-officer-uplift-england-and-wales-quarterly-update-to-31-march-2023>

police officer numbers over the PUP is yet to affect the system. Additionally, ACSLs reflect 2022 to 2023 levels.

Figure 1.1: Total prison population projection, December 2023 to March 2028⁹
 (Source: Table A4).

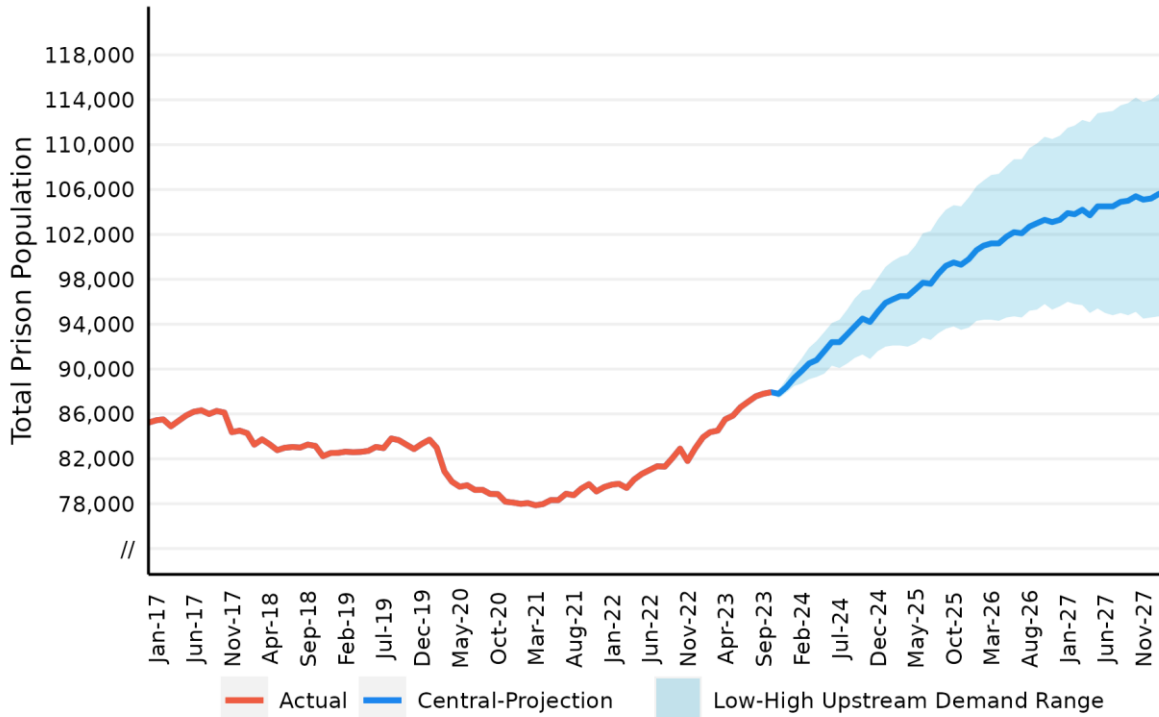


Figure 1.1 presents the actual prison population between January 2017 and November 2023, with central, low and high population projections from December 2023 to March 2028.

Table 1.1 presents the prison population projection by custody type, reported at an end of November position.

⁹ The chart shows the central projection for prison population and the range estimated from reasonable low and high upstream demand scenarios. This shaded area therefore estimates the impact of plausible future trends in crime types and levels of police and prosecutorial activity, however this does not reflect the full range of demand risk. The uncertainty around these projections is large and increases over time. See Section 2 for more information about the sources of uncertainty.

Table 1.1: Total prison population by custody type¹⁰ at end November 2023 and projections for November 2024 to November 2027

Date	Total	Remand	Determinate	Indeterminate	Recall	Non-Criminal	Fine Defaulters
Central							
November 2023*	87,935	16,186	50,592	8,518	12,150	465	24
November 2024	94,500	15,800	56,500	8,300	13,300	500	0
November 2025	99,500	14,300	62,100	8,100	14,500	500	0
November 2026	103,300	12,500	66,800	8,000	15,400	500	0
November 2027	105,400	11,100	69,700	7,900	16,200	500	0
Low							
November 2024	91,300	14,600	54,600	8,300	13,300	500	0
November 2025	93,800	11,800	59,200	8,100	14,200	500	0
November 2026	95,800	9,600	62,700	8,000	15,000	500	0
November 2027	95,100	8,600	62,500	7,900	15,600	500	0
High							
November 2024	97,000	16,900	57,900	8,300	13,300	500	0
November 2025	104,600	16,700	64,700	8,100	14,600	500	0
November 2026	110,700	15,900	70,600	8,000	15,700	500	0
November 2027	114,200	15,100	73,900	8,000	16,600	500	0

Numbers greater than 100 are rounded to the nearest 100; numbers smaller than 100 are rounded to the nearest 50.

Components may not sum due to rounding. * Populations are actual prison population values taken from 30th November 2023.

The determinate population is projected to grow over the whole projection period in the central and high scenarios and the increase in this category is the main driver for the projected rise in the total population since the determinate sub-population is the single largest group. The projected growth in the determinate population is driven by an increase in the number of offenders receiving a determinate sentence, due to continued increases in police and prosecutorial charging activity and criminal courts working to reduce the volume of outstanding cases. In the long-term, changes in sentencing policy and behaviour, which will keep the most serious offenders in prison for longer, lead to a build-up of prisoners serving longer sentences.

The number of people remanded in custody is projected to decrease over the long-term projection period. The remand population was 16,186 at the end of November 2023, due to the high volume of outstanding cases awaiting trial in the Crown Court, in part driven by recent increases in incoming demand. Despite a growth in both receipts and disposals over the first three quarters of 2023, disposals remained below receipts meaning the outstanding caseload increased. Latest management information from HMCTS indicates the Crown Court outstanding caseload remained relatively stable over the last 3 months of 2023¹¹. The volume of outstanding cases is expected to fall over the projection period in the long-term due to an assumed increase in disposals, driven by behaviour and activity in the courts continuing to return to pre-COVID patterns. The size of the remand population is therefore also projected to decrease as the time taken for courts to process cases improves.

The indeterminate population consists of offenders who serve Imprisonment for Public Protection¹² (IPP) and life sentences. This population is projected to fall over the projection

¹⁰ Non-criminal prisoners are held for civil offences or under the immigration act. A civil non-criminal prisoner is someone held in prison because of a non-criminal matter, for example, non-payment of council tax or contempt of court. The non-criminal population also includes immigration detainees that have finished serving their sentence and are being kept in prison by immigration authorities.

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/hmcts-management-information-december-2023>

¹² Sentences of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPPs) were created by the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and started to be used in April 2005. Offenders sentenced to an IPP are set a minimum term (tariff) which they

period driven by the gradual decline of IPP offenders. Offenders can no longer receive an IPP sentence due to its abolition in 2012, with current IPP offenders being released by the Parole Board. Any such released offenders subsequently recalled will be counted in the recall projection.

The recall population¹³ is projected to increase for the duration of the projection period. The increase is partly due to the expected growth of the determinate population – this will result in a larger pool of offenders on licence after serving the custodial part of their sentence, and a proportion of this group will be recalled to custody. About 20%¹⁴ of the offenders currently in the recall population have been recalled to prison following an indeterminate sentence. This cohort of the recall population is also projected to increase over the projection period because more offenders will leave prison following an indeterminate sentence and therefore more people will be eligible to be recalled to custody.

The non-criminal¹⁵ population includes prisoners held for civil offences and immigration detainees held in prisons. This population is assumed to remain constant over the projection period. The number of fine defaulters in custody is also assumed to stay at current levels.

Changes in the prison population are expected as the result of a range of policies, including those already in effect but not yet fully represented in the population and others expected to commence over the projection period. In addition to the impacts resulting from increased police officer numbers, other estimated impacts factored into the projections include:

- The impacts of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022¹⁶, which includes provisions for changing the automatic release point for violent and sexual offenders sentenced to a standard determinate sentence of 4 to 7 years;
- The impacts of the Release of Prisoners Order 2020¹⁷, which increases custodial sentences for offenders convicted of a relevant violent or sexual offence with a custodial sentence of 7 years or more;
- The impacts of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021¹⁸, including extending extraterritorial jurisdiction over specified offences (necessary for ratification of the Istanbul Convention);

must spend in prison. After they have completed their tariff, they can apply to the Parole Board for release. The Parole Board will release an offender only if it is satisfied that it is no longer necessary for the protection of the public for the offender to be confined.

¹³ Offenders are released from custody under licenced supervision, subject to a set of conditions such as living at an approved address. If the offender breaches the conditions of their licence they may be recalled into prison.

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2023/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2023>

¹⁵ Non-criminal prisoners are held for civil offences or under the Immigration Act. A civil non-criminal prisoner is someone held in prison because of a non-criminal matter, for example, non-payment of council tax or contempt of court. The non-criminal population also includes immigration detainees that have finished serving their sentence and are being kept in prison by immigration authorities.

¹⁶ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/32/contents/enacted>

¹⁷ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/158/made>

¹⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents/enacted>

- The impacts of the Government’s ambition in relation to charges of adult rape cases set out in the Rape Review¹⁹;
- The impacts of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022²⁰, including tougher sentences for those who pilot a small boat or smuggle migrants into the UK via other dangerous or illegal means;
- The impacts of revised sentencing guidelines for sexual offences against a child²¹;
- The impacts of mandating domestic abuse and safeguarding checks in all cases where electronic monitoring is proposed²²;
- The impacts of The Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Removal of Prisoners for Deportation) Order 2023²³;
- The impacts of The Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Home Detention Curfew) Order 2023²⁴.

Estimated impacts for these policies are assumed to be the same in the three projection scenarios.

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/end-to-end-rape-review-report-on-findings-and-actions>

²⁰ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/36/contents/enacted>

²¹ <https://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk/news/item/child-sexual-offences-sentencing-guidelines-published/>

²² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/electronic-monitoring-statistics-publication-september-2022/electronic-monitoring-statistics-publication-england-and-wales-september-2022>

²³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2023/1368/contents/enacted>

²⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2023/390/article/2/made>

2. Uncertainty in the projection

Several factors have contributed to the uncertainty around the 2023-2028 projections. Three main sources of uncertainty are (a) future court activity and recovery of the Criminal Justice System; (b) future crime mix and police charging rates; and (c) not yet fully realised or future policy changes which have the potential to change prison receptions, or the amount of time offenders spend in custody.

Demand in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) – arising from changing crime trends and police and prosecutorial behaviours – is a key driver of the future prison population. The low, central, and high projections presented in Section 1 illustrate the potential impact of differing upstream demand assumptions on the prison population. These projections reflect assumptions agreed with Home Office and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for plausible low, central, and high future upstream demand scenarios, accounting for the best available evidence at the time.

The prison population projections are informed by the latest available published data and reflect additional assumptions about the future of the CJS such as sentencing outcomes and uncertain policy impacts yet to come into effect. Unanticipated changes to Government policy, as well as offender, police, and sentencing behaviours, will inevitably mean the actual prison population in future years will differ to some degree from projections.

Uncertainty around future court activity and the recovery of the Criminal Justice System

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns restricted the courts' ability to process cases through 2020 and 2021, leading to an increase in the volume of outstanding criminal cases waiting for trial or sentencing in the Crown Court. The volume of disposals from the courts increased following the end of CBA action. Despite this, the outstanding caseload continued to increase as disposal volumes have not yet outpaced the volume of receipts entering the court. Uncertainty around the recovery profile for the Crown outstanding caseload influences both the speed the remand population is projected to fall and the rate at which demand flows into the sentenced population.

Recent published statistics²⁵ show that prosecutions and convictions have been increasing, however in the year to June 2023 volumes of both were still about 9% lower than the year to June 2019. Excluding summary offences²⁶ (which have a lower propensity to receive a custodial sentence), the proportion of offenders sentenced to immediate custody has also changed in recent years. This increased from 32% in 2018 and 2019 to 34% in the year ending June 2020, falling to 30% in the year ending June 2021 and increasing to 33% for the years ending June 2022 and 2023. The types of cases prioritised during the pandemic and pleas associated with these cases are likely to have contributed to these short-term fluctuations.

Published statistics²⁵ show that average custodial sentence length (ACSL) has increased – ACSL has steadily risen over the last 10 years, up by 5.4 months from 15.0 months in 2013 to 20.4 months in 2023. In the year to June 2023 43% of custodial sentences were for 12 months or more, up from 39% in the year to June 2019.

²⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-june-2023>

²⁶ There are three broad types of offence, based on severity: indictable only, triable either-way and summary offences. Indictable only offences are the most serious and must be tried at the Crown Court; summary offences are the least serious and must be tried at magistrates' courts; and triable either-way offences are of intermediate severity and may be tried at either court based on the circumstances of the case.

There has also been a change in the mix of offence types for custodial sentences in the 12 months to June 2023. In comparison with the year ending June 2019, the proportions of violence against the person, sexual, drug and public order offences have increased, while the proportions of robbery, theft, possession of weapons, miscellaneous crimes against society and fraud offences have decreased²⁵. Variations in the proportions of different offence types being dealt with by the courts can have a substantial impact on the volume of prison receptions.

Projections are predicated on assumptions for how the Crown Court outstanding caseload will reduce and future trends in other areas of the CJS, such as sentencing outcomes and custody rates. The three upstream demand scenarios reflect a range of reasonable outcomes for future case mix and ACSL, as detailed in Section 1.

Uncertainty around future crime types and police charging rates

A combination of factors around crime and charges appears to be increasing the risks of a larger future prison population: a recovery in charges for offences which fell sharply during the period covered by COVID-19 restrictions, improved joint working between the police and CPS to enhance case progression, and investigations starting to benefit from increases in police and prosecutor resources.

It is not possible to predict exactly what the impacts of charge volumes and case mix will be. The three upstream demand scenarios (described in Section 1) reflect different assumptions for plausible future police and prosecutorial activity and crime trends but are not intended to represent the full range of uncertainty – a change to any of these assumptions could lead to very different impacts on the prison population. In particular, the scale and profile of the prison population impact would be different if police officers focussed on more high harm crimes (e.g. trafficking of drugs, robbery, rape, and other sexual offences) or on offences related to visible policing (e.g. theft, criminal damage, possession of weapons, and possession of drugs). Although convictions for low harm crimes would incur relatively short custodial sentences, a high volume of these types of additional cases could lead to an increase in the prison population. High harm crimes result in longer custodial sentences, so a relatively small number of additional cases of this type could cause a large and sustained rise in the prison population.

Uncertainty due to other policy impacts

The prison demand projections also include the impacts of policy changes. For some policies already in effect, the impacts are not yet fully represented in the prison population i.e. the policy impact on the prison population will increase or decrease from that seen at the beginning of the projection period. Other policies are expected to commence over the projection period, and therefore their impact is not reflected in the prison population at the beginning of the projection period. The policy impacts included in these prison projections were based on the most up to date data available and the best assumptions of future impact at the time of assessment. However, there is inherent uncertainty around these impacts due to being unable to precisely predict the volume and nature of future cases flowing into the CJS. Any policies that have not received royal assent at the time of modelling are not included in these projections due to uncertainty over both the timelines and precise detail of the policies, which will remain until the parliamentary process has concluded. On 16th October, the Lord Chancellor announced a package of legislative measures to alleviate pressure on the prison estate²⁷. Whilst some of these measures have been enacted and are included in the projection, the remaining measures are still subject to the passage of

²⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-governments-approach-to-criminal-justice>

legislation through parliament and as such have not been included in this publication. Future policies made in response to system activity may also cause outturn to deviate from these projections.

Uncertainty and limitations due to modelling methodology

The modelling methodology, described in Sections TG1, TG2 and TG3, is another source of uncertainty. The modelling approach used to produce the prison population projections presented in this bulletin is a representation of a complex real-world system and does not capture every aspect which affects the prison population. As a result, even if assumptions prove accurate and are unchanged for the whole projection period, the projections will not match the actual prison population perfectly.

An example of this is the remand modelling, which assumes a linear relationship between the volume of cases outstanding in the Crown Court and Magistrates Court and the historic remand population – the method is detailed fully in Section 4a of TG3. Although data supports the rationale for this approach, it is a simplification of reality because the remand population could be affected by other trends in the CJS, and the relationship between these factors is likely to change over time. Modelling decisions like this are therefore a source of risk to the accuracy of projections.

3. Comparison against 2022-2027 population projection

The prison population tracked close to the 2022-2027 projection over most of 2023. High rates of growth are projected from 2024 onwards resulting in a central prison population projection for March 2025 1,800 above the 2022-2027 publication.

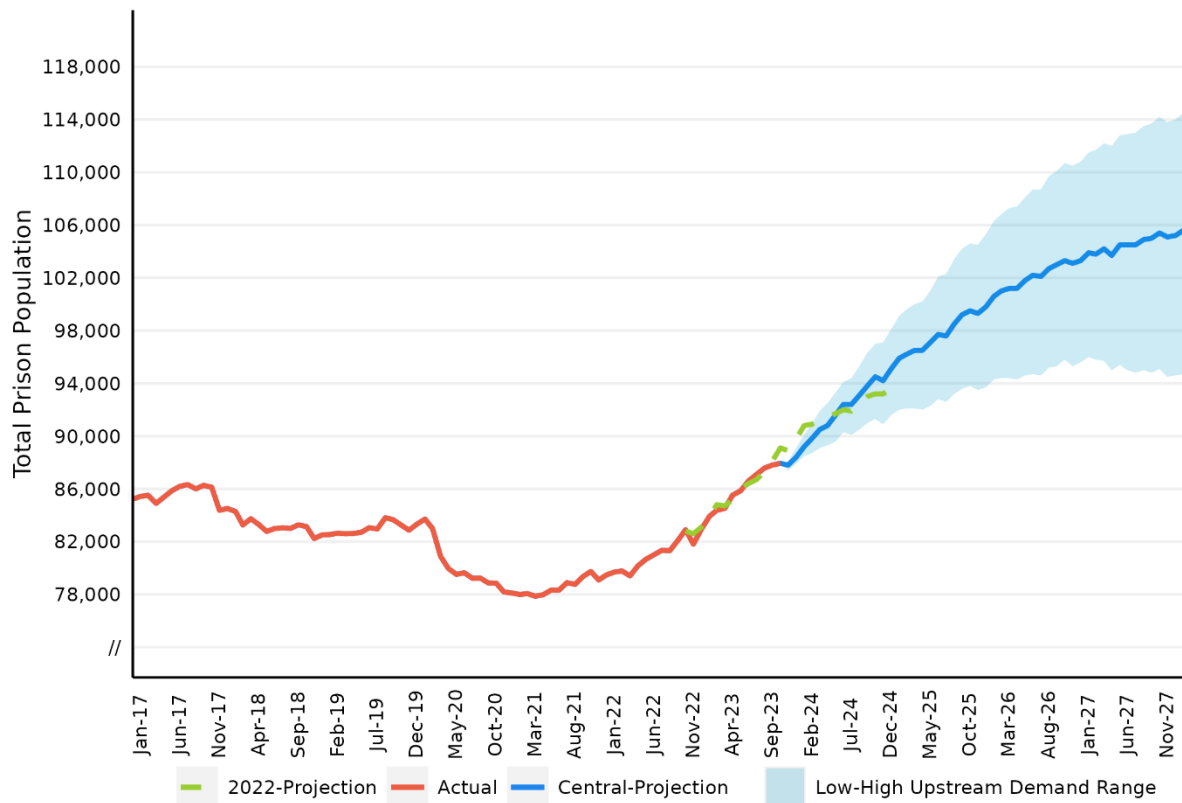
Through to Autumn 2023 the prison population grew more quickly than expected in the 2022-2027 projection. However, from October 2023 the rate of growth slowed and the actual population fell below the projection, with the prison population at the end of November 2023 1,200 below the level projected in the 2022-2027 publication. Growth slowed in both the determinate and remand population, however it is too early to understand exactly what factors drove these effects and which, if any, may be permanent. Some of the slowing of growth in the determinate population can be attributed to a temporary measure announced by the Lord Chancellor on the 16th October to allow the prison service to move some lower-level offenders out of prison on to licence up to 18 days before their automatic release date²⁸. This temporary measure is not assumed to continue over the projection period.

The 2023-2028 projection assumes that the slowing of growth over this period is temporary and the higher growth observed in the earlier part of 2023 returns in 2024. The 2023-2028 publication projects a higher prison population in the central scenario from Summer 2024 onwards. At March 2025 the total population is expected to be 1,800 higher than previously projected. Comparisons to the 2022-2027 projections at the sub-population level are discussed in more detail below.

A comparison of the 2022-2027 projection against actuals to date and the latest projections is presented in Figure 3.1.

²⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-governments-approach-to-criminal-justice>

Figure 3.1 Comparison of the 2022-2027 total prison population projection against actuals and latest 2023-2028 projections²⁹ (Source: Tables A4 and A5)



Comparison against 2022-2027 sub-population projections

Whilst the total population tracked closely to the 2022-2027 publication for the majority of 2023, individual sub-populations, most notably the remand and determinate populations, differed from the previous projection by a greater degree.

The number of people remanded in custody increased from 14,733 at the end of November 2022 to 16,186 at the end of November 2023. This is around 3,000 higher than projected in the 2022-2027 publication which expected the remand population to start falling over this period. The growth in the remand population over 2023 has been driven by a combination of higher-than-expected demand, and slower than previously projected recovery from the impact of CBA action in the courts. This population is projected to fall as courts recover and time on remand falls. However, this fall is expected to start later than previously projected, meaning that, at the end of November 2024, the projected remand population is 3,300 higher than the 2022-2027 population.

The slower than anticipated recovery in the courts also contributed to a determinate population that tracked below the 2022-2027 population throughout 2023, largely offsetting the higher-than-expected remand population. This population increased from 48,068 offenders at the end of November 2022 to 50,592 at the end of November 2023, compared to the 2022-2027 projection of 55,200 at this point. Therefore, the 2023-2028 projection for this population starts from a lower point and remains lower than the 2022-2027 projections in the short term, with a determinate population that is 2,700 lower in November 2024. High growth is then anticipated over the remainder of the projection period reflecting the increases

²⁹ The chart shows our central projection, however the uncertainty around this projection is large. See Section 2 for more information about the sources of uncertainty.

in incoming demand seen over 2023 and the cases remaining in court backlogs completing their proceedings.

The recall population has increased from 10,779 at the end of November 2022 to 12,150 at the end of the November 2023, a greater increase than projected in the 2022-2027 projections. This difference was driven by a higher-than-expected number of people being recalled. Latest insight does not suggest that the rate at which people are recalled to prison will drop back down to previous levels. To reflect this, the 2023-2028 projection estimates a recall population that is around 800 higher in November 2024, compared to the 2022-2027 projection.

The indeterminate population has remained relatively constant between November 2022 and November 2023 at around 8,500, whereas the 2022-2027 publication projected a small decrease over this period to 8,300. This population is projected to slowly fall over the projection period as a result of a continued decline of the IPP population due to its abolition in 2012 (see section 1), at November 2024 the indeterminate population is expected to be 100 higher than previously projected.

Table 3.1 Comparisons between the prison population projections for 2022-2027 and 2023-2028 (central scenario), by type of custody³⁰

Date	2022-2027	2023-2028	Difference
Total			
November 2023	89,100	87,935*	-1%
November 2024	93,200	94,500	1%
Remand			
November 2023	13,100	16,186*	24%
November 2024	12,500	15,800	27%
Determinate			
November 2023	55,200	50,592*	-8%
November 2024	59,200	56,500	-5%
Indeterminate			
November 2023	8,300	8,518*	2%
November 2024	8,200	8,300	1%
Recall			
November 2023	11,700	12,150*	4%
November 2024	12,500	13,300	6%
Non-Criminal			
November 2023	800	465*	-39%
November 2024	800	500	-33%
Fine Defaulters			
November 2023	50	24*	-8%
November 2024	50	0	-19%

Numbers greater than 100 are rounded to the nearest 100; numbers smaller than 100 are rounded to the nearest 50. Components may not sum due to rounding. Note that percentages are calculated before rounding. * Populations are actual prison population values taken from 30th November 2023.

³⁰ Non-criminal prisoners are held for civil offences or under the immigration act. A civil non-criminal prisoner is someone held in prison because of a non-criminal matter, for example, non-payment of council tax or contempt of court. The non-criminal population also includes immigration detainees that have finished serving their sentence and are being kept in prison by immigration authorities.

4. Projection of over 50, 60 and over 70 years old populations

The populations of over 50, over 60 and over 70-year-olds in prison are projected to increase over the projection period, as a result of the increasing overall prison population. These sub-populations are estimated to remain relatively constant as proportions of the total prison population.

Table 4.1 shows projections of prison population aged 50 to 59, 60 to 69 and over 70 years old. The prison population is projected to increase over the projection period for all of these age groups, as is the overall prison population.

Table 4.1: Prison population aged over 50, 60 and 70 years old, November 2023 actuals and projected November 2024 to November 2027

Date	Total (all ages)	50 and over	50 to 59	60 to 69	70 and over
Central					
November 2023*	87,935	15,477	9,381	4,149	1,947
November 2024	94,500	16,000	9,600	4,400	2,100
November 2025	99,500	16,800	9,900	4,700	2,200
November 2026	103,300	17,800	10,400	5,000	2,400
November 2027	105,400	18,600	10,900	5,100	2,600
Low					
November 2024	91,300	15,600	9,400	4,300	2,000
November 2025	93,800	16,200	9,600	4,500	2,100
November 2026	95,800	16,800	9,800	4,700	2,300
November 2027	95,100	17,200	9,900	4,800	2,500
High					
November 2024	97,000	15,900	9,600	4,300	2,100
November 2025	104,600	17,100	10,100	4,700	2,200
November 2026	110,700	18,400	10,800	5,000	2,500
November 2027	114,200	19,200	11,200	5,200	2,700

Numbers greater than 100 are rounded to the nearest 100; numbers smaller than 100 are rounded to the nearest 50. Components may not sum due to rounding. * Populations are actual prison population values taken from 30th November 2023.

The 50-year-old and over population is projected to increase from 15,477 as at November 2023 to 18,600 in November 2027.

This projected increase in the 50-year-old and over prison population is driven by the increasing determinate population and the knock-on impact on the recall population as prisoners released after determinate sentences are recalled.

5. Projection of age and sex cohorts

The overall prison population is projected to increase over the projection period, with the populations of both female adults, and male adults increasing and the populations of children remaining stable.

Table 5.1 shows projections of prison population by those aged under 18 and adults by sex. Adult male and adult female sub-populations increase over the projection period due to the same factors driving the increase in the total population. The Juvenile population has remained relatively stable in recent years and is projected to remain at this level throughout the projection.

Table 5.1: Prison population by age group and sex, November 2023 actuals and projected November 2024 to November 2027

Date	Total	Juvenile	Female 18+	Male 18+
Central				
November 2023*	87,935	286	3,611	84,038
November 2024	94,500	300	3,800	90,300
November 2025	99,500	300	4,100	95,100
November 2026	103,300	300	4,200	98,800
November 2027	105,400	300	4,200	100,900
Low				
November 2024	91,300	300	3,700	87,300
November 2025	93,800	300	3,800	89,800
November 2026	95,800	300	3,800	91,700
November 2027	95,100	300	3,800	91,000
High				
November 2024	97,000	500	4,200	92,300
November 2025	104,600	500	4,600	99,500
November 2026	110,700	500	4,700	105,500
November 2027	114,200	500	4,800	108,900

Numbers greater than 100 are rounded to the nearest 100; numbers smaller than 100 are rounded to the nearest 50. Components may not sum due to rounding. * Populations are actual prison population values taken from 30th November 2023.

The adult male (18 and over) population is projected to increase from 84,038 at the end of November 2023 to 100,900 by November 2027. Supporting Table A2 provides a further breakdown of the young adult population (aged 18 to 20 inclusive, both male and female), which is also projected to increase from the current population of 3,256 (November 2023) to 3,500 by November 2027.

The juvenile population covers only offenders held in His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) estates and includes those in the 15 to 17 age group. Note that figures do not cover those young offenders held in Secure Children's Homes or Secure Training Centres. The juvenile population decreased in 2020 and has remained roughly constant at around 300 since the end of 2020. The number of 15- to 17-year-olds in HMPPS custody is projected to remain at this level throughout the projection, with a projected population of 300 at November 2027.

The adult female population has increased from 3,245 at the end of November 2022 to 3,611 at the end of November 2023 and is projected to increase further to 4,200 by November

2027. This projection does not include any future impact of the Female Offender Strategy³¹ and Strategy Delivery Plan³², which aims to improve outcomes for female offenders by treating custody as a last resort, as work is still on-going to assess the impacts of this policy.

³¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-offender-strategy>

³² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-offender-strategy-delivery-plan-2022-to-2025>

6. Links to related Ministry of Justice statistics

For further information on:

- The latest statistics on court receipts visit:
www.gov.uk/government/collections/criminal-court-statistics
- The latest statistics on the Criminal Justice System, including information on sentencing, visit:
www.gov.uk/government/collections/criminal-justice-statistics-quarterly
- The latest statistics and commentary on the prison population visit:
www.gov.uk/government/collections/offender-management-statistics-quarterly
- The Story of the Prison Population 1993-2020 visit:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/story-of-the-prison-population-1993-to-2020>
- Weekly prison population and capacity figures visit:
www.gov.uk/government/collections/prison-population-statistics

TG1. Modelling methodology

The prison projections modelling is part of a wider suite of models within the Ministry of Justice used to model the criminal courts and offender management, driven by projections of demand for the Ministry of Justice's services. Starting from projected volumes of completed court cases (produced by separate models which are discussed in Sections 1 and 2 of TG3), two main components of the modelling suite are used to develop prison population projections – a custodial sentencing model and a prison population projection model.

The custodial sentencing model (discussed in Section 3 of TG3) is driven by projections of numbers of defendants convicted or sentenced in the criminal courts. To project volumes of people received into prison, it also considers:

- the case type and court route defendants have come through;
- the sentences which concluded cases attract; and
- the proportion of sentences which lead to a prison reception.

The prison population projection model (Section 4 of TG3) takes projections of prison receptions and then models the amount of time offenders spend in prison to calculate the resulting prison population for each month of the projection period.

The assumptions informing these projections, and therefore the projections themselves, are subject to uncertainty.

The projection model is based on latest available data from various sources including court proceedings and performance data and sentencing data. Latest P-NOMIS extracts, referenced in offender management statistics, are utilised to model prison receptions and population data.

The method used for generating projections of the prison population in England and Wales for the 2023 to 2028 projections is similar to the approach used to generate the previous 2022 to 2027 projections published on 23rd February 2023. Sections TG2 and TG3 provide further details of the methods used to produce the prison population projections and the assumptions behind them.

TG2. Uncertainties in the prison population projections

The projections presented reflect the impact of the latest trends and assumptions in the flow of defendants through the courts, in sentencing behaviour and in the age band, sex, and offence of defendants entering the system. Estimated impacts of changes to legislation and guidance which took place before November 2023 have been accounted for (as detailed in Section 1).

The recovery of courts from outstanding caseloads built up during the COVID-19 pandemic and Criminal Bar Association disruptive action result in considerable uncertainty in these projections. Even without these effects, the actual future prison population is impossible to predict precisely. Changes to criminal justice processes could influence the numbers of offenders being brought to the point of sentence or the way that offenders are managed. Changes to sentencing behaviour may also be different from those modelled.

In addition, criminal justice processes, sentencing behaviour and policy decisions can all change in response to a multitude of environmental factors which cannot be anticipated. Such factors could include strike action affecting the Criminal Justice System, high-profile criminal cases, and events like the public disorder in August 2011.

Assumptions for modelling were agreed through consultation with policy and operational experts at the Ministry of Justice, His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service, His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service, Home Office, and the Crown Prosecution Service. The assumptions are based on analysis (where reliable data is available), and on expert judgement from stakeholders. The assumptions are therefore likely to be more robust for those measures and processes that are well defined.

TG3. Detail of models and assumptions

Overview of the modelling approach

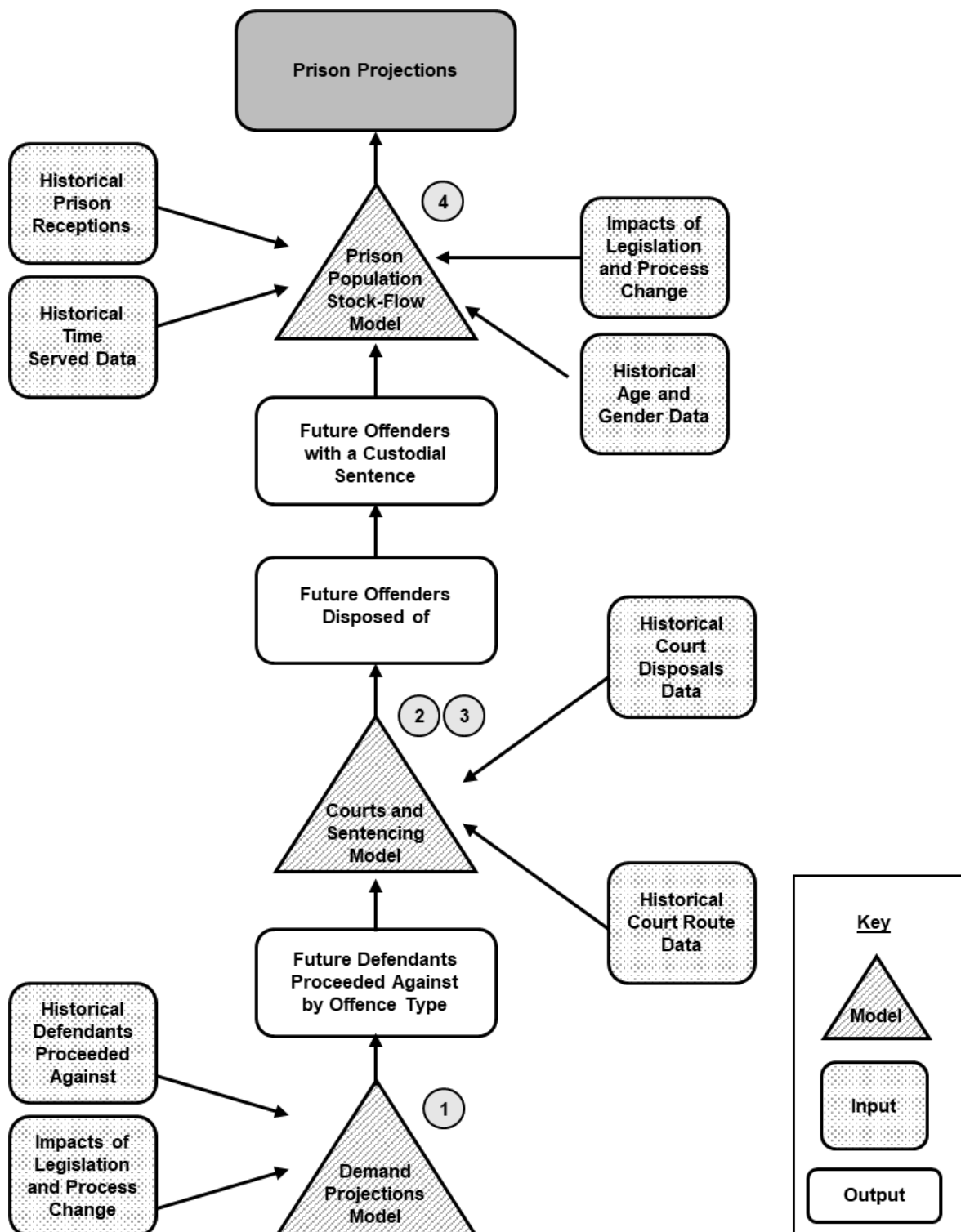
The methods used to generate this set of prison population projections are similar to the approach taken for the previous projections (2022 to 2027 projections published on 23rd February 2023).

Since there is uncertainty around future levels of demand entering the Criminal Justice System (CJS), this publication presents the prison population projections based on three plausible upstream demand scenarios which have been agreed between the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the Home Office and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

Prison population projections are initially produced for separate sub-populations and then combined. In most cases, these population groups are projected by combining reception (inflow) projections over time, discharge (outflow) projections over time, and the starting-point population (this type of modelling is known as stock-flow modelling). The reception projections come from modelling the flow of cases of particular types through courts, and then applying calculated ratios of court disposals (closed cases) that become prison receptions. The discharge projections are derived by applying time periods served in prison to the existing prison population and new receptions. The overall structure is shown in Figure TG3.1.

Prison sub-populations that are not modelled in a stock-flow manner are remand, fine defaulters and non-criminal populations, as well as changes to the prison population resulting from government policies that are being or are expected to be implemented. The remand population is modelled using the projection of Crown Court and Magistrate Court outstanding case count, fine defaulters and non-criminal populations are assumed to remain constant at their recent level, and policy impacts are each projected according to the unique aspects of the policy in question.

Figure TG3.1: Key components of the prison projections modelling system



1) Producing projections of defendants entering court

Projections of defendants proceeded against at court are chosen as the entry point to the modelling system because this is the entry point of defendants into the Ministry of Justice's area of responsibility.

The volume of defendants proceeded against at court fell during the pandemic. In projecting future demand, three plausible scenarios for future demand from police and prosecutorial activity have been agreed between the MoJ, the Home Office and CPS and modelled for these projections. The scenarios have different assumptions for the levels and composition of cases entering the criminal courts, as detailed in Section 1.

2) Converting projections of defendants entering court into volumes of completed court cases

Workload models for the criminal courts are used to convert the projections of court demand into a set of projections of court disposals (completed court cases) by disposal type (including custodial convictions). These projections are a key input for the prison population modelling described in Sections 3 and 4 of TG3 below.

These models take projections of defendants entering court (court receipts) and assign various attributes (such as plea behaviour) to cases based on historical data. These attributes are used to estimate likely hearing times and to predict progress through the courts. This projected future demand is combined with the current outstanding caseload to estimate total court workload. The volume and type of cases completed in a period is then projected by comparing assumptions of available capacity against the listing processes and priorities in courts. The projected case completions are used to produce estimates of the resulting flow of cases through the system.

3) Converting completed court cases into volumes of prison inflows

The sentencing module takes projections of court disposals (Section 2 of TG3) and derives projected volumes of custodial sentences. The conversion of court disposals into custodial sentences is based on historical court sentence outcomes.

The ratio of longer sentences for a given court disposal has varied in recent data, but it is assumed that the long-term ratios will return to those seen in the latest sentencing data during periods in which magistrates' sentencing powers were not in place. More recent data is used to determine custodial sentences in the short term, with ratios returning to the longer-term trends by mid-2024.

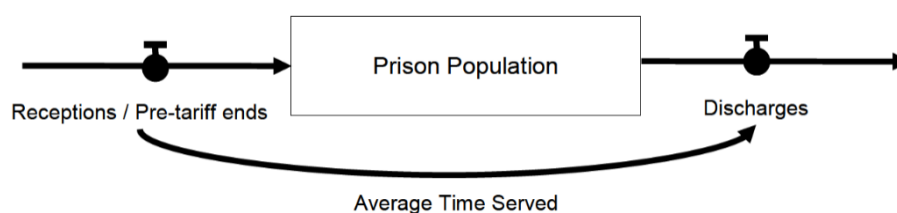
The projected custodial sentences are then converted into prison receptions using conversion ratios derived from historical proportions. Custodial sentences include offenders who may already be serving a sentence for a previous crime or those who would serve their whole custodial sentence on remand, meaning that they would not be a new reception to prison.

4a) Producing prison population projections

Prison population projections are produced using separate models for individual sub-populations, combined with the impacts of new policies. The following sub-populations in prison are modelled using a stock-flow model based on the generic structure shown in Figure TG3.2: determinate sentence, life sentence, Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) and recalls. The stock-flow model begins with the starting-point prison population, predicts

the monthly flow of offenders into and out of prison, and calculates the resulting prison population at the end of each month.

Figure TG3.2: Generic stock-flow structure in the prison population stock-flow models



The **remand population** projection is based on the relationship between the number of outstanding triable cases in Crown Court (split by indictable only and triable either-way³³), the number of outstanding summary non-motoring cases in the Magistrates court, and the remand population in the latest 12 months of available data. This relationship is quantified using linear regression and is used to predict the remand population by applying the calculated regression coefficients to projected outstanding indictable only and triable either-way Crown Court cases and outstanding summary non-motoring Magistrate Court cases that have been projected using the method described in Section 2 of TG3.

For the **determinate population**, the monthly prison receptions (inflows to prison) are estimated in the sentencing module, as described in Section 3 of TG3. Monthly determinate prison discharges (outflows from prison) are estimated using historical distributions of time spent in custody, accounting for any expected increase in the time served on remand, relative to the remand times seen in historical discharges.

For the **IPP and life sentence (indeterminate) population**, outflows depend on the tariff lengths (the minimum term an offender must spend in prison before becoming eligible to apply for parole) prisoners receive, and on the frequency and outcome of Parole Board hearings. The values of these parameters are set and calibrated to reflect the most recent management information on Parole Board outcomes.

For the **recall population**, indeterminate recalls are treated explicitly based on data and assumptions around future release and recall rates, and conditional on Parole Board capacity as per the indeterminate population. The determinate recalled population is predicted in four main steps. First, the size of the eligible pool of offenders subject to licence conditions, split by sentence length band, is estimated from the predicted discharge of determinate prisoners (see paragraph above on determinate population). Second, a monthly 'rate of recall' is applied to this pool to estimate new recallees. Third, a profile of average time spent recalled into custody is applied to estimate re-releases. Fourth, the total determinate sentenced recall population is calculated based on the existing recall population, the number of new recallees, and the number of re-releases.

The **non-criminal population** and the **fine defaulter population** are assumed to remain constant throughout the projection period, with the populations determined by the most recent data available prior to projections.

³³ There are three broad types of offence, based on severity: indictable only, triable either-way and summary offences. Indictable only offences are the most serious and must be tried at the Crown Court; summary offences, which are split into two further categories, summary non-motoring and summary motoring, are the least serious and must be tried at magistrates' courts; and triable either-way offences are of intermediate severity and may be tried at either court based on the circumstances of the case.

4b) Accounting for the impacts of policy effects

The impact of policies that are being implemented or are expected to be implemented are mostly projected separately as population changes, i.e. not according to a stock-flow method (detailed in Section 4a of TG3 above), and then overlaid on the core projections to give the full projections presented here. In each case, policy impacts are projected according to the unique aspects of the policy in question.

Exceptions to this approach include the impacts of the additional police officers and the impacts of the Government's ambition in relation to charges of adult rape cases as set out in the Rape Review. The effects of these policy changes are included earlier in the modelling pipeline, with estimated volumes of additional charges incorporated into the upstream demand assumptions. These additional charges are then modelled through the whole CJS using the courts and sentencing models and the stock-flow method described above.

4c) Splitting out projections by age and sex

The determinate population modelling methodology allows age-bands and sex to be modelled explicitly. Newly received offenders (see Section 3 of TG3) are assigned an age and sex based on distributions of the age and sex of offenders entering prison in scenario-specific time periods aligning with the time periods used to define sentence length assumptions (see Section 1). Existing and newly received offenders are then aged whilst they are in prison to determine movements into/out of age-bands at any point (e.g. offenders moving from the 21 to 49 years old age-band to the 50 to 59 years old age-band as they age during their time in custody).

For all other prison sub-populations, the population in prison at the end of each modelled month is sub-divided by age band and sex using historical splits of the prison population by sub-population, described as follows.

In the case of the non-criminal, fine, remand, recall and life populations, and in the case of additional populations that result from policy impacts, sex and age distributions are assumed to remain at the average observed in the previous six months of historical data available prior to the start of the projection.

For the IPP population, the sex distribution is assumed to remain constant at the level observed in the most recent historical data available prior to the start of the projections. However, because there are no incoming offenders, the aging of existing offenders is sufficient to calculate the population in any given age band.

Further Information

National Statistics Status

National Statistics are accredited official statistics that meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality, and public value.

Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics that all producers of official statistics should adhere to. You are welcome to contact us directly with any comments about how we meet these standards. Alternatively, you can contact OSR by emailing regulation@statistics.gov.uk or via the OSR website.

It is the Ministry of Justice's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected for National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with OSR promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained and reinstated when standards are restored.

Contact

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Next update: November 2024 (provisional)

URL: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-population-projections-ns



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Alternative formats are available on request from
PrisonProjection.Statistics@justice.gov.uk