

Prisons, Punishment and Sentencing in Wales

2025 Factfile

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Canolfan
Llywodraethiant Cymru

Wales Governance
Centre

Preface

About Us

The Wales Governance Centre, based within Cardiff University's School of Law and Politics, is a leading research centre specialising in law, politics and government in Wales. Its work on criminal justice began in 2018 with the launch of the *Justice and Jurisdiction* project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, the Welsh Government, and Cardiff University. The project produced a total of eleven reports, the findings of which significantly informed the subsequent publication *The Welsh Criminal Justice System: On the Jagged Edge* (University of Wales Press, October 2022). The Centre's ongoing *Factfile* report series began in June 2018 and provide data-informed analysis of imprisonment, sentencing, and the wider operation of the criminal justice system in Wales.

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
NOTES ON TEXT	10
INTRODUCTION	12
1 THE PRISON POPULATION	14
2 WOMEN AND ETHNICITY	27
3 PRISONS IN WALES	49
4 THE COURTS AND SENTENCING	76
CONCLUSION	91
APPENDIX 1	94
REFERENCES	96

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the latest in the Wales Governance Centre's *Prison Factfile* series. The report draws together information on prisons and sentencing published by the Ministry of Justice, including the second *Welsh Justice Data Release*, as well as a raft of previously unseen data obtained via the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and in response to written parliamentary questions tabled by Members of Parliament in the House of Commons. The aim of this *Factfile* is to once again contribute to a more territorially refined, critical, and informed discussion on criminal justice in Wales. It is hoped that the breadth of evidence and information presented here will support greater scrutiny of the Welsh justice system, while also informing political and public debates on the future of justice in Wales, as well as shaping academic research agendas that seek to render Wales visible as a distinct unit of analysis. Some of the report's key findings and insights are outlined below.

THE PRISON POPULATION

- Despite the introduction of several measures by the Ministry of Justice since 2024 to reduce prisoner numbers, the Welsh prisoner population fell by just 0.2 per cent in 2025.
- More than a quarter (28 per cent) of Welsh people in prison were being held in English prisons last year.
- According to revised Ministry of Justice data, approximately 244 Welsh-speaking prisoners were held in Welsh prisons in 2025. This total comprised 61 prisoners whose 'preferred' language was Welsh and 183 prisoners who identified Welsh as a second language.
- Despite having reached record levels in 2024 (804), the number of Welsh prisoners on remand increased further in 2025 (809).

- At HMP Cardiff, more than half (52 per cent) of all prisoners were being held on remand last year.
- There was a 27 per cent increase in the number of people recalled to custody in Wales for breaching post-release licence conditions in 2025.
- When combined, a third (34 per cent) of the Welsh prison population were either on remand or in prison having been recalled to custody last year.
- In August, the UK Government announced that prisoners serving Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences would be included in measures aimed at reducing prison overcrowding in England and Wales. The latest available data show that, as of June 2026, there were 40 Welsh prisoners serving IPP sentences who may therefore be affected by the plans.

WOMEN AND ETHNICITY

- Having increased for four consecutive years between 2020 and 2024, the number of Welsh women in prison fell by five per cent last year.
- Despite a decline in the Welsh female prison population, the number of women handed immediate custodial sentences in Wales increased by 27 per cent in 2025, reaching its highest level since the outbreak of Covid-19.
- One in four (25 per cent) of all women sentenced to immediate custody in Wales were handed sentences of up to one month or less in 2025.
- More than a third (39 per cent) of all custodial sentences given to women in Wales in 2025 were for 'theft from shops' offences.

- Although remand prisoners comprised 15 per cent of the Welsh female prison population when the *Women's Justice Blueprint* was published in 2019, almost a fifth (19 per cent) of Welsh women were in prison on remand last year.
- More than a third (39 per cent) of women appearing at the Crown Court in Wales were remanded in 2025. This is the highest remand rate recorded for women at the Crown Court in Wales since 2012 and surpasses the (previously highest) rate recorded in 2024 (38 per cent).
- People from Black ethnic groups in Wales remained the most over-represented ethnic group in the prison population in 2025. There were 58 Black people from Wales in prison for every 10,000 of the population, compared with 15 White people per 10,000 of the population.
- The average custodial sentence length in Wales between 2017 and 2025 was 9.2 months higher for Black defendants (25.2 months) than those from a White ethnic group (16 months).
- Between 2017 and 2025, almost three quarters (73 per cent) of Black defendants were remanded into custody at the Crown Court in Wales. This compares to 62 per cent of White defendants.

PRISONS IN WALES

- The average number of people held in the Welsh prison estate marginally increased (0.6 per cent) in 2025 (5,347).
- On average, 1,777 prisoners from England were being held in Wales last year. That is the equivalent population of HMP Cardiff, HMP Swansea and HMP Usk/Prescoed combined, but represents a decrease on the level recorded in 2024 (1,861).

- Even though the number of prison places in Wales already exceeds the number of Welsh people in prison, the Ministry of Justice's proposal to expand HMP Parc by a further 345 places would increase this surplus still further. Based on 2025 data, the surplus of prison places in Wales is projected to rise from 430 to 775 places.
- A total of 3,635 releases under the Ministry of Justice's Standard Determinate Sentence 40 (SDS40) early release scheme were recorded across prisons in Wales in 2025.
- The number of those released from Welsh prisons without a fixed address to return to increased by seven per cent in 2025/26, rising to 865.
- The number of people recorded as rough sleeping on the day of their release from prison rose for a fourth consecutive year in 2025/26. In total, 695 prison leavers managed by Welsh probation services were rough sleeping on the day of their release last year, representing a 24 per cent increase on the previous year.
- There were 52 deaths recorded among people under post-release supervision by the probation service in Wales in the year ending March 2025.
- Drug poisoning (with intent undetermined) accounted for over a third (37 per cent) of all deaths among prison leavers supervised in the community in Wales during 2024/25. By comparison, this category accounted for just over a fifth (21 per cent) of deaths among prison leavers supervised in the community across England and Wales as a whole last year.
- Despite managing only 6 per cent of the total probation caseload across England and Wales, Wales accounted for 15 per cent of all self-inflicted deaths attributed to drug poisoning (with intent undetermined) among prison leavers supervised by the probation service in the community during 2024/25.

- There were 16 deaths across the Welsh prison estate in 2025, including seven at HMP Parc.
- Four self-inflicted deaths were recorded across the Welsh prison estate last year, three of which occurred at HMP Swansea.
- Having reached their highest ever level in 2024, the number of self-harm incidents recorded in Welsh prisons decreased by 10 per cent in 2025.
- Of the 13,394 individuals who self-harmed in prison in England and Wales in 2025, 848 had a recorded origin address in Wales.

THE COURTS AND SENTENCING

- The backlog of cases in the criminal courts in Wales continues to grow, with the average number of outstanding cases in the magistrates' courts increasing by 16 per cent in 2025.
- Ministry of Justice data show that England has consistently recorded longer average Crown Court waiting times than Wales in every year since 2016. Over this period, the average waiting time in England was 20.6 weeks, compared with 13.8 weeks in Wales.
- Since 2013, Ministry of Justice data show that 2017 remains the only year in which the conviction rate in England (88.8 per cent) was higher than it was in Wales (88.2 per cent).
- Wales has now recorded a higher 'in-country' imprisonment rate than England in every year since 2019, while its 'home address' imprisonment rate has exceeded that of England in each year since 2013.

- Based on home address, there were 155 Welsh people per 100,000 of the Welsh population in prison in 2025. This compared to a rate of 138 English prisoners per 100,000 of the population.
- When measured as a rate per 100,000 of the total population (all sexes), the Welsh female imprisonment rate (7.9 per 100,000) would have ranked third highest in western Europe in 2024.

NOTES ON TEXT

A select number of Welsh and English prison population data are now published routinely by the Ministry of Justice as part of its *Welsh Justice Data: Annual Release*. All data relating to prisoners' 'home addresses' are based on the origin address recorded on reception into custody, which is generally regarded as the individual's home address prior to their imprisonment. The Ministry of Justice states that around 97 per cent of prisoners have an origin location (i.e. addresses that are recorded on its central IT system). If no address is given, an individual's committal court address is used as a proxy for the area in which they are resident. Those with no recorded origin are typically foreign nationals or those recently received into custody. No address has been recorded and no court information is available for around three per cent of all prisoners and these figures are excluded from the data included in this latest *Factfile*.

Prosecution, conviction, and sentencing data broken down by police force area are used in this report to analyse trends and outcomes at courts in Wales and England. These data were gathered from the Ministry of Justice's *Outcomes by Offence data tool (Pivot Table): December 2025*. Although it is understood that not *all* people prosecuted, convicted, and sentenced at Welsh courts will be domiciled in Wales, there is an expectation that many people dealt with at courts in Wales will be domiciled in Wales (the same rule-of-thumb applies to England). Section 30 of the Courts Act 2003 directs that when individuals are required to appear before a magistrates' court they are required to appear in a place 'in the local justice area'. This includes a location in the local justice area in which the offence is alleged to have been committed, a place in which the person charged resides, a place in which witnesses (or the majority of witnesses) reside, or a place where other cases raising similar issues are being dealt with. There are 10 local justice areas in Wales following the introduction of the Local Justice Areas Order 2016.¹ At the Crown Court, Criminal Procedure Rule 9.3 states that in deciding the Crown

¹ North West Wales; North Central Wales; North East Wales; Montgomeryshire; Cardiff; Mid Wales; Gwent; Carmarthenshire; Ceredigion; West Glamorgan.
https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2016/941/pdfs/ukxiem_20160941_en.pdf

Court centre at which trial will take place, one of the considerations should be the convenience of the court's location for parties and witnesses involved in the case.²

This report once again presents data relating to the accommodation status of those managed by Welsh probation services upon their release from custody. Settled accommodation is defined here as 'accommodation that provides a permanent independent housing solution, supported Housing and long term residential healthcare'. According to the Ministry of Justice (2026a), rough sleeping refers to a situation where an individual 'does not have any accommodation they are entitled to occupy, or they have accommodation they are entitled to occupy but they cannot be reasonably expected to occupy it for any reason. The individual sleeps in open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments) or in other places not designed for occupation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats or stations)'.

This *Factfile* also includes data on the number of Welsh prisoners (based on home address) who self-harmed in 2025. According to the Ministry of Justice (2025a), incidents where individuals have self-harmed are recorded on the Incident Reporting System. Although the system does not include the address of the prisoner, addresses have been added by matching onto the prison NOMIS system. The Ministry of Justice (2025a) state that 'around half of the individuals that self-harmed' in the previous year did so on more than one occasion. The matching process, therefore, 'has looked up each individual prisoner rather than each incident, so has only linked to one address for each prisoner'. Prisoners that have left prison custody, changed address, then returned to prison custody to serve a new sentence are only recorded against the address which matched for them originally. The Ministry of Justice also notes that there are a small number of individuals for whom no address information is recorded.

² Other considerations include how soon a suitable courtroom will become available; and the directions on the allocation of Crown Court business. <https://www.justice.gov.uk/courts/procedure-rules/criminal/docs/crim-proc-rules-2014-part-09.pdf>

INTRODUCTION

Since the election of a Labour government in Westminster in 2024, prisons and penal policy in England and Wales have rarely been out of the headlines. Over the last year, scrutiny has intensified amid growing concerns over prison capacity in England and Wales (Kotecha and Moore, 2026), unsafe prison conditions (HMI Prisons, 2026a), rising numbers of people being recalled to custody (Kotecha, 2026), inadequate support for prisoners on remand (HMI Prisons, 2026b), and continuing restrictions on prison regimes (Prison Reform Trust, 2026). Mounting concerns over the summer about the government's early prisoner release scheme have further heightened attention on the prison system. In August, the newly appointed Prime Minister, Andy Burnham, directed the new Justice Secretary, Alex Norris, to present Parliament with a plan to increase the availability of prison places in England and Wales. While Norris is the tenth Justice Secretary to be tasked with addressing prison capacity pressures since 2016, the frequent turnover of ministers in Whitehall continues to present significant challenges for policymakers in Wales seeking to ensure that justice policy adequately reflects the devolved context (Jones and Wyn Jones, 2022). Indeed, Norris' appointment means that each of the last four editions of this *Factfile* has been published under a different Justice Secretary.

Alongside the continuing developments and political upheaval in Whitehall, the last year has also seen increasing attention devoted to issues specific to Wales. Following the conclusion of its *Prisons, Probation and Rehabilitation in Wales* inquiry in June, the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee (2026a; 2026b) raised several concerns about the criminal justice system in Wales, including the treatment of Welsh women, declining prison safety, persistent gaps in the availability of Wales-specific justice data, the continuing failure to explain the causes of Wales' table topping imprisonment rate, as well as controversial proposals for further prison expansion at HMP Parc. Broader concerns have also been raised about the treatment and experiences of Welsh-speaking prisoners in Wales. In November 2025, the Welsh Language Commissioner (2025) ordered a statutory investigation into HM Prison and Probation Service's compliance with its Welsh Language Scheme at HMP Berwyn after research identified instances of neglect and interference in prisoners' use of Welsh, raising wider questions about the protection of linguistic rights within the prison system, as well as the

standard of Welsh language monitoring and scrutiny (Jones and Davies, 2025; Davies and Jones, 2026).

These challenges facing the Welsh criminal justice system over the last year have unfolded at a time of significant political change in Wales. The 2026 Senedd election in May saw Plaid Cymru emerge as the largest party for the first time, bringing an end to Labour's century-long electoral dominance (Griffiths, 2026). The responsibility for leading on justice policy issues in Welsh Government now rests with the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Minister for Social Justice and Equality, Sioned Williams, while responsibility for advancing the government's ambition for justice devolution is held by the Cabinet Minister for Government Effectiveness and the Constitution, Dafydd Trystan Davies. Setting out his government's priorities, the Welsh Government's First Minister, Rhun ap Iorwerth, used his first statement to the Senedd to underline the government's commitment to securing the devolution of policing and justice powers and the importance of making 'early progress' towards achieving this goal (Hale, 2026).

However, while much of the political focus since May has centred on the question of devolution and the transfer of further powers (Deans, 2026; Palmer and Davies, 2026), the purpose of this latest *Prison Factfile* is to once again direct much-needed attention towards the operation of the justice system as it currently exists in Wales. Drawing on the Ministry of Justice's second *Welsh Justice Data: Annual Release*, as well as information obtained under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and in response to written parliamentary questions in the House of Commons, this *Factfile* continues to demonstrate what can be achieved when Wales is the subject of serious, sustained, in-depth research. By continuing to ask searching and far-reaching questions about the state of justice in Wales, and by making key sources of previously unavailable data accessible to a wider audience, this report once again seeks to support enhanced scrutiny of the Welsh criminal justice system, and to further underline the need for policymakers in both Whitehall and Wales to engage far more seriously with the operation of the system in Wales and its outcomes.

1 THE PRISON POPULATION

1. Ongoing concerns about limited prison capacity and the growing prison population in England and Wales remained the subject of considerable political debate throughout 2025. In March 2025, the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee's report on prison estate capacity highlighted a range of longstanding failings that have contributed to rising prisoner numbers and prison place shortages in England and Wales. The Committee (2025: 6) warned that the continuing capacity crisis was undermining the delivery of rehabilitative services, arguing that a lack of purposeful activity in prisons was effectively 'storing up problems for the future'.
2. Despite the introduction of measures by the UK Government aimed at reducing prisoner numbers, including Standard Determinate Sentence 40 (SDS40) and changes to Home Detention Curfew (HDC) arrangements, the prison population in England and Wales remained largely stable in the 12 months to December 2025. By the end of the year, the prison population in England and Wales had increased by 0.3 per cent (Ministry of Justice, 2026b).³
3. This pattern of stability is also reflected within prison population data broken down by 'home address'. While the number of Welsh people in prison fell by 0.2 per cent during the last year, the equivalent English prison population increased by 0.2 per cent in 2025 (Ministry of Justice, 2026c).⁴
4. Data now made publicly available by the Ministry of Justice (2026c) as part of its *Welsh Justice Data: Annual Release* show that there were 4,917 Welsh people in prison in 2025, compared with 4,918 the previous year.
5. While distance from home and the dispersal of prisoners across England and Wales remain significant challenges for many Welsh prisoners and their outside contacts, the

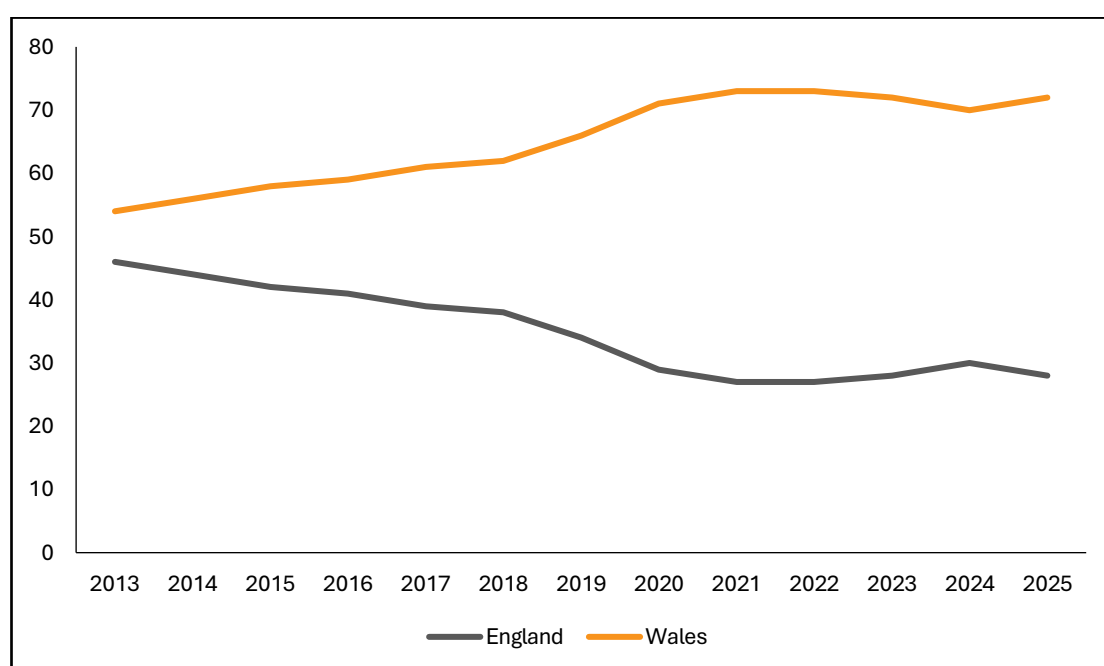
³ From 85,372 in December 2024 to 85,613 in December 2025.

⁴ There were 81,437 English people in prison in 2025.

expansion of HMP Parc in 2015 and the opening of HMP Berwyn in 2017 have led to a marked increase in the proportion of Welsh prisoners held within Wales over the last decade (see Figure 1.1).⁵

Figure 1.1

The percentage of Welsh prisoners being held in prisons in Wales and England, 2013 to 2025



6. The majority of Welsh people in the Welsh prison estate in 2025 were held at HMP Parc (42 per cent), followed by HMP Berwyn (21 per cent), HMP Cardiff (18 per cent), HMP Swansea (10 per cent), HMP Usk (six per cent) and HMP Prescoed (four per cent).
7. Although the number of Welsh people held in prisons in Wales has increased in recent years, a substantial proportion continue to be imprisoned in England. In 2025, more than a quarter (28 per cent) of prisoners from Wales were being held in English prisons.

⁵ The expansion of HMP Parc was announced in September 2013 (BBC News, 2013). The extension added 387 new prison places and was opened in January 2015.

While this represents a decrease on the proportion recorded in 2024, more than one in four Welsh prisoners were held outside Wales last year.⁶

8. At the end of December 2025, Welsh people were being held in 107 prisons in England (Ministry of Justice, 2026c).
9. The only adult prisons Welsh prisoners were not held in across England in December 2025 were HMP Chelmsford, HMP Cookham Wood, HMP Deerbolt, HMP Doncaster, HMP Exeter, HMP Humber, HMP Leicester, HMP Lewes, and HMP Thameside.
10. Because there are no high security prisons in Wales, all Welsh category A prisoners are held in high security prisons in England. On average, there were 34 prisoners from Wales held as category A in 2025 (McKinnell, 2026a).
11. Prison population data broken down by offence type show that a third (33 per cent) of Welsh people were in prison for violence against the person in 2025. The second largest offence category for Welsh prisoners last year were those suspected or convicted of sexual offences (20 per cent) (Ministry of Justice, 2026c).
12. Across England and Wales, the proportion of older people in prison has risen dramatically over the last two decades (Prison Reform Trust, 2026). The ageing prison population has led to growing concerns over the distinct health and social care needs of older people in custody. A report by the Senedd's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee (2021: 63) into prison healthcare in Wales found that older prisoners are more likely to have 'greater and more complex health and social care needs', including chronic conditions, pain management problems, physical disabilities, and dementia.
13. The proportion of Welsh prisoners aged 50 or above has steadily increased in recent years. While prisoners aged 50 or above comprised 15 per cent of the Welsh prison

⁶ On average, 1,390 Welsh prisoners were being held in English prisons in 2025. This compared to 1,475 Welsh prisoners held in England in 2024.

population in 2017, this figure had risen to 18 per cent in 2025 (Ministry of Justice, 2026c).⁷

14. In June 2025, HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) modified the way in which prisoner religion and belief data are collected, resulting in some prisoners being reclassified between religion and belief categories. While this change prevents direct comparisons with previous years, data show that a quarter (25 per cent) of Welsh people in prison in 2025 identified as having ‘no faith or belief’ (45 per cent) while a fifth (20 per cent) were recorded as ‘Agnostic, Atheist or Humanist’ (Ministry of Justice, 2026c).
15. Despite representing just 2.2 per cent of the Welsh population recorded in the 2021 Census, almost one in ten (9 per cent) of all Welsh prisoners in 2025 identified as Muslim.⁸
16. The lack of data and information on Welsh language in prisons has been a recurrent theme within parliamentary and academic debates on imprisonment in Wales over the last two decades (House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee, 2007; 2026b; Jones, 2017; Jones and Davies, 2025). Although the Ministry of Justice (2024b) published data on the number of Welsh-speaking prisoners for the first time in 2024, this was done so on an ‘ad hoc’ basis and has not been updated or repeated.
17. Despite a request that data on the number of Welsh-speaking prisoners be included in the *Welsh Justice Data: Annual Release* during discussions with justice officials on improving access to data in 2025, the Ministry of Justice declined to do so. The Ministry has reiterated that ‘annual summaries’ of these data will instead be published through HMPPS’s *Welsh Language Scheme Annual Monitoring Report* (McKinnell, 2026b). It remains unclear, however, why this information cannot be included in *both* publications to improve transparency and data accessibility.

⁷ From 742 in 2017 to 898 in 2025.

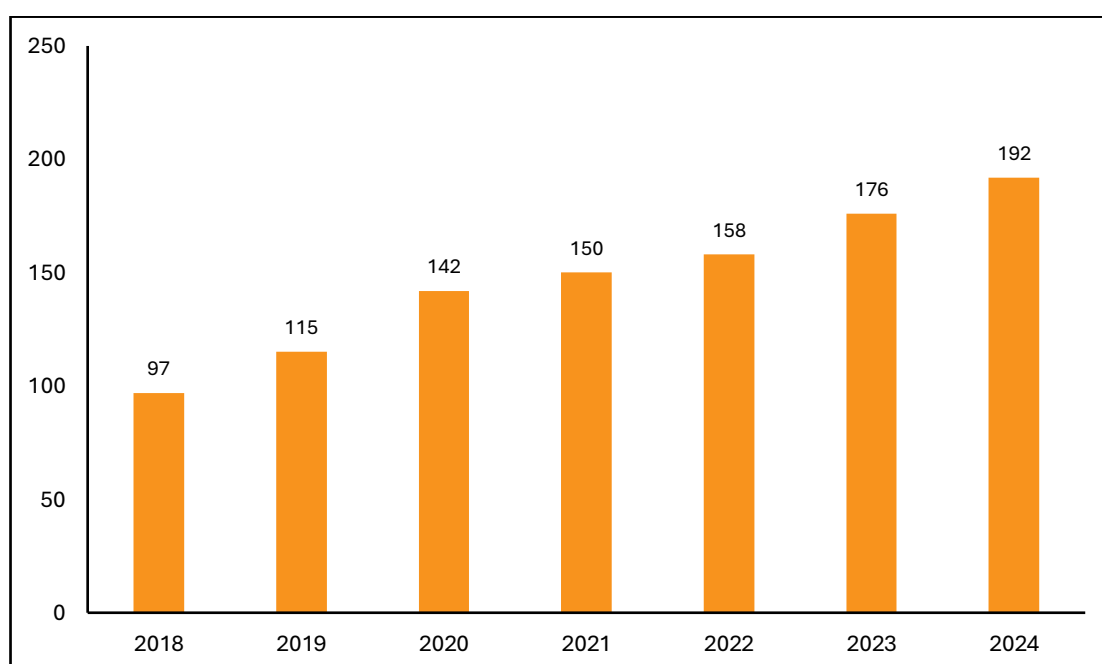
There were 367 Welsh people in prison aged 60 or above in 2025.

⁸ There were 443 Muslim prisoners from Wales in 2025.

18. Data that have been obtained previously through Freedom of Information requests indicate that the number of Welsh-speaking prisoners recorded by HMPPS has increased steadily since 2018 (see Figure 1.2). Based on the average number of Welsh people (based on home address) held in Welsh prisons in 2024, the Ministry of Justice's (2025b) figures showed that just 5.3 per cent of the Welsh prison population were Welsh-speaking. Given that 12.6 per cent of the Welsh population aged 16 and above can speak Welsh (Office for National Statistics, 2022a), the information published by the Ministry of Justice adds to existing concerns about data inaccuracy and the potential undercounting of Welsh-speaking prisoners.

Figure 1.2

The average number of Welsh-speaking prisoners in Wales, 2018 to 2024



19. Despite repeated commitments by HMPPS to collect information on prisoners' Welsh language preferences, previous inspection reports at HMP Parc and HMP Berwyn suggest that this still does not happen consistently across the Welsh prison estate (HMIP, 2022a; 2022b).

20. Although a request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 for 2025 data was submitted to the Ministry of Justice on 22 June 2026, no response was received. However, in response to a written question tabled in the House of Commons in September 2026, the Ministry of Justice published updated figures, including separate breakdowns for prisoners whose ‘preferred’ language is Welsh and those who report Welsh as a second language (McKinnell, 2026b). According to the Ministry, these data reflect improvements in the recording and reporting of Welsh-speaking prisoners.
21. At HMP Berwyn, where almost two-thirds (62 per cent) of the prison population were from outside of Wales at the end of December 2025, the latest data show that those whose ‘preferred’ and ‘second’ language was Welsh comprised seven per cent of the prison’s overall population (McKinnell, 2026b).⁹
22. A recent study into the experiences of Welsh-speaking prisoners at HMP Berwyn found that prisoners had experienced both neglect and interference with their right to use Welsh. This included examples of prison staff at HMP Berwyn telling prisoners to stop speaking Welsh, while others had been threatened with sanctions under the Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme for speaking Welsh, and had circumscribed their use of Welsh as a result (Jones and Davies, 2025).
23. In November 2025, following the publication of the study on HMP Berwyn, and a subsequent visit to the prison, the Welsh Language Commissioner announced a statutory inquiry into HMPPS’s implementation of its Welsh Language Scheme at the prison. Although the Commissioner was unable to reach a definitive conclusion on whether the Scheme had been breached on the basis of the available evidence, the investigation nevertheless identified ‘significant concerns’ regarding the experiences of some Welsh-speaking prisoners at HMP Berwyn (Welsh Language Commissioner, 2026: 19). These concerns included evidence that correspondence submitted in Welsh was subject to considerable delays, a lack of Welsh-speaking Listeners available to

⁹ Of HMP Berwyn’s total population of 1,917 prisoners at the end of December 2025, 727 had a home address in Wales. A total of 133 prisoners at HMP Berwyn in December 2025 had Welsh language recorded as their preferred spoken language (53) or Welsh language recorded as a second spoken language (80).

support prisoners in crisis, and limited access to Welsh-language services, including Welsh television and radio broadcasts, as well as religious services.

24. The House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee's recent *Prisons, Probation and Rehabilitation in Wales* inquiry heard evidence of a range of shortcomings in the provision of Welsh-language services across the prison estate. In its final report, the Committee (2026b: 61) described these issues as 'deeply concerning' and emphasised that Welsh-speaking prisoners 'should be able to exercise their rights to speak Welsh', highlighting the positive contribution that the Welsh language can make to rehabilitation. Alongside recommendations for HM Inspectorate of Prisons to strengthen its inspection arrangements for Welsh-language provision in Wales, including the development of a bespoke survey for Welsh-speaking prisoners, the Committee (2026b) also called on the UK Government to work with the Welsh Government to bring Crown bodies within the scope of the Welsh Language Standards Regulations 2023 to improve compliance with its Welsh language obligations.
25. In addition to concerns about the experiences of Welsh-speaking prisoners in Wales, researchers and policymakers have long highlighted the challenges faced by Welsh speakers held across the prison estate in England (Jones, 2017; Madoc-Jones, 2007; Welsh Language Commissioner, 2018). At the end of December 2025, there were 11 prisons in England holding at least one prisoner whose preferred language was Welsh, and 37 prisons holding at least one prisoner for whom Welsh was their second language (see Figure 1.3) (McKinnell, 2026b).
26. Ministry of Justice data show that, in December 2025, only 41 Welsh-speaking prison officers (Band 3-5) were employed across prisons in Wales (excluding HMP Parc) (McKinnell, 2026c). This amounted to just four per cent of all operational prison officers (Band 3-5) working within Welsh prisons (excluding HMP Parc).¹⁰

¹⁰ There were 971 operational prison staff employed at Welsh prisons (excluding HMP Parc as staff employed at private sector prisons are excluded from the data) in December 2025 (Band 3-5) (Ministry of Justice, 2026d). According to the Ministry of Justice, 'whether staff can speak Welsh is a self-reported variable, with the vast majority of staff not reporting this information, so the true numbers of Welsh speakers are likely to be higher' (McKinnell, 2026c).

Figure 1.3

Welsh prisoners recorded as ‘preferred’ and ‘second’ Welsh language speakers broken down by prison in Wales, December 2025¹¹

	Preferred	Second	Total
Berwyn	53	80	133
Cardiff	0	23	23
Parc	5	43	48
Prescoed	-	-	-
Swansea	-	22	22*
Usk	3	15	18
Total	61	183	244

- 27.** A significant consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic was the creation of a substantial backlog of criminal cases in the Crown Court of England and Wales. Despite widespread recognition of the issue and efforts to reduce delays (Castro, 2025), a high volume of outstanding cases has resulted in significant increases in the number of prisoners on remand awaiting trial or sentencing since 2019 (Ministry of Justice, 2024a).
- 28.** In 2025, the number of remand prisoners in England and Wales decreased by two per cent overall.¹² This was reflected in a two per cent fall in the number of prisoners awaiting trial, and a two per cent decrease in those awaiting sentencing (Ministry of Justice, 2026b).¹³
- 29.** By contrast, the number of Welsh prisoners on remand increased slightly in 2025, rising by 0.6 per cent. While *Prisons and Imprisonment in Wales: 2024 Factfile* found that the

¹¹ - denotes suppressed values of two or fewer, but not a zero. Values of one or two are suppressed by the Ministry of Justice to prevent disclosure in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

* The available data identify at least 22 cases; however, as the preferred total is unknown, it is not possible to determine the precise overall number.

¹² From 17,023 in December 2024 to 16,628 in December 2025.

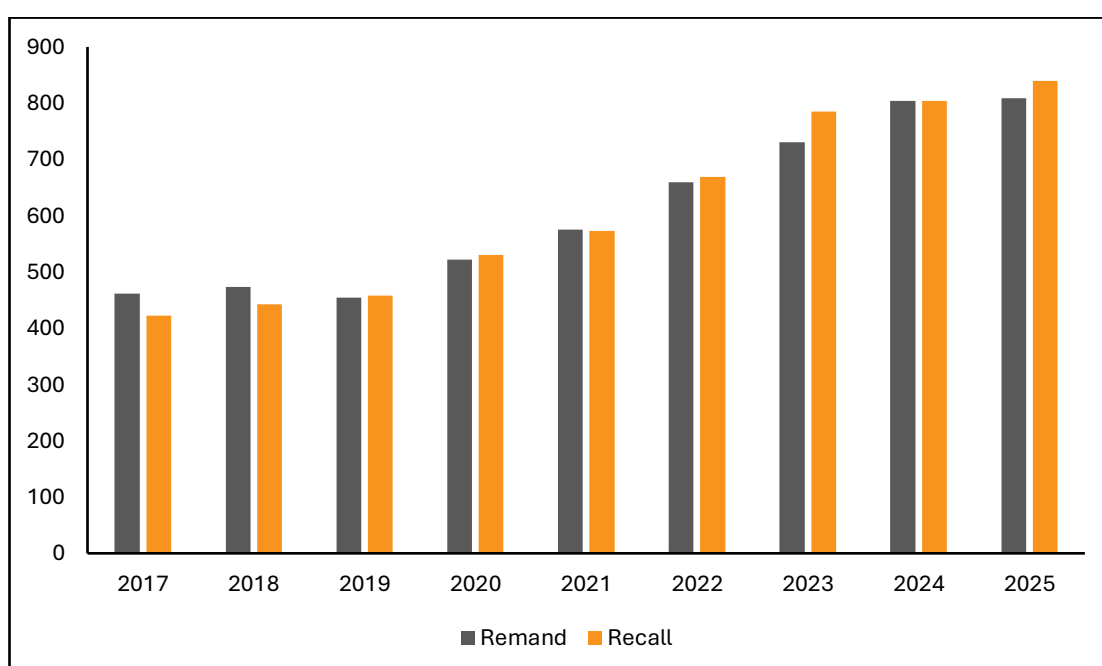
¹³ Untried: From 11,195 in December 2024 to 10,930 in December 2025.

Unsentenced: From 5,828 in December 2024 to 5,698 in December 2025.

number of Welsh prisoners on remand reached its highest level in 2024 (804) since the Wales Governance Centre began collecting data broken down by sentence type in 2017, this level was exceeded last year (809) (see Figure 1.4) (Ministry of Justice, 2026c).

Figure 1.4

Welsh prisoner remand and recall population, 2017 to 2025



- 30.** Welsh prisoners on remand comprised 17 per cent of the overall Welsh prison population in 2025. This compared to just 10 per cent of the prison population in 2019, the year before the outbreak of Covid-19.
- 31.** At HMP Cardiff, more than half (52 per cent) of all prisoners were being held on remand in 2025. While this represents a modest decline from the level (56 per cent) recorded in 2024, it remains substantially higher than pre-pandemic levels, with only 31 per cent of prisoners held on remand at the prison in 2019 (Ministry of Justice, 2026e).

32. A report published by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) in March 2026, drawing on evidence from 12 inspections of reception prisons in England and Wales, identified a range of challenges facing remand prisoners, many of whom were found to receive inadequate support across several areas of prison life. Compared with sentenced prisoners, those held on remand were less likely to report receiving support from staff, to have access to their own cell, to be able to shower daily or to obtain clean clothing. Inspectors also found that remand prisoners often experienced limited access to healthcare, spent less time out of their cells, and were less likely to participate in purposeful activity or receive support preparing them for their release (HMI Prisons, 2026b).
33. Alongside the remand population, the growing number of prisoners recalled to custody has been a significant contributor to rising prisoner numbers in England and Wales (Rowland, 2024). Following changes to fixed-term recall arrangements in 2024, together with the introduction of early release schemes, the number of fixed-term recalls has increased substantially.¹⁴ The *Independent Review of Prison Capacity*, published in August 2025, noted that the most frequently cited reason for recall was not the commission of further offences, but non-compliance with licence conditions. The review (2025: 22) concluded that overstretched probation services, combined with the relative inexperience of some probation staff, had contributed to a culture in which recall was increasingly used as a ‘first’ or ‘very early’ response to concerns about compliance, often in inappropriate circumstances. This included the case of a man who was recalled after missing probation appointments while receiving hospital treatment for a broken back.
34. In August 2026, prison governors in England and Wales told the BBC that prisoners released under the SDS40 scheme were being returned to custody at a ‘rapid rate’, including for breaches of their licence conditions. Although the policy was introduced to ease pressure on a prison system operating close to capacity, governors claimed that the cycle of release and recall means that prisons are effectively ‘going round in circles’,

¹⁴ The Suitability for Fixed Term Recall Order 2024 was introduced in 2024 to reduce the amount of time that some recalled prisoners spend in custody.

raising questions about the long-term effectiveness of the government's measures to free up prison places (Kotecha, 2026).

35. In 2022, the House of Commons Justice Committee (2022a: 43) called upon the UK Government to tackle the 'recall merry-go around' facing those sentenced to Indeterminate Sentences for Public Protection (IPP). Despite being abolished as a sentence in 2012, the change was not applied retrospectively with the UK Government refusing calls to resentence those who have been detained for indefinite periods (Murray, 2023). As a result, hundreds of released IPP prisoners have subsequently been recalled to custody with the Chief Inspector of Probation, Martin Jones, warning that many prisoners are now 'trapped in the system' (Martin, 2025).
36. In June 2025, an expert working group convened by the Howard League for Penal Reform (2025: 5; 10) published proposals to help end the 'grave injustice' of IPP sentences and the 'momentous consequences' it has for those recalled. The group's recommendations included introducing a much higher threshold for recall, as well as independent scrutiny of recall decisions to ensure that the recall test 'has been properly applied' (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2025: 13).
37. As part of the UK Government's plans to free up prison places amidst growing concerns over prison capacity in England and Wales, the Prime Minister, Andy Burnham (2026), confirmed in August that the UK Government would review the Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences imposed between 2005 and 2012, which left hundreds of people in prison 'without any prospect of release despite having already served very long sentences'. In a statement made on 29 August, the Prime Minister confirmed that the government would 'end the injustice' of IPP sentences by the end of this current parliament (Grierson, 2026).
38. Based on the data included in the most recent *Welsh Justice Data: Annual Release*, there were 40 Welsh prisoners serving Indeterminate Sentences for Public Protection in June 2026. One of these prisoners, Leroy Douglas from Cardiff, was sentenced to two and a half years' imprisonment for a robbery offence in 2005 but remains in custody two

decades later. Following the UK Government's announcement in August, it was confirmed in September that Douglas is expected to be released in October (Dewey, 2026).

39. Another IPP prisoner from Wales is Shaun Lloyd. Mr Lloyd received an IPP sentence with a tariff of two years and nine months in 2006. After serving eight years in custody, he was released in 2014 but has since been recalled to prison on five separate occasions. A recent report by the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention identified Mr Lloyd as one of five IPP prisoners, including Leroy Douglas, whose detention was considered arbitrary and unlawful under international law (LaI, 2026).
40. Data published for the first time in October 2026 revealed the unreleased and recalled breakdown of IPP prisoners from Wales.¹⁵ In 2025, an average of 45 Welsh people were in prison serving IPP sentences having never been released, while a further 84 IPP prisoners from Wales were in custody having been recalled after a previous release (McKinnell, 2026d).¹⁶
41. Despite a minor reduction in the number of Welsh prisoners in 2025, the recall population increased by five per cent last year. On average, 840 Welsh people were in prison having been recalled to custody in 2025 (Ministry of Justice, 2026c).¹⁷
42. While those recalled to prison comprised approximately nine per cent of the Welsh prison population in 2017, recalled prisoners accounted for 17 per cent of Welsh prisoners last year (Ministry of Justice, 2026c).

¹⁵ A request for the 'unreleased' and 'recalled' breakdown was submitted to the Ministry of Justice on 2 October 2025, with a follow-up email sent on 3 November 2025 after the statutory 20 working day deadline had passed. Following the absence of both a substantive response and any acknowledgement of receipt, a request for an internal review of the handling of the case was submitted on 15 December 2025. A year on since the original request was made, no response had been received from the Ministry of Justice.

A full list of Freedom of Information requests submitted to the Ministry of Justice under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 that had not received a response at the time of writing is provided in Appendix 1.

¹⁶ There were 52 IPP prisoners from Wales in 2024.

¹⁷ From 804 in 2024 to 840 in 2025.

43. When combined, a third (34 per cent) of the Welsh prison population were either on remand or in prison having been recalled to custody in 2025.
44. Even though six per cent of the total probation caseload in England and Wales were managed by Welsh probation services in 2025, seven per cent of all recalls into custody for breach of post-release licence were recorded in Wales last year (Ministry of Justice, 2026f; 2026g).¹⁸
45. There was a 27 per cent increase in the number of people recalled to custody in Wales for breaching post-release licence conditions in 2025, compared with a 29 per cent increase in England (Ministry of Justice, 2026g).¹⁹
46. While the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee's (2026b: 20) *Prisons, Probation and Rehabilitation in Wales* inquiry heard evidence about comparatively 'high recall rates' in Wales, no explanation for this pattern has yet emerged. As with many of the trends highlighted in this and previous editions of the *Factfile*, these data remain largely unexplained and have yet to be subjected to sustained analysis or scrutiny. As a result, little is known about the drivers underpinning Wales's comparatively high recall rate or its wider consequences.

¹⁸ England and Wales: 48,272 in 2025; Wales: 3,562 in 2025.

14,913 people were supervised by Welsh probation services in 2025. The total for England and Wales was 245,205 in 2025.

¹⁹ Wales: From 2,816 in 2024 to 3,562 in 2025.

England: From 34,672 in 2024 to 44,710 in 2025.

2 WOMEN AND ETHNICITY

WOMEN

1. A particular problem faced by Welsh female prisoners and their families arises from the nature of the prison estate on which they are held. As there are no women's prisons in Wales, all Welsh female prisoners are imprisoned in England.
2. The 'distinct set of issues' facing Welsh women, including distances from home, problems maintaining family contact, and links with community-based services (Rees et al. 2017; House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee, 2007:19), has prompted the development of several bespoke initiatives and policies over the last decade. Arguably the most significant of these is the Welsh Government and Ministry of Justice's *Women's Justice Blueprint*, published in 2019 to support the delivery services that are 'distinct to Wales' and which included a commitment to reduce the number of Welsh women entering the criminal justice system (Welsh Government and Ministry of Justice, 2019: 1).²⁰
3. The Welsh Government's (2022a) *Delivering Justice for Wales* strategy reiterated its commitment to improving services for Welsh women and to diverting women away from the criminal justice system. This included recognition of the need to further develop the *Women's Pathfinder Diversion Scheme* and to 'embed good practice' and embolden 'radical change' across Wales (Welsh Government, 2022a: 11; 105).
4. However, despite repeated commitments to reduce the number of Welsh women in prison, several policy measures introduced by the UK Government over the last decade mean that female prisoner numbers in England and Wales are still projected to rise. In its *Prison Population Projections 2025 to 2030*, the Ministry of Justice (2025c) estimate that the number of adult female prisoners in England and Wales will increase by a

²⁰ The strategy was initially unveiled as the *Female Offending Blueprint for Wales*.

further 11 per cent from 3,527 in September 2025 to 3,900 in September 2029.²¹ Based on disaggregated data from December 2025, this will see the number of Welsh women in prison increase from 221 to 246 by the end of 2029.

5. One of the major problems surrounding the ‘jagged edge’ of justice in Wales is that policies devised by justice officials in Whitehall routinely fail to take account of the devolved legislative and policy landscape (Jones and Wyn Jones, 2022). While previous versions of the Ministry of Justice’s projections acknowledged that the Women’s Justice Board and its *Female Offender Strategy* may affect future numbers in England and Wales, albeit without incorporating their impact into the estimates, the Ministry of Justice have routinely failed to acknowledge the potential effect of the Welsh Government’s ‘flagship’ *Women’s Justice Blueprint* in Wales. Although the Ministry’s latest projections identify a range of policies that are likely to influence the size of the prison population,²² none relate to measures introduced by the Welsh Government.
6. Having increased for four consecutive years between 2020 and 2024, the number of Welsh women in prison fell by five per cent last year (see Figure 2.1) (Ministry of Justice, 2026c).²³
7. Despite this reduction, Welsh women were still being held in all 12 women’s prisons in England in December 2025, with almost three-quarters (72 per cent) of women placed at either HMP Eastwood Park in Gloucestershire (141) or HMP Styal in Cheshire (19).

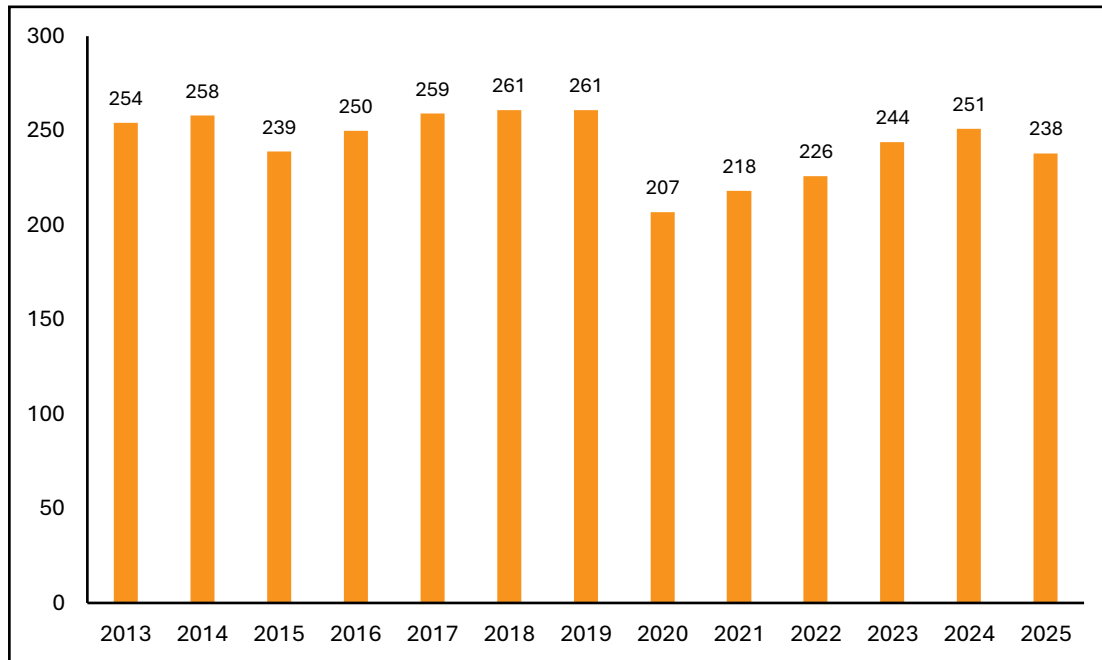
²¹ This is based on the Ministry of Justice’s ‘central’ estimate.

²² These include the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022; Release of Prisoners Order 2020, The Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Home Detention Curfew) Order 2023; Victims and Prisoners Act 2024’ The Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Requisite and Minimum Custodial Periods) Order 2024; The Sentencing Act 2020 (Magistrates’ Court Sentencing Powers) (Amendment) Regulation 2024; and the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (Suitability for Fixed Term Recall) Order 2025.

²³ From 251 Welsh female prisoners in 2024 to 238 in 2025.

Figure 2.1

The number of Welsh women in prison, 2013 to 2025



8. The separation of women from children is often the issue most likely to affect the mental health and well-being of female prisoners. Throughout her landmark review of women within the criminal justice system almost two decades ago, Baroness Corston (2007: 30) was told that separation from children was emotional ‘torture’ for mothers in prison. The review (2007) found that 18,000 children a year are separated from their mothers by imprisonment.²⁴
9. On multiple occasions, the Wales Governance Centre has requested data on the number of Welsh women in prison who are mothers of children under the age of 18. In response to a request in September 2023, the Ministry of Justice (2023) confirmed that it held the data but stated that it was ‘exempt from disclosure under section 22(1) of the FOIA, because it is intended for future publication’. When these data were eventually published as part of the Ministry of Justice’s *Better Outcomes through Linked*

²⁴ The House of Commons and House of Lords Joint Committee on Human Rights’ *The Right to Family Life: Children Whose Mothers Are in Prison* report (2019) estimated that around 17,000 children each year are affected by the imprisonment of their mother.

Data (BOLD) in July 2024, however, no Welsh disaggregation was provided. Following a further request asking for a Welsh breakdown of the BOLD data set, the Ministry of Justice again confirmed that it ‘holds all of the information’ requested, but refused the request on the basis that the ‘cost of identifying those prisoners who entered prison from Welsh home addresses with children from individual case records would exceed the appropriate limit’ set out in the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Although new requests for these data were submitted by the Wales Governance Centre in August 2025 and July 2026, the former was refused and the latter had not been responded to at the time of writing.

10. Ministry of Justice (2025d) data show that in the year ending March 2025, a total of 196 pregnant women had been held in prisons across England. The figures also reveal that 36 births were recorded during 2024/25. While the data include breakdowns by age, ethnicity and religion, no information is provided on prisoners’ home address, making it impossible to identify how many of these women were from Wales.²⁵
11. Requests for disaggregated information on the number of women from Wales included in the pregnancy and births data were rejected in July 2024 and August 2025. In response to these requests, the Ministry of Justice (2024d) confirmed that, ‘while separate data sets on pregnant women and their home location prior to entering custody exist, linking this information would be a complex process and would represent the creation of new data’, something which the Freedom of Information Act 2000 does not oblige the Ministry of Justice to do. A further request seeking a Welsh breakdown of the latest pregnancy and births statistics was submitted in August 2026 in preparation for this latest *Factfile*. However, no response had been received at the time of writing.
12. As part of the wider collective efforts being made to improve the availability and accessibility of Wales-specific justice data, the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee’s *Jagged Justice: Prisons, Probation and Rehabilitation in Wales* report

²⁵ These data have been moved from the HMPPS Annual Digest, published in July, to the HMPPS Offender Equalities Annual Report, which is published in November. Consequently, data up to March 2026 were not available for inclusion in this report.

(2026b) recommended that the Ministry of Justice provide the Committee with an annual written update on progress towards publishing the outstanding datasets identified by the Wales Governance Centre and the Welsh Government to improve understanding of the Welsh justice system. Among the datasets identified by the Wales Governance Centre are information on the number of Welsh women who experience pregnancy while in custody and the number of Welsh prisoners who are parents.

13. Despite the overall reduction in the Welsh female prison population in 2025, analyses of sentencing data show that the number of women handed immediate custodial sentences at courts in Wales last year reached its highest level since the outbreak of Covid-19 (Ministry of Justice, 2026h).²⁶
14. The number of immediate custodial sentences handed to women in Wales increased by 27 per cent last year.²⁷ While two per cent of women sentenced in Wales received an immediate custodial sentence in 2019, this figure had risen to 4.9 per cent in 2025.
15. The number of immediate custodial sentences handed to women at the magistrates' court in Wales increased by 38 per cent in 2025.²⁸ Over the same period, the immediate custodial sentence rate increased from 2.2 per cent in 2024 to 3.5 per cent last year.

SHORT TERM SENTENCES

16. Previous research by the Wales Governance Centre has shown that women in Wales are more likely to receive shorter custodial sentences than men (Jones, 2019a; 2020; 2023; 2024; 2025). The frequent use of short-term sentences often brings considerable 'chaos and disruption' to the lives of women and their families (Corston, 2007: i), with women sentenced to short-term custodial sentences more likely to commit future offences than those sentenced to a court order (Hillier and Mews, 2018).

²⁶ 560 immediate custodial sentences were handed to women at courts in Wales in 2025.

²⁷ From 442 in 2024 to 560 in 2025.

²⁸ From 278 immediate custodial sentences in 2024 to 384 in 2025.

17. Four in five (81 per cent) women sentenced to immediate custody in Wales were handed sentences of 12 months or less in 2025. This compared to 64 per cent of men sentenced to custody in Wales last year (Ministry of Justice, 2026h).²⁹
18. Although sentences of 12 months or less are often used as a proxy for short-term imprisonment in discussions on penal policy, previous editions of the *Factfile* have also examined the use of even shorter custodial sentences to illustrate the scale and extent of the issue. Sentencing data show, for example, that a quarter (25 per cent) of all women sentenced to immediate custody in Wales received sentences of one month or less in 2025, compared with 12 per cent of men.³⁰
19. The number of sentences of one month or less handed to women at courts in Wales increased by 32 per cent in 2025.³¹ On average, a woman was sentenced to a prison term of one month or less at courts in Wales every three (working) days throughout 2025.
20. Almost three-quarters (72 per cent) of women sentenced to immediate custody for one month or less at courts in Wales in 2025 had been convicted of ‘theft from shops’. Overall, ‘theft from shops’ — or ‘shoplifting’ — accounted for 39 per cent of all custodial sentences given to women in Wales last year.³²
21. Despite the Ministry of Justice and Welsh Government’s (2019: 1) shared commitment to build ‘confidence in alternatives to short-term custody’ for women in Wales, 598 immediate custodial sentences of one month or less have been handed to women sentenced at courts in Wales since the *Women’s Justice Blueprint* was published in 2019 (see Figure 2.2) (Ministry of Justice, 2026h).

²⁹ There were 452 sentences of 12 months or less handed to women in 2025 and 3,379 handed to men.

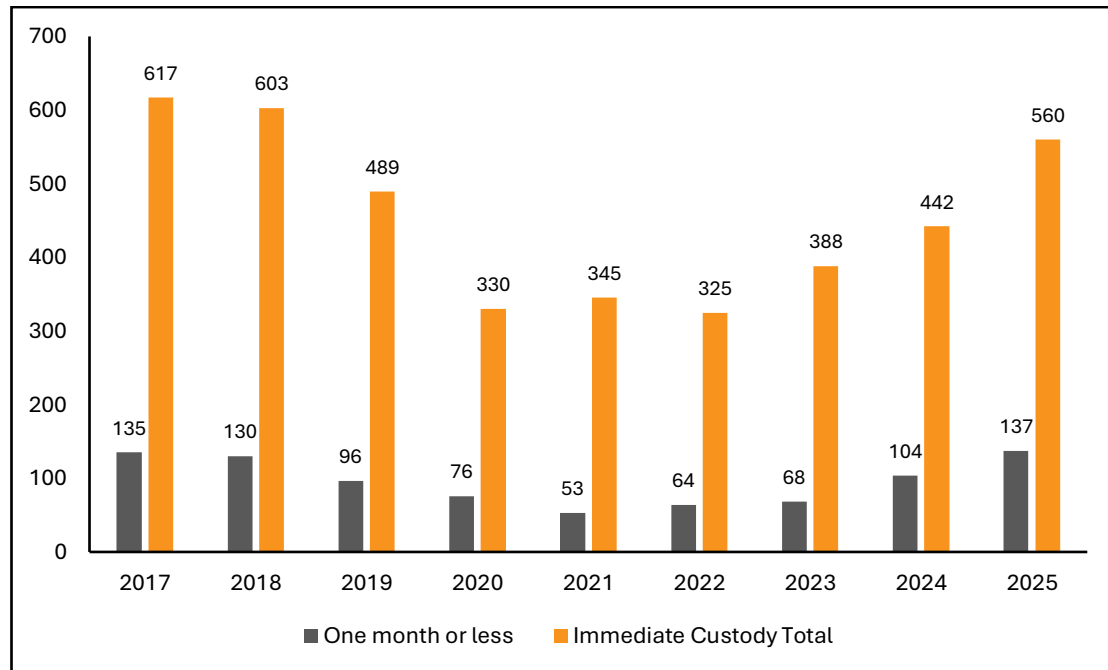
³⁰ 137 sentences of one month or less were handed to women in Wales in 2025. This compared to 627 sentences of one month or less given to men.

³¹ From 104 in 2024 to 137 in 2025.

³² 99 sentences of one month or less were handed to women convicted of ‘theft from shops’ in 2025. 217 immediate custodial sentences were handed to women at courts in Wales for ‘theft from shops’ offences in 2025.

Figure 2.2

Women sentenced to immediate custody and to sentences of one month or less, 2017 to 2025



22. In 2025, 93 per cent of all custodial sentences of one month or less given to women in Wales were at the magistrates' court (Ministry of Justice, 2026i).³³

23. Analysis of court data by police force area shows that almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of women sentenced to immediate custody at the magistrates' court in North Wales in 2025 received a sentence of one month or less.³⁴ This compared to 28 per cent of women in South Wales, 14 per cent in Gwent and 11 per cent in Dyfed Powys.

24. Between 2017 and 2025, two-fifths (43 per cent) of women who received an immediate custodial sentence at magistrates' courts in North Wales were sentenced to prison for

³³ 127 sentences of one month or less were handed to women at the Magistrates' Court in 2025.

³⁴ Of the 79 immediate custodial sentences imposed on women at the Magistrates' Court in North Wales in 2025, 50 (63 per cent) were for one month or less.

one month or less. This compared to 27 per cent of women sentenced in Gwent, 27 per cent in South Wales, and 26 per cent in Dyfed-Powys (Ministry of Justice, 2026h).

25. Although efforts in Wales to reduce the use of short custodial sentences for women have fallen well short of their stated ambitions, the Sentencing Act 2026, which took effect in March 2026, introduced a presumption against custodial sentences of 12 months or less in England and Wales. Although campaigners hope the change will help address the longstanding concerns associated with short-term imprisonment, particularly for women, evidence available in Scotland, where a presumption against short-term sentences of 12 months or less was introduced in 2019, suggests that caution may be warranted. According to the findings of the Scottish Sentencing and Penal Policy Commission (2026: 50), which was established by the Scottish Justice Secretary in February 2025 to examine rising prisoner numbers in Scotland, sentences of under 12 months ‘remain by far the most frequently received sentence of imprisonment’ in Scotland, despite the presumption against them. The Commission also found that of the 798 women sentenced to prison in 2023/24, 88 per cent were handed a sentence of 12 months or less.
26. While the *Women’s Justice Blueprint* clearly sets out the Ministry of Justice and Welsh Government’s (2019:1) joint commitment to work with courts and sentencers to develop greater ‘confidence in alternatives to short-term custody’ across Wales, a snapshot survey carried out in 2022 found that only around 50 per cent of Magistrates’ Association members in Wales were aware of the Blueprint’s existence. This, according to the Senedd’s Equality and Social Justice Committee’s (2023: 23) *Women’s Experiences in the Criminal Justice System* report, represents a ‘particular concern’.
27. One explanation offered for the increasing number of women from Wales being sentenced to custody is a limited awareness among sentencers of the adverse consequences of short-term custodial sentences. During an evidence session organised as part of the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee’s (2025:5) most recent inquiry into prisons in Wales, prison governors suggested that magistrates should visit prisons that hold Welsh women, including HMP Eastwood Park and HMP

Styal, in order to ‘see the reality of a short sentence, and the extent of support available during it, for themselves’. Governors argued that such visits would help to inform future sentencing decisions by enhancing magistrates’ understanding of the impact of short custodial sentences and increasing awareness of the potential benefits of community-based alternatives.

28. Following the publication of the Wales Governance Centre’s *Prisons and Imprisonment in Wales: 2024 Factfile* in November 2025, a Women’s Justice Blueprint roundtable event was hosted by HMPPS and the Welsh Government in February 2026 to explore ways of improving outcomes for Welsh women. Discussions highlighted the need to strengthen alternatives to custody and improve sentencers’ awareness of the limitations of custodial sentences, particularly in the context of rising numbers of Welsh women being imprisoned, and the commitments set out in the *Women’s Justice Blueprint*.

RESIDENTIAL WOMEN’S CENTRE

29. In its 2018 *Female Offender Strategy*, the Ministry of Justice (2018: 15) underlined the need for ‘an entirely different approach’ to the treatment of women in the criminal justice system. The strategy included a commitment to establishing five Residential Women’s Centres across England and Wales to help ‘see fewer women in custody’ and to enhance support services in the community (Ministry of Justice, 2018: 8).
30. In May 2020, the then UK Justice Minister, Lucy Frazer QC, announced that the very first Residential Women’s Centre would be sited in Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2020). The Ministry of Justice confirmed in August 2023 that the Residential Women’s Centre will be located at a site in Swansea after it successfully appealed Swansea Council’s decision to reject its planning application for the Centre in September 2022.
31. Unveiled as an ‘alternative’ to imprisonment for women convicted of ‘low-level offences’ (Ministry of Justice, 2020), the Ministry of Justice (2022a) have claimed that the centre will have capacity for 12 women who are from the ‘local community or

surrounding areas’ and ‘have been given a community sentence which includes a requirement to reside at the Residential Women’s Centre’.

32. However, despite the UK Government’s claims that a Residential Women’s Centre would provide vital services to women and offer an ‘alternative’ to imprisonment, widespread concerns have been raised about what the Howard League for Penal Reform (2022: 2) have described as an ‘unevidenced experiment in wholly new residential provision’.
33. In response to the Senedd Cymru’s Equality and Social Justice Committee’s inquiry, *Women’s experiences in the criminal justice system*, the Nelson Trust expressed deep concern over the requirement placed upon women to be resident at the Residential Women’s Centre. Unlike other women’s centres across England and Wales, fears have been raised that the residential aspect of the centre will simply ‘replicate the harms of short-term prison sentences’ (Nelson Trust, 2022:3). The Prison Reform Trust (2022: 2) have shared similar concerns about the Residential Women’s Centre becoming a prison ‘in all but name’.
34. One of the principal objections to the Residential Women’s Centre is that, unlike other residential centres across England and Wales, the facility will be managed and run by the probation service. Under the auspices of HMPPS in Wales, there are credible and justifiable concerns that the Residential Women’s Centre will simply act as a route into custody, rather than a route away from prison (see Carlen, 2002; Moore et al., 2018).
35. At the heart of these concerns is that, as already shown, the use of recall by probation services across England and Wales has increasingly become a route (back) into custody in recent years (Independent Review of Prison Capacity, 2025). To compound these misgivings, disaggregated data have previously shown that a higher proportion of recalls occur in Wales than in England.

36. In 2024, nine per cent of all women recalled to custody in England and Wales were in Wales. This despite the fact that Welsh women comprised six per cent of the female prison population in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2025e).³⁵ Although a Freedom of Information request seeking the latest data for 2025 was submitted to the Ministry of Justice in June 2026, no response was received. At the time of writing, the Ministry has neither responded to nor acknowledged the request.
37. One of the main arguments offered in support of the Residential Women's Centre is that it will divert women who might ordinarily receive short-term custodial sentences away from prison. The plans, however, are likely to do little for the increasing number of women in Wales who are being handed longer-term prison sentences.
38. *Prisons and Imprisonment in Wales: 2024 Factfile* showed that the average custodial sentence length for women sentenced in Wales had increased in recent years, from 7.2 months (2017) to 12.4 months (2024).³⁶ While the level in 2025 remained higher than it was several years ago, the average custodial length for women sentenced to immediate custody in Wales last year was 10.2 months.
39. The proportion of women sentenced to immediate custody in Wales who received a sentence of four years or more fell sharply in 2025, declining from nine per cent in 2024 to 4.3 per cent last year.³⁷
40. When examining the sentence profile of Welsh women in prison, the number serving sentences of four years or more was 14 per cent lower in 2025 than in the previous year.³⁸ Although this decline is likely to reflect the reduction in the number of longer custodial sentences handed to women at courts in Wales last year, it may also indicate the effect of the UK Government's early release scheme in reducing the size of the

³⁵ England: 2,242; Wales: 219.

³⁶ Last year's *Factfile* reported a figure of 11.5 months for 2024. Following a revision in the latest data, the updated figure is reflected here.

³⁷ There were 24 women sentenced to immediate custody for four years or more at courts in Wales in 2025, compared to 40 women in 2024.

³⁸ From an average of 71 in 2024 to 61 in 2025.

sentenced prison population. Indeed, nine per cent of all those released under SDS40 in England and Wales during 2025 were from female prisons.³⁹

41. Set against a broader trend of women receiving longer prison sentences in Wales, it remains unclear what impact, if any, the Residential Women's Centre would have for women in Wales. This includes Welsh women entering custody on remand while awaiting trial or sentencing.
42. Although the *Women's Justice Blueprint* contains a commitment to 'building confidence' in the use of alternatives to remand in Wales, the proportion of Welsh women in prison on remand is increasing (see Figure 2.3). In 2019, the year that the Blueprint was launched by the Welsh Government and Ministry of Justice, those on remand comprised 15 per cent of the Welsh female prison population. In 2025, a fifth (19 per cent) of Welsh women in prison were being held on remand (Ministry of Justice, 2026c).⁴⁰
43. There was a 3 per cent rise in the number of women remanded across all courts in Wales in 2025.⁴¹ In total, 553 women were remanded into custody at either the magistrates' court (320) or Crown Court (233) in Wales last year (Ministry of Justice, 2026j).

³⁹ 39,650 were released from male prisons in 2025.

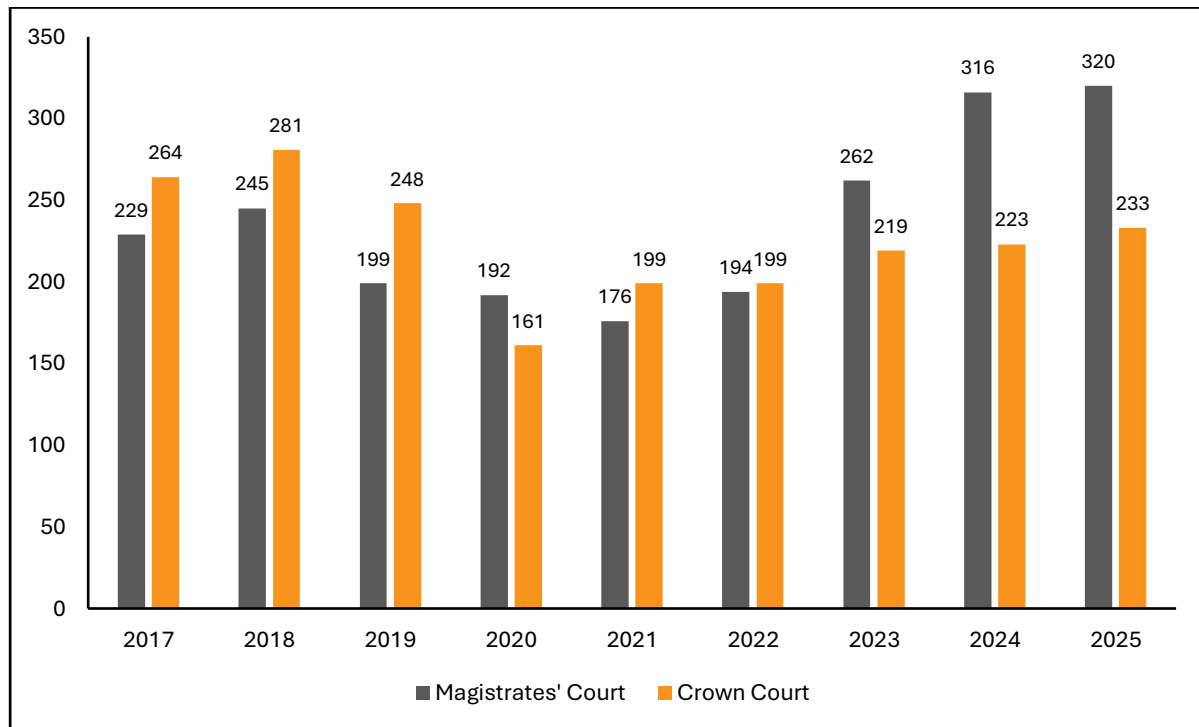
Female prisons: 3,960

⁴⁰ On average, there were 46 Welsh women in prison on remand in 2025.

⁴¹ From 539 in 2024 to 553 in 2025.

Figure 2.3

Women remanded in custody at the magistrates and Crown Court in Wales, 2017 to 2025



44. A study by JUSTICE on the use of remand at the magistrates' court found that the processes for determining bail were often not 'followed properly' by magistrates in England and Wales. These failings serve to undermine the fairness of remand decisions reached by magistrates and can increase the likelihood that remand is 'imposed unnecessarily' (JUSTICE, 2023: 1). Although the Bail Act 1976 and Criminal Procedure Rules 2020 require magistrates to provide reasons for their decision to issue or refuse bail, explanations for these decisions are seldom provided.
45. The comparatively small size of the women's prison estate means that women are often held on remand further from home than men. This issue is especially pronounced in Wales, where the absence of custodial places for women results in Welsh women being held in prisons in England, often at considerable distances from home (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2023).

46. While the Bail Act 1976 includes provisions which enable courts to remand people to prison for their ‘own protection’ against self-harm or the perceived danger of harm to others, the House of Commons Justice Committee’s (2022b) *Women in Prison* inquiry found that this type of remand is used more often for women than men. The Committee (2022b: 45) recommended that the UK Government amend the Bail Act 1976 ‘so that it is unlawful to remand anyone to custody for their own protection or welfare’. This recommendation was rejected by the UK Government in October 2022.
47. The number of women remanded at the magistrates’ court in Wales increased further in 2025.⁴² Since 2019, there has been a 61 per cent increase in the number of women remanded at the magistrates’ court in Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2026j).⁴³
48. The proportion of women who were remanded in custody at the magistrates’ court in Wales increased from 2.2 per cent in 2024 to 2.5 per cent in 2025. This continues a longer-term trend, with the remand rate having risen from 0.8 per cent in 2019, the year in which the *Women’s Justice Blueprint* was published.
49. Of those women remanded and sentenced at the magistrates’ court in Wales, over half (53 per cent) went on to receive a non-custodial sentence in 2025. At the Crown Court, a third (32 per cent) of women remanded and sentenced there received a non-custodial sentence in 2025.⁴⁴
50. Almost two-fifths (39 per cent) of women appearing at the Crown Court in Wales were remanded in 2025. This is the highest remand rate recorded for women at the Crown

⁴² From 316 in 2024 to 320 in 2025.

⁴³ From 199 in 2019 to 320 in 2025.

⁴⁴ Those classified as receiving a non-custodial sentence include those given a suspended sentence, a community sentence, a fine, an absolute discharge, a conditional discharge, compensation, or otherwise dealt with.

Magistrates’ court: 148 women were remanded into custody and sentenced in 2025. Of this number, 78 went on to receive a non-custodial sentence.

Crown Court: 199 women were remanded into custody and were sentenced in 2025. Of this number, 63 went on to receive a non-custodial sentence.

Court in Wales since 2012 and surpasses the (previously highest) rate recorded in 2024 (38 per cent) (Ministry of Justice, 2026j).⁴⁵

51. Despite the UK Government's apparent continued support for the Residential Women's Centre, including the recommendation by the Women's Justice Board (2026: 17) in March 2026 that the Centre could serve as a 'test site' for the provision of accommodation for women 'at the point of remand', little progress has been made on the Centre over the past year. Following the introduction of the Sentencing Act 2026 and the publication of the *Independent Review of the Criminal Courts* in 2025, the Ministry of Justice's (2026k: 11) response to the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee's latest inquiry indicated that the Residential Women's Centre's original purpose, presented as an 'alternative to custody for women from the local area', may require revision to align with recent sentencing reforms and the government's 'current policy priorities'.

ETHNICITY

52. The Ministry of Justice's 2025 report, *Statistics on Ethnicity and the Criminal Justice System 2024*, identified that minority ethnic groups are 'over-represented' within most stages of the criminal justice system in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2025f: 8). The findings showed that the most significant disparities related to stop and search, the use of custodial remand, and representation within the prison population (Ministry of Justice, 2025f).
53. The Lammy Review in 2017 concluded that people from minority ethnic backgrounds in England and Wales are drawn disproportionately into the criminal justice system. The review found that despite comprising just 12 per cent of the population of England and Wales, Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) men and women make up 25 per cent of its prison population (Lammy, 2017).

⁴⁵ 359 women appearing before the Crown Court were granted bail, while 233 were remanded into custody. A further two cases were recorded as having an unknown remand status.

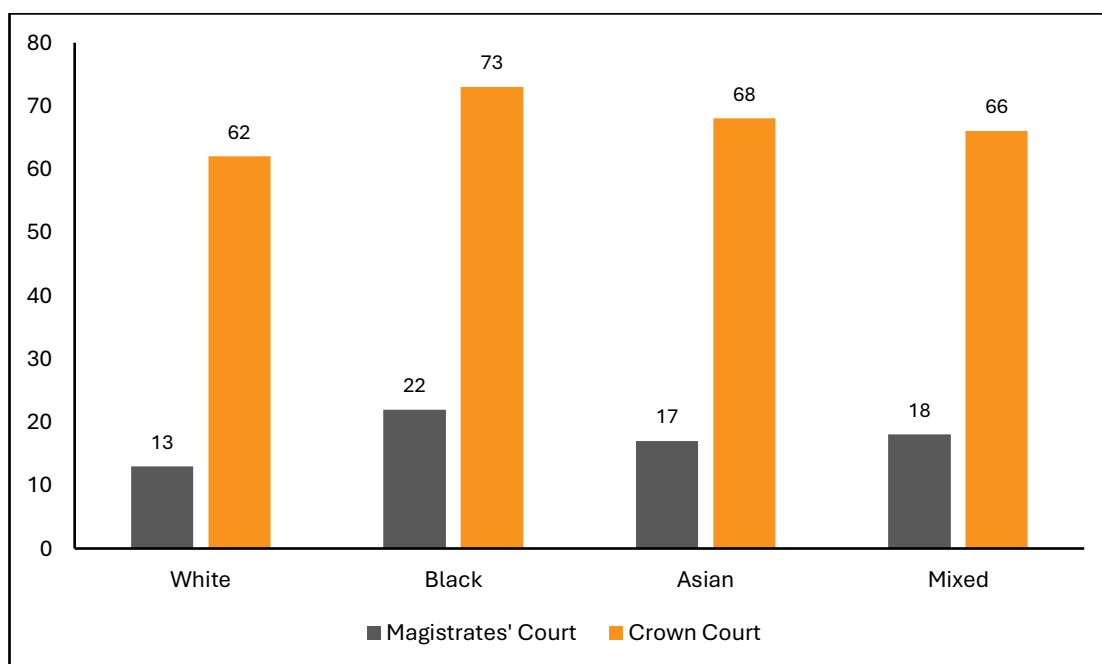
54. In March 2025, the Sentencing Council for England and Wales issued new guidance to judges to order a pre-sentence report if an individual is from a minority background. The guidance was issued in response to data, research and evidence which reveals sentencing disparities (for certain offences) between white offenders and those from an ethnic minority background. According to the then Chairman of the Sentencing Council, Lord Justice William Davis, providing sentencers with as much information as possible about an individual's background offers 'one means by which such disparity might be addressed' (Sentencing Council, 2025: 5). Despite the Sentencing Council's efforts, however, the plans were abandoned in March 2025 following an intervention by the then Justice Secretary, Shabana Mahmood, over fears that the proposals would have created a 'two-tier' justice system in England and Wales (Zeffman and Nevett, 2025).
55. While criminal justice is reserved to the UK Government, the Welsh Government has a clear set of responsibilities for promoting fairness and tackling all forms of discrimination in Wales. In July 2022, the Welsh Government published its *Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan* which includes a chapter dedicated to crime and justice. The plan sets out the Welsh Government's (2022b: 14) pledge to tackle inequality and racial disproportionality in Wales by creating 'an anti-racist criminal justice system'. In its *2024 Action Plan update*, the Welsh Government (2024: 72-3) reiterated its 'steadfast' commitment to combating racism in the Welsh criminal justice system by working alongside 'criminal justice partners', encouraging anti-racist policy from the UK Government, and strengthening the evidence base to identify racial disparity in the Welsh system.⁴⁶
56. Previous research by the Wales Governance Centre has uncovered the prevalence and extent of racial disproportionality within the Welsh criminal justice system. *Sentencing and Imprisonment in Wales* (Jones, 2019a), *Sentencing and Immediate Custody in*

⁴⁶ In May 2026, the Welsh Government (2026) launched its *Anti-racist Wales Action Plan interactive dashboard*. However, despite 'Crime and Justice' being identified as a key topic area, the dashboard does not include data on racial disproportionality within the different stages of the Welsh criminal justice system. Instead, its focus is (currently) predominantly on hate crime and the ethnic composition of the police workforce in Wales.

Wales (Jones, 2019b), *The Welsh Criminal Justice System: On the Jagged Edge* (Jones and Wyn Jones, 2022), *Prisons in Wales* (Jones, 2023), *Prisons and Sentencing in Wales* (Jones, 2024), and *Prisons and Imprisonment in Wales* (Jones, 2025) found that individuals from non-White backgrounds in Wales were over-represented in almost all stages of the criminal justice system. The latest data show that these trends continued in 2025.

Figure 2.4

The average remand rate (%) at the magistrates' court and Crown Court in Wales broken down by ethnic group, between 2017 and 2025



- 57.** Consistent with trends observed on an England and Wales level, analysis of court data in Wales show that a higher proportion of Black, Asian and Mixed defendants are remanded to custody at both the magistrates' court and Crown Court (see Figure 2.4).

- 58.** Between 2017 and 2025, almost three quarters (73 per cent) of Black defendants were remanded into custody at the Crown Court in Wales.⁴⁷ This compares to 62 per cent of White defendants (Ministry of Justice, 2026j).
- 59.** A fifth (22 per cent) of all Black defendants appearing at the magistrates' court in Wales between 2017 and 2025 were remanded into custody. This compares to 13 per cent of White defendants, 18 per cent of Mixed defendants, and 17 per cent of defendants from an Asian background (Ministry of Justice, 2026j).⁴⁸

Figure 2.5

The percentage of English and Welsh people in the general population and in prison by ethnic group in 2025⁴⁹

Ethnic Group	Prisoners	% of Prison population	% of General population	Rate of Representation in Prison
England				
White	57,617	70.8	81.1	0.87
Black	10,140	12.5	4.2	3
Asian	6,842	8.4	9.6	0.88
Mixed	4,052	5	3	1.7
Wales				
White	4,346	88.4	93.8	0.94
Black	160	3.3	0.9	3.7
Asian	156	3.2	2.9	1.1
Mixed	161	3.3	1.6	2.1

⁴⁷ 712 Black defendants were remanded in custody at the Crown Court in Wales between 2017 and 2024.

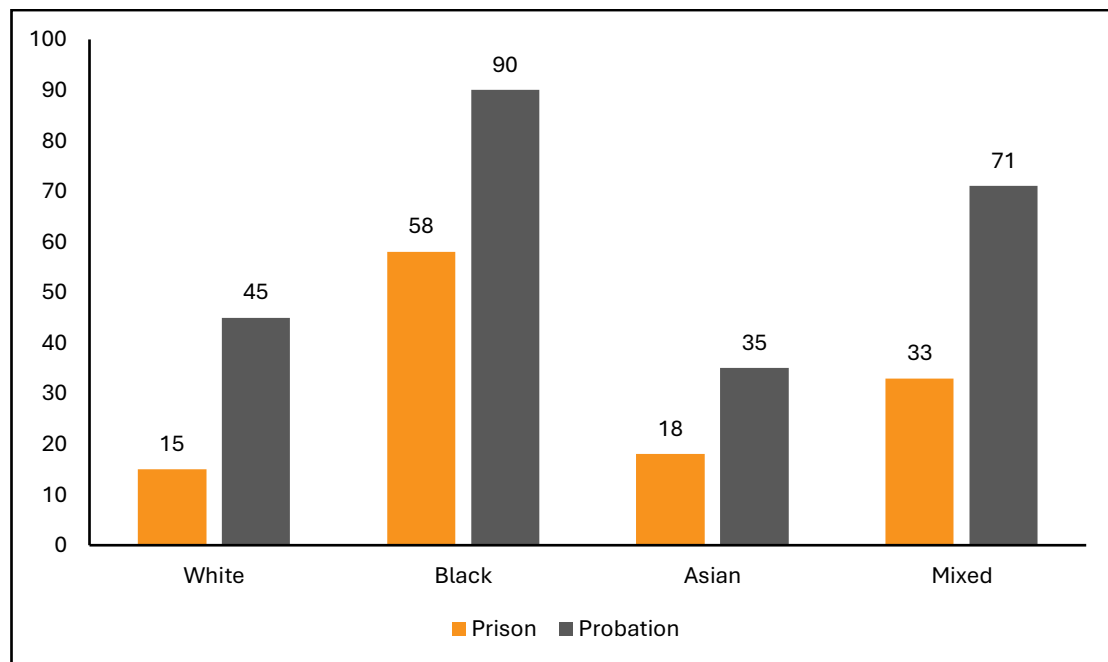
⁴⁸ High levels of missing data place considerable limitations on what conclusions can be drawn from data by ethnic group at magistrates' Courts in England and Wales.

⁴⁹ Welsh population by ethnicity (2021 census): White (2,915,849); Black (27,554); Asian (89,028); Mixed (48,466). English population by ethnicity (2021 census): White (45,783,404), Black (2,381,720), Asian (5,426,392), Mixed (1,669,378).

- 60.** When analysed alongside Welsh population data drawn from the 2021 Census, Black individuals from Wales were the most over-represented ethnic group in prison in 2025, followed by those from a Mixed background and individuals belonging to an Asian ethnic group (see Figure 2.5) (Ministry of Justice, 2026c; Office for National Statistics, 2022b).
- 61.** Consistent with the trends recorded in previous years, Welsh individuals from a White ethnic background were the only group to be (marginally) under-represented in prison in 2025. English prisoners from a Black and Mixed ethnic group were also over-represented in prison in 2025.
- 62.** Although racial disparities are evident in both England and Wales, the available data suggest that the overall level of disproportionality is greater in Wales than in England (see ‘Rate of Representation in Prison’ in Figure 2.5) (Ministry of Justice, 2026c; Office for National Statistics, 2022b).
- 63.** There were 58 Black people from Wales in prison for every 10,000 of the population in 2025. This rate compared to just 15 White people per 10,000 of the population, as well as 18 for Asian individuals and 33 for those from a Mixed ethnic background (see Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6

Rates of imprisonment and probation supervision per 10,000 people by ethnic group in Wales in 2025⁵⁰



64. For every 10,000 Black people living in Wales, 90 were under probation supervision in 2025. This compared to a rate of 71 per 10,000 for individuals from a Mixed background, 45 for White and 35 for those from an Asian ethnic group (McKinnell, 2026e) (see Figure 2.6).

65. Research has also shown that individuals from minority ethnic groups are more likely to receive longer custodial sentences. The Ministry of Justice's (2025f) *Statistics on Ethnicity and the Criminal Justice System 2024* showed that Asian, Black, and Mixed defendants in England and Wales receive longer custodial sentences than White defendants sentenced for indictable offences.

⁵⁰ Population by ethnicity (2021 census): White (2,915,849); Black (27,554); Asian (89,028); Mixed (48,466).

66. The average custodial sentence length in Wales between 2017 and 2025 was 9.2 months higher for Black defendants (25.2 months) than those from a White ethnic group (16 months) (Ministry of Justice, 2026h).
67. In 2025, the average length of a custodial sentence in Wales for Black defendants was 25.5 months, compared to 15 months for White defendants (Ministry of Justice, 2026h).
68. Individuals from a minority ethnic background are also more likely to serve a higher proportion of their determinate sentences in prison than White prisoners. *Prison, Probation and Sentencing in Wales* showed that between 2015 and 2018, Mixed prisoners from Wales served a higher proportion of their determinate sentences in prison (63 per cent), followed by Black (61 per cent), White (57 per cent) and Asian (57 per cent) prisoners (Jones, 2020).
69. Between 2019 and 2023, Black (77 per cent) prisoners from Wales served a higher proportion of their determinate sentences in prison, followed by Mixed (70 per cent), White (64 per cent), and Asian (56 per cent) prisoners (Ministry of Justice, 2024c).
70. A Freedom of Information request seeking data for 2024 was submitted to the Ministry of Justice on 2 October 2025, but no response was received. In preparation for this latest *Factfile*, a request for 2025 data was submitted on 22 June 2026. At the time of writing, however, this request also remains unanswered.
71. In response to a written parliamentary question requesting the exact same information, the Ministry of Justice stated that centrally collated prison release data only allow the ‘average proportion of sentence’ served by individuals released from determinate sentences to be readily estimated, and that these calculations may also include time spent in the community on bail and that providing an accurate response would incur a disproportionate cost (McKinnell, 2026f). Given that these data have previously been disclosed by the Ministry of Justice in response to Freedom of Information requests, it remains unclear why the department has since adopted a different approach to their release.

72. In 2024, the Senedd's Equality and Social Justice Committee's (2024) *Action, not words: towards an anti-racist Wales by 2030* acknowledged the extent of racial disproportionality across the Welsh criminal justice system. The Committee (2024:37), however, highlighted the 'difficulties' facing researchers who are forced to use freedom of information legislation to obtain basic data broken down by ethnic group in Wales. Drawing upon evidence received by the Wales Governance Centre, the Committee (2024: 37) recommended that the Welsh Government establish a Welsh Criminal Justice Observatory to help improve access to vital 'data and knowledge' in this area. In February 2025, the Welsh Government commissioned Miller Research UK to conduct the Welsh Justice Research Programme. However, rather than prioritising research on justice outcomes, including those affecting minority communities in Wales, the programme has largely been oriented towards preparations for the devolution of justice powers to Wales.⁵¹

⁵¹ At the time of writing, no research outputs arising from this work have been made publicly available by Miller Research UK or the Welsh Government.

3 PRISONS IN WALES

1. The prison estate in Wales is comprised of five different establishments.

- HMP Berwyn in Wrexham is one of the largest prisons in western Europe. Opened in February 2017, the prison is a designated adult male category C training prison and holds Category B adult males on remand. At the end of June 2026, the prison held a total of 1,915 prisoners (Ministry of Justice, 2026l).
- HMP Cardiff is a Category B reception and resettlement prison that accommodates a mix of remanded, unsentenced, sentenced and recalled adult male prisoners. The year 2027 will mark 200 years since construction of the prison first began, before eventually opening in 1832. At the end of June 2026, HMP Cardiff held 589 prisoners (Ministry of Justice, 2026l).
- HMP/YOI Parc in Bridgend is a category C resettlement prison that holds convicted adult men, young adults (18-20), and young people (16-17) remanded and convicted. Currently operating as Wales' only privately run prison, HMP Parc was the very first prison to be built in England and Wales under the Private Finance Initiative. Following the construction of a new 'house-block' on the existing site in 2015, HMP Parc is one of the largest prisons in England and Wales and is expected to grow further as part of the UK Government's latest expansion plans. In June 2026, there were a total of 1,806 prisoners being held at HMP Parc (Ministry of Justice, 2026l).
- HMP Swansea is a category B reception prison for adult males and serves local courts in south Wales. The prison population is a mixture of remanded, unsentenced, sentenced, and recalled prisoners. At the end of June 2026, the prison held a total of 374 prisoners (Ministry of Justice, 2026l).

- HMP Usk and HMP Prescoed in Monmouthshire are two separate prisons located on different sites that are managed as a single establishment by HMPPS. HMP Prescoed is an adult male open prison that manages category D prisoners. HMP Usk operates as a small category C training prison which largely deals with offenders convicted under the Sex Offenders Act 1997. At the end of June 2026, HMP Usk and HMP Prescoed had a combined population of 484 prisoners (Ministry of Justice, 2026l).

POPULATION

2. Since HMP Berwyn became operational in 2017, the average number of prisoners held in Wales has increased by 35 per cent.⁵² While the average number of people held in the Welsh prison estate surpassed 5,000 for the first time in 2022, there were 5,347 people held in the Welsh prison estate in 2025 (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1

The average prison population in Wales by establishment, 2021 to 2025

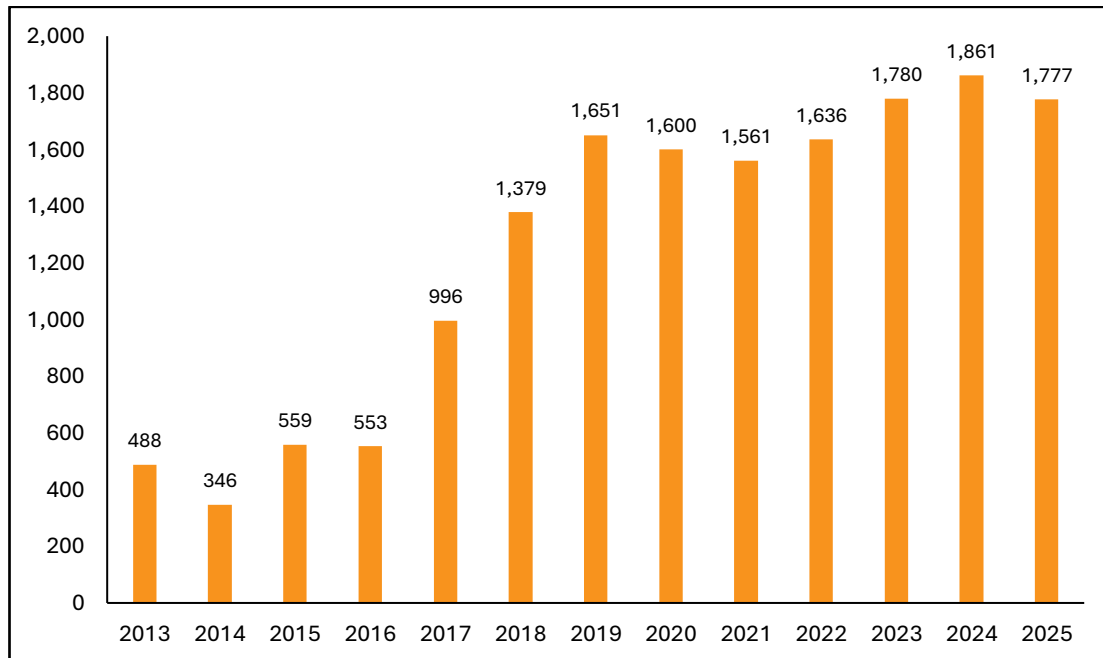
Prison	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Berwyn	1,783	1,826	1,950	1,952	1,909
Cardiff	679	732	764	706	725
Parc	1,625	1,640	1,756	1,768	1,813
Swansea	319	375	416	392	394
Usk/Prescoed	454	497	520	496	506
Total	4,860	5,069	5,406	5,314	5,347

⁵² From 3,962 in 2017 to 5,347 in 2025.

3. Despite only a marginal increase in the prison population in Wales (0.6 per cent) in 2025, prisoner numbers rose across all prisons last year, except for HMP Berwyn (see Figure 3.1) (Ministry of Justice, 2026m).
 4. On average, 1,777 prisoners from England were being held in Welsh prisons in 2025 (see Figure 3.2). That is the equivalent population of HMP Cardiff, HMP Swansea and HMP Usk/Prescoed combined, but represents a decrease on the level recorded in 2024 (1,861) (Ministry of Justice, 2026c).
 5. Despite a fall in the number of English prisoners held in Wales last year, a third (33 per cent) of all prisoners held in the Welsh prison estate in 2025 were from England.
-

Figure 3.2

The average number of English prisoners held in Wales, 2013 to 2025



6. Since HMP Berwyn opened in February 2017, the number of English prisoners held in Wales has risen by 177 per cent.⁵³
7. At the end of December 2025, 61 per cent of prisoners held at HMP Berwyn were from England.⁵⁴
8. In total, prisoners from 123 different local authorities in England were being held at HMP Berwyn in December 2025 (Ministry of Justice, 2026c).
9. Despite claims made in 2015 that HMP Berwyn would play a crucial role in ‘being a regional prison serving the North West of England’ (House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee, 2015: 11), prisoners from 93 English local authorities outside of North West England were also being held at HMP Berwyn in December 2025.
10. In total, approximately 259 prisoners at HMP Berwyn had origin addresses in English local authorities outside the North West of England in December 2025 (Ministry of Justice, 2026c).
11. The opening of HMP Berwyn in 2017 created a sustained surplus of prison places in Wales — with the number of places in Wales exceeding the total number of Welsh prisoners. In 2025, for instance, there were 4,917 people *from* Wales in prison (across England and Wales), compared with 5,347 people being held within the Welsh prison estate. By contrast, while 81,437 people *from* England were in prison in 2025, the English prison estate held 81,950 people.⁵⁵
12. In May 2025, it was reported by BBC Wales that proposals were being readied to expand the size of HMP Parc by a further 345 places (Moffat, 2025). This news followed the

⁵³ From 622 in December 2016 to 1,725 in December 2025.

⁵⁴ There were 1,164 English prisoners held at HMP Berwyn in December 2025 and 1,917 prisoners in total.

⁵⁵ It is important to recognise that the prison estate in Wales is currently unable to accommodate all Welsh prisoners, including women and those held as Category A. For further information on this see the oral evidence given by the former Executive Director of HMPPS in Wales, Amy Rees (2018: Q333), to the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee in 2018.

Ministry of Justice’s decision in September 2024 to grant HMP Parc ‘pre-application approval’ as part of its efforts to increase prison capacity and tackle overcrowding in England and Wales.

13. The decision to expand HMP Parc by an additional 345 places will further increase the surplus of prison places in Wales. Based on 2025 data, the surplus of prison places in Wales is estimated to rise from 430 to 775 places.⁵⁶

Figure 3.3

The number of first prison receptions in Wales by establishment, 2021 to 2025

Prison	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Berwyn	1,100	943	1,029	1,228	1,111
Cardiff	2,457	1,973	1,924	2,197	2,029
Parc	353	321	391	401	452
Swansea	1,168	1,135	1,366	1,435	1,407
Usk	0	0	1	0	0
Total	5,078	4,372	4,711	5,261	4,999

14. Although the number of first prison receptions increased across England and Wales by 3 per cent in 2025, the number of prison receptions in Wales fell by 5 per cent last year.⁵⁷ HMP Parc was the only prison in Wales to experience an increase in the number of first receptions in 2025 (13 per cent) (Ministry of Justice, 2026n).
15. In total, there were 262 fewer receptions recorded at Welsh prisons in 2025 (see Figure 3.3). The largest decrease was recorded at HMP Berwyn (10 per cent), followed by HMP Cardiff (8 per cent), and HMP Swansea (2 per cent) (Ministry of Justice, 2026n).

⁵⁶ This has been calculated using data from March 2025, June 2025, September 2025 and December 2025. Welsh prisoners: 4,917; Welsh prison population: 5,347; Welsh prison population (after expansion): 5,692.

⁵⁷ England and Wales: From 73,717 in 2024 to 75,578 in 2025.
Wales: From 5,261 in 2024 to 4,999 in 2025.

16. A study published by the Ministry of Justice in 2012 found that 15 per cent of prisoners reported being homeless prior to entering custody (Williams et al. 2012). In Wales, 2024 data gathered from the Ministry of Justice show (when mapped onto prison reception data) that around a third (32 per cent) of all people arriving at prisons in Wales in 2024 had no fixed address (Jones, 2025).
17. Ministry of Justice data for 2025, provided in response to a written parliamentary question, indicate a sharp reduction in the number of people arriving at prisons in Wales as homeless. A total of 1,650 were recorded as homeless on reception in Welsh prisons in 2024, but this figure fell by 80 per cent in 2025 (McKinnell, 2026g).⁵⁸
18. At HMP Berwyn, the number of prison receptions fell by 10 per cent in 2025, yet the number of prisoners recorded as homeless on arrival declined by 94 per cent. While these data may well reflect genuine changes in circumstances or improvements in services aimed at addressing homelessness, the data presented below suggest there may be grounds to question their reliability.⁵⁹

RELEASE AND HOMELESSNESS

19. The number of releases from Welsh prisons was virtually unchanged in 2025 (see Figure 3.4) (Ministry of Justice, 2026p).⁶⁰ On average, 90 prisoners a week were released from Welsh prisons into the community last year, an average of approximately 18 releases per day.⁶¹

⁵⁸ From 1,650 in 2024 to 328 in 2025.

⁵⁹ The Ministry of Justice acknowledge that these data ‘are drawn from raw OASys data and have not been subject to additional quality assurance. The data should be treated as an indication of recorded homelessness at reception rather than a definitive measure of the total number of prisoners who were homeless’.

⁶⁰ There was a 0.4 per cent increase in the number of prison releases in Wales in 2025.

⁶¹ This figure is based on 260 working days in a year. If a prisoner has an automatic release date that falls on a weekend or Bank Holiday, they are released on the weekday before. The exception to this is prisoners serving very short sentences – of less than 5 days – where there is specific statutory provision for them to be released on a Saturday if their release date falls on a weekend.

Figure 3.4

The number of prison releases in Wales by establishment, 2021 to 2025

Prison	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Berwyn	1,053	1,013	1,103	1,495	1,511
Cardiff	1,130	1,096	1,029	1,023	910
Parc	739	647	696	1,068	1,277
Prescoed	186	180	227	256	264
Swansea	619	717	746	748	640
Usk	61	64	54	69	76
Total	3,788	3,717	3,855	4,659	4,678

- 20.** Changes to Home Detention Curfew (HDC) eligibility contributed to a 16 per cent increase in the number of those released under Home Detention Curfew across England and Wales in 2025.⁶² These changes include extending HDC eligibility to those sentenced to four years or more (effective from 17 June 2024) and increasing the maximum period spent on HDC from 180 days to 365 days (effective from 3 June 2025). A Freedom of Information request seeking a breakdown of HDC releases from Welsh prisons, as well as the number of Welsh prisoners released under HDC based on home address, was submitted to the Ministry of Justice in August 2026. At the time of writing, the request remained unanswered.
- 21.** The Ministry of Justice’s SDS40 (Standard Determinate Sentences 40) early release scheme has contributed to an increase in prison releases in England and Wales since its introduction in September 2024. The policy enables certain prisoners serving ‘standard determinate sentences’, who would ordinarily be released at the 50 per cent point of their sentence, to become eligible for release after serving 40 per cent of their custodial term. Tranche 1 of the scheme commenced on 10 September 2024 and

⁶² From 10,134 in 2024 to 11,796 in 2025.

applied to eligible prisoners serving sentences of less than five years. Tranche 2 began on 22 October 2024 and extended eligibility to prisoners serving sentences of five years or more.

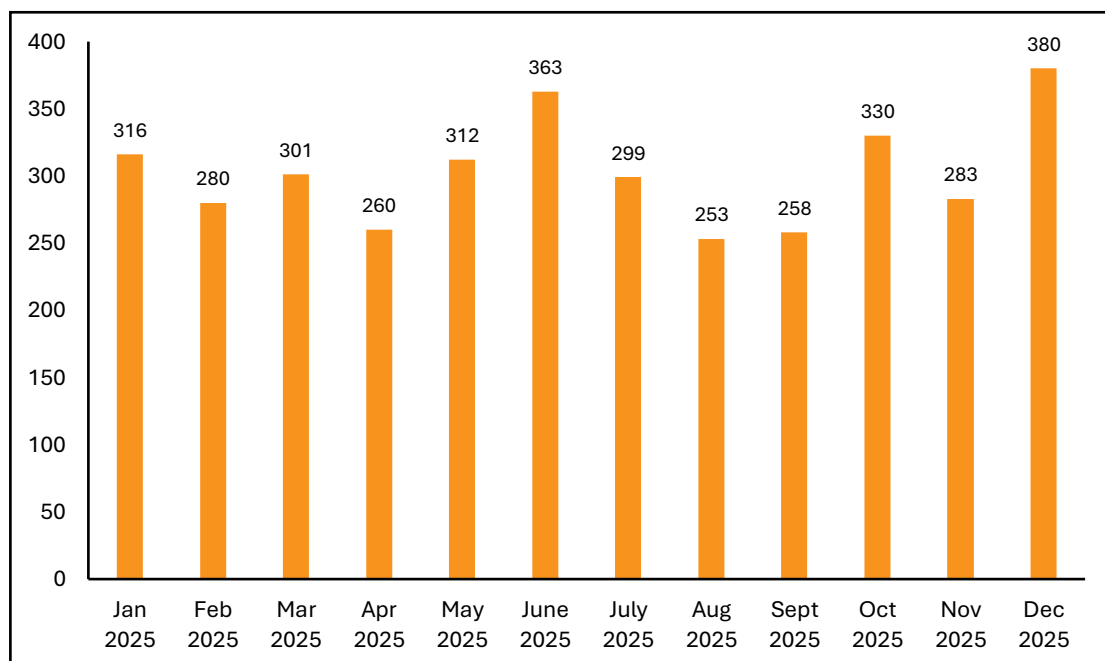
22. In the 12 months to March 2026, there were 43,610 SDS40 releases recorded across England and Wales, nine per cent of which were from female prisons (Ministry of Justice, 2026q).⁶³
23. The rollout of SDS40 has added to growing concerns over prisoner homelessness in England and Wales, as well as the increased likelihood of prisoners being recalled to custody. For some, including HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, the fact that some prisoners would be released into homelessness and recalled to custody as a consequence of the UK government's policy was simply 'inevitable' (Vinter, 2024).
24. In September 2024, officials at Cardiff Council (2024) raised concerns about the additional pressures SDS40 were placing on accommodation services across the city (BBC News, 2024). Members of the Council's Community and Adult Services Scrutiny Committee (2024: 4) were told that individuals due for release 'kept appearing and disappearing' from the lists provided to council staff, making it 'very difficult' for housing services to put the appropriate level of support in place. On the day that Tranche 1 of the SDS40 scheme was implemented, 10 September 2024, Cardiff Council was required to provide housing support to 11 prison leavers (Peskett, 2024).
25. During an inspection visit in January 2025, HMI Prisons (2025) found that 11 prisoners had been released from HMP Parc under SDS40 without anywhere confirmed to sleep on their day of release. In response to a Freedom of Information request from the Wales Governance Centre in August 2025, the Ministry of Justice (2025g) confirmed that they are unable to provide information on the number of Welsh prisoners (based on home address) released as homeless under SDS40 because these data are drawn 'from different data sources'.

⁶³ Male prisons: 39,650
Female prisons: 3,960

26. In the 12 months to December 2025, a total of 3,635 releases under SDS40 were recorded across prisons in Wales (see Figure 3.5), with HMP Berwyn recording the highest number of releases (1,170), followed by HMP Parc (960), HMP Cardiff (774), HMP Swansea (508) and HMP Prescoed (223) (Ministry of Justice, 2026q).
27. In addition to data on releases from Welsh prisons, information obtained from the Ministry of Justice via the Freedom of Information Act 2000 show that 1,899 prisoners from Wales (based on home address) were released under the SDS40 scheme between September 2024 and March 2025 (Ministry of Justice, 2025h).

Figure 3.5

Monthly SDS releases from prisons in Wales in 2025



28. The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 removed prisoners from the list of people given automatic ‘priority need’ status for temporary accommodation in Wales. Since its introduction there have been numerous calls to re-introduce priority need for prisoners amidst growing concerns over rising levels of rough sleeping and homelessness upon

release (Jones and Wyn Jones, 2022; Mackie, 2017; Senedd Cymru's Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee, 2018; Shelter Cymru, 2017).

29. A survey carried out by Shelter Cymru in 2017 discovered that 13 per cent of rough sleepers in Wales first became homeless after being released from prison with no accommodation to return to (Jackson, 2018). The research also found that people were often recalled to prison because they had no fixed address. According to Jackson (2018: 29), this finding 'strongly suggests' that the removal of priority need status for prison leavers has been a 'contributing factor' to this problem.
30. In its *Ending Homelessness* White Paper published in October 2023, the Welsh Government (2023: 104) declared homelessness among prison leavers as 'one of the most significant challenges' to have faced homelessness teams in Wales over the last decade. Alongside anecdotal evidence from housing service providers, the Welsh Government's (2023) annual rough sleeper count revealed that two-fifths (43 per cent) of those rough sleeping in Wales had a history of serving time in prison.
31. The most recent inspections carried out by HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMI Prisons) in Wales have raised several concerns about levels of prisoner homelessness upon release. Inspectors at HMP Swansea reported that 'a third of prisoners were either homeless or in transient accommodation' on the first night of their release (HMI Prisons, 2023: 52). At HMP Cardiff, HMI Prisons (2024: 5) found that 'too many' prisoners were being released as homeless or without sustainable accommodation and identified the problem as one of its six 'priority concerns'. At HMP Parc, inspectors found that there were gaps in the data available on prison release outcomes, with around 8 per cent of prisoners included in the data confirmed as having nowhere to sleep on the day of their release (HMI Prisons, 2025a). At HMP Berwyn, HMI Prisons (2025b) found that only 41 per cent of prisoners went into their own home, rented property, or to live long term with family or friends upon their release. In the previous 12 months before HMI Prison's (2025b) visit, over 250 prisoners were released from HMP Berwyn as homeless. Most recently at HMP Usk/Prescoed, despite finding that 'positive accommodation outcomes' were reported in 90 per cent of cases at both prisons, inspectors discovered

that access to accommodation and housing on release ‘was becoming more difficult’ (HMI Prisons, 2025c: 43).

32. In its most recent annual report, the Independent Monitoring Board (2026a) for HMP Berwyn noted that, although local authorities across North Wales and North West England continued to work with the prison to facilitate access to accommodation prior to release, Wrexham County Borough Council’s involvement was limited to conducting housing assessments at the point of release itself.
33. Ministry of Justice data show that 865 people were released from Welsh prisons without a fixed address to return to in the year ending March 2026 (McKinnell, 2026h). This represents a seven per cent increase on the level recorded the year before.⁶⁴
34. On average, 16 people a week were released from Welsh prisons as homeless in 2025/26.
35. The majority of those released from prison as homeless in Wales were at HMP Cardiff (385), followed by HMP Berwyn (215), HMP Parc (135); and HMP Swansea (130).
36. Two in five (42 per cent) prisoners released from HMP Cardiff in the year ending March 2026 had no fixed address to return to. This represented a 20 per cent increase in the number of those released from HMP Cardiff without a fixed address in just one year (McKinnell, 2026h).⁶⁵
37. On average, seven people a week were released from HMP Cardiff as homeless in 2025/26.
38. Successive editions of the Wales Governance Centre’s *Prison Factfile* have charted the rise in the number of people supervised by Welsh probation services who were rough sleeping upon release from prison (see Figure 3.6). The latest data show that the

⁶⁴ From 806 in 2024/25 to 865 in 2025/26.

⁶⁵ From 320 in 2024/25 to 385 in 2025/26.

number of individuals recorded as rough sleeping on the day of their release rose for a fourth consecutive year in 2025/26.

39. The number of those recorded as rough sleeping increased by a further 24 per cent in Wales in 2025/26,⁶⁶ during a period in which the number of those managed by Welsh probation services increased by seven per cent (Ministry of Justice, 2026r).⁶⁷

Figure 3.6

Type of accommodation on release from custody, 2021/22 to 2025/26⁶⁸

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Settled Accommodation	2,175	2,450	2,670	2,940	3,205
Other Housed	965	865	915	1,220	1,535
Bail/Probation Accommodation	560	690	880	1,190	1,270
Home Office Immigration Enforcement Accommodation	10	35	20	20	10
Homeless, Not Rough Sleeping	315	105	105	45	70
Rough Sleeping	105	330	500	560	695
Unknown, Awaiting Assessment	15	25	20	10	10
Other Unknown	280	175	85	130	115
Total	4,425	4,675	5,195	6,115	6,910

40. In total, 695 prison leavers managed by Welsh probation services were rough sleeping on the day of their release in 2025/26 (Ministry of Justice, 2026r).

⁶⁶ From 560 in 2024/25 to 695 in 2025/26.

⁶⁷ From 14,714 in 2024/25 to 15,808 in 2025/26.

⁶⁸ All cases from 2023/24 were rounded by the Ministry of Justice to the nearest multiple of 5 'to protect the disclosure of personal information of any individual'. Data from previous years have been updated here to reflect this change.

41. Overall, one in ten (10 per cent) of those supervised by Welsh probation services were recorded as rough sleeping on the day of their release from prison last year (Ministry of Justice, 2026r).
42. In England, the number of those recorded as rough sleeping upon release increased by 20 per cent in 2025/26,⁶⁹ while the people supervised by English probation services rose by seven per cent (Ministry of Justice, 2026r).⁷⁰
43. Of all those supervised by probation services in England, 15 per cent were recorded as rough sleeping upon their release in 2025/26.⁷¹
44. The number of individuals recorded as rough sleeping three months after release from prison remained unchanged in Wales in 2025/26 (Ministry of Justice, 2026s). In contrast, England experienced a 9 per cent increase in the number of people recorded as rough sleeping three months after release during the same period.⁷²
45. Just under half (46 per cent) of those managed by Welsh probation services went into settled accommodation immediately following release in 2025/26 (Ministry of Justice, 2026s). This compares to 49 per cent of prison leavers entering settled accommodation in 2021/22.
46. The Welsh Government's *Ending Homelessness White Paper* not only recognised the scale of the challenges facing prisoners on release but also set out proposals to improve homelessness services for prison leavers from Wales. The changes include offering enhanced support to prisoners at the prison reception stage, proposals to use local connection at the prevention duty stage, and steps to ensure that prisoners can be considered homeless to secure early release (Welsh Government, 2023).⁷³

⁶⁹ England: From 11,435 in 2024/25 to 13,665 in 2025/26.

⁷⁰ From 226,448 in 2024/25 to 241,884 in 2025/26.

⁷¹ 13,655 prisoners in England were recorded as rough sleeping on release in 2025/26.

⁷² Wales: From 85 in 2024/25 to 85 in 2025/26.

England: From 1,900 in 2024/25 to 2,065 in 2025/26.

⁷³ The Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Act 2026 received Royal Assent on 1 April 2026.

47. In a recent report on reducing deaths among prison leavers, Nacro (2026: 1) identified homelessness as ‘a major risk factor in post-release deaths’ in England and Wales. Similarly, a report published by the Prison and Probation Ombudsman (2024a) found that one-third of prison leavers who died within two weeks of release from prison had been released into homelessness. The Prison and Probation Ombudsman’s (2024a: 8) research also identified a ‘clear link’ between homelessness and substance use, with many prison leavers returning to drug and/or alcohol use following their release into the community.
48. In its most recent annual report, the Independent Monitoring Board (IMB) for HMP Swansea highlighted the case of Mr B, a former prisoner who died from drug toxicity five days after his release. Although the prison’s resettlement team had completed a housing referral just five days before his release, the IMB concluded that this provided insufficient time to secure appropriate accommodation. As a result, Mr B was released from prison homeless (IMB, 2026b).
49. Ministry of Justice (2025i) data on deaths among prison leavers supervised by the probation service in the community show that 8 per cent of all deaths recorded in England and Wales between 2022/23 and 2025/25 were in Wales. This is despite Welsh probation services managing only 6 per cent of the total probation caseload across England and Wales during the same period.
50. While self-inflicted deaths among prison leavers accounted for a quarter (25 per cent) of all fatalities recorded in England and Wales between 2022/23 and 2025/25, more than a third (36 per cent) of all deaths recorded in Wales were classified as self-inflicted during this period (Ministry of Justice, 2025i).⁷⁴
51. There were 52 deaths recorded among people under post-release supervision by the probation service in Wales in the year ending March 2025. Half of these deaths were

⁷⁴ Wales: Total deaths – 143; Self-inflicted – 52.
England and Wales: Total deaths – 1,868; Self-inflicted – 465.

recorded as ‘self-inflicted’, while 44 per cent were attributed to natural causes, four per cent to homicide and two per cent recorded as ‘other: non-natural’ (see Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7

Deaths of offenders supervised by the probation service in the community in Wales, 2022/23 to 2024/25

	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Self-inflicted	18	8	26
Natural Causes	16	16	23
Homicide	0	2	2
Other: Non-natural	13	18	1
Total	47	44	52

- 52.** Drug poisoning remains by far the most common cause of ‘self-inflicted’ deaths among prison leavers in England and Wales. Since changes to data collection practices in 2019, the number of drug-related deaths in the year post-release has doubled in England and Wales. According to Nacro (2026: 4), this trend underlines the need for ‘urgent action’ to better support people with a history of substance use and reduce the number of preventable deaths following release from prison.
- 53.** Drug poisoning (with intent undetermined) accounted for over a third (37 per cent) of all deaths among prison leavers supervised in the community in Wales in 2024/25.⁷⁵ This was substantially higher than the proportion recorded across England and Wales as a whole, where deaths attributed to drug poisoning (with intent undetermined) accounted for just over a fifth (21 per cent) of the total.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Since 2022/23, the Ministry of Justice has distinguished between drug poisoning deaths recorded as ‘intentional’ and those for which intent was classified as ‘undetermined’.

Between 2022/23 and 2024/25, there have been 17 ‘intentional’ drug poisoning deaths recorded across England and Wales, one of which was recorded in Wales (in 2024/25). During this period, a total of 254 deaths attributed to drug poisoning (with intent undetermined) were recorded in England and Wales, 34 of which were in Wales (13 per cent).

⁷⁶ In 2024/25, drug poisoning (with intent undetermined) accounted for 19 of the 52 deaths recorded among prison leavers in Wales. Across England and Wales as a whole, the equivalent figure was 131 deaths out of a total of 620.

54. Of the 131 self-inflicted deaths attributed to drug poisoning (with intent undetermined) among prison leavers supervised by the Probation Service in England and Wales in 2024/25, 15 per cent were recorded in Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2025i).⁷⁷ This is despite the fact that Welsh probation services were responsible for managing only 6 per cent of the total probation caseload across England and Wales during the same period.
55. While 55 per cent of self-inflicted deaths among prison leavers in England and Wales between 2022/23 and 2024/25 were attributed to drug poisoning (with intent undetermined), the proportion was higher in Wales, where drug poisoning accounted for 65 per cent of such deaths over the same period.⁷⁸
56. When considering deaths caused by drug poisoning across the general population, Wales has consistently recorded a higher rate than England. According to the most recent data, there were 140.4 drug poisoning deaths per million people in Wales in 2024, compared with 91.1 per million in England (Office for National Statistics, 2025). Data published in October 2025 also showed a continuing year-on-year increase in the number of drug-related deaths in Wales. In total, 417 drug-related deaths were registered in 2024, up from 377 in 2023 (ITV Wales News, 2025).
57. Although the control, classification, and criminalisation of drugs remain reserved to the UK Government under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, thereby ‘very clearly’ limiting what the Welsh Government can deliver in Wales (Brewster and Jones, 2019: 374), responsibility for addressing substance use among prison leavers in the community nevertheless rests largely with the devolved government. While the Welsh Government’s *Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2019-2022* (2019: 30) identified the need to develop ‘move on’ processes for individuals leaving residential rehabilitation settings, including prisons, no subsequent policy specifically addressing this issue has been published in the seven years since the plan’s release in October 2019. It therefore

⁷⁷ Wales: 19; England and Wales: 131.

⁷⁸ Wales: Self-inflicted total – 52; Self-inflicted (drug poisoning – intent undetermined) – 34.
England and Wales: Self-inflicted total – 465; Self-inflicted (drug poisoning – intent undetermined) – 254.

remains unclear what action is being taken to recognise, monitor, and respond to drug related deaths among prison leavers in Wales.

SAFETY IN CUSTODY

- 58.** The Ministry of Justice's recent plans to expand HMP Parc comes at a time when the prison has faced sustained scrutiny over declining safety and deteriorating conditions. Since 2024, significant concerns have been raised about the prison's safety record following a sharp increase in the number of deaths recorded at the prison. Of the 21 deaths recorded across the Welsh prison estate in 2024 — the year that approval for the expansion was granted by HMPPS — 17 occurred at HMP Parc (Ministry of Justice, 2025j). This was the highest number of deaths recorded at any single prison in during 2024 and jointly the highest annual total ever recorded by an individual prison in England and Wales.⁷⁹
- 59.** Following an unannounced inspection at the prison in January 2025, HMI Prisons (2025a: 3) concluded that there had been a 'serious deterioration' in standards at HMP Parc, with the prison 'troubled' by the steady flow of drugs into the prison. At least four of the deaths recorded at HMP Parc in 2024 were believed to be linked to drugs, with HMI Prisons (2025a: 3) suggesting that several were 'likely caused by synthetic opioids'. In May 2024, South Wales Police confirmed that a prison staff member had been arrested in connection with drug dealing offences at HMP Parc (Aitken, 2024).
- 60.** According to Ministry of Justice (2026t) data, there was a 7 per cent increase in the number of drug finds at HMP Parc in 2025/26.⁸⁰ The total recorded last year represents a 167 per cent increase on the number of drug finds recorded at HMP Parc only three years ago.⁸¹

⁷⁹ There were 17 deaths recorded at HMP Lindholm in Doncaster in 2021.

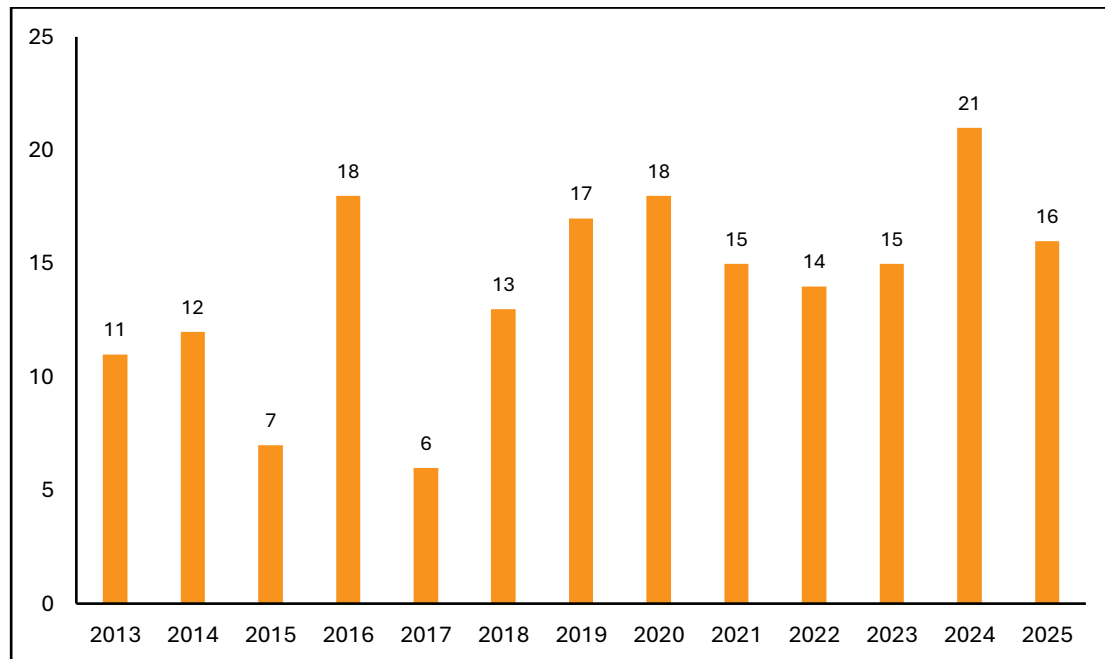
⁸⁰ From 1,035 in 2024/25 to 1,106 in 2025/26.

⁸¹ From 415 in 2022/23 to 1,106 in 2025/26.

61. In January 2026, HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2026c) carried out a follow-up review to assess progress against the concerns raised during its inspection of HMP Parc the previous year. The review found that, of the 11 concerns previously identified by inspectors, good progress had been made in only one area, while progress was deemed reasonable in three areas and insufficient in seven.
62. Although inspectors acknowledged the efforts made by G4S, supported by HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), to reduce the supply of drugs at HMP Parc, HMI Prisons (2026c: 9) concluded that drugs continued to be far too easily available within the prison. The review also found that the prison had made ‘insufficient progress’ in addressing concerns about high levels of self-harm and to address and mitigate the associated risks posed to prisoners’ health outcomes.
63. Against the backdrop of the ongoing concerns being raised by HMI Prisons regarding safety levels at HMP Parc, the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee’s (2026a: 7) *The Future of HMP Parc* report concluded in March that ‘significant challenges remain’ at the prison and called on the Ministry of Justice to ‘pause the planned expansion’ at HMP Parc.

Figure 3.8

The number of deaths in Welsh prisons, 2013 to 2025



64. There were 16 deaths across the Welsh prison estate in 2025 (see Figure 3.8), seven of which were recorded at HMP Parc (Ministry of Justice, 2026u).
65. The rising number of deaths recorded across the Welsh prison estate in recent years has added considerable weight to longstanding concerns about prison safety in England and Wales. Analysis carried out by INQUEST (2020) into files on 61 inquests into deaths in prison custody uncovered a range of failings that have contributed to both self-inflicted and non-self-inflicted deaths since 2013. These include: ‘inconsistent and insufficient’ mental health services; poor communication and information sharing between health officials and prison staff; poor emergency care including delays in calling for emergency services; problems relating to prescription and illicit drugs including delays in accessing medication; and ‘wide-ranging failures’ in providing basic medical care to prisoners suffering from physical and mental health problems (INQUEST, 2020: 7-8).

Figure 3.9

The number of self-inflicted deaths in Wales by establishment, 2021 to 2025

Prison	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Berwyn	0	0	0	1	0	1
Cardiff	3	3	1	0	1	8
Parc	1	1	0	3	0	5
Swansea	1	0	0	0	3	4
Usk/Prescoed	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	5	4	1	4	4	18

66. Ministry of Justice (2026u) data show that there have been 18 confirmed self-inflicted deaths in Welsh prisons between 2021 and 2025 (see Figure 3.9). The majority of these deaths were recorded at HMP Cardiff (eight), followed by HMP Parc (five), HMP Swansea (four) and HMP Berwyn (one).
67. There were four self-inflicted deaths recorded across the Welsh prison estate in 2025, three of which were at HMP Swansea.
68. Disaggregated data show that of the 79 self-inflicted deaths recorded in England and Wales in 2025, five individuals had a recorded origin address in Wales (McKinnell, 2026i).
69. A report by the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee (2018: 14) in 2018 identified ‘natural cause’ deaths as the ‘leading cause of mortality’ in prisons in England and Wales. More recently, a study on healthcare in prisons in England and Wales found that prisoners are likely to die from ‘natural causes’ around 20 years earlier than people in the general population (The National Confidential Enquiry into Patient Outcome and Death, 2024).

70. The Prison and Probation Ombudsman (2017) has determined that a large number of ‘natural cause’ deaths can be explained by inadequate prison healthcare as well as an increase in the older prisoner population. Evidence submitted by South Wales Against Wrongful Conviction to the Senedd Cymru’s Health, Social Care and Sport Committee’s inquiry into prison healthcare in Wales described the poor treatment of elderly prisoners as a ‘national scandal’ that, in some cases, amounts to ‘inhumane and degrading treatment’ (South Wales Against Wrongful Conviction, 2019: 5).
71. Following two deaths at HMP Cardiff in 2019, the Prison and Probation Ombudsman concluded that the standard of health care provision at the prison ‘was not equivalent’ to what would be found in the community (Senedd Cymru’s Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, 2021: 28).
72. Between 2020 and 2025, there were a total of 59 deaths across the Welsh prison estate with the cause of death attributed to ‘natural causes’ (Ministry of Justice, 2026u). While a third (33 per cent) of all prisoners in the Welsh prison estate were held at HMP Parc during this period, over half (56 per cent) of all natural cause deaths in Wales were recorded at HMP Parc.⁸²
73. In 2025, there were six ‘natural cause’ deaths recorded at HMP Parc.
74. In August 2024, the Prison and Probation Ombudsman published the findings of its reinvestigation into the death of Mr Aaron Nunes at HMP Parc in February 2016. Mr Nunes died in hospital of septic shock and diabetic ketoacidosis. The Ombudsman’s (2024b:1) initial report stated that the care received by Mr Nunes at the prison was ‘equivalent to that he could have expected to receive in the community’. An inquest into Mr Nunes’ death later concluded that the direct cause of his death was ‘his failure to manage his own health adequately’ (Prison and Probation Ombudsman, 2024b:1). However, following legal action taken by Mr Nunes’ mother, the Prison and Probation Ombudsman reinvestigated his death and found that a ‘large number of significant

⁸² There were 33 natural cause deaths recorded at HMP Parc between 2020 and 2025.

failings’ had in fact contributed to Mr Nunes’ death. According to the Ombudsman (2024b:4) ‘Parc could not offer the clinical care and observation required to meet Mr Nunes’ complex healthcare needs safely’. Ultimately, Mr Nunes’ death could have been prevented had he ‘received dental and diabetic healthcare of an acceptable standard’ at HMP Parc.

- 75.** In the most recent round of adult prison inspections in Wales, HMI Prisons found that 59 per cent of its previous recommendations on safety in Welsh prisons had been achieved in full, six per cent were partially achieved and a third (34 per cent) had not been achieved (see Figure 3.10).

Figure 3.10

HMI Prisons recommendations on prison safety achieved by Welsh prisons between 2023 and 2025

	Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	Total
Berwyn	0	1	1	2
Cardiff	5	0	1	6
Parc	0	0	4	4
Swansea	12	0	5	17
Usk/Prescoed	2	1	0	3
Total	19	2	11	32

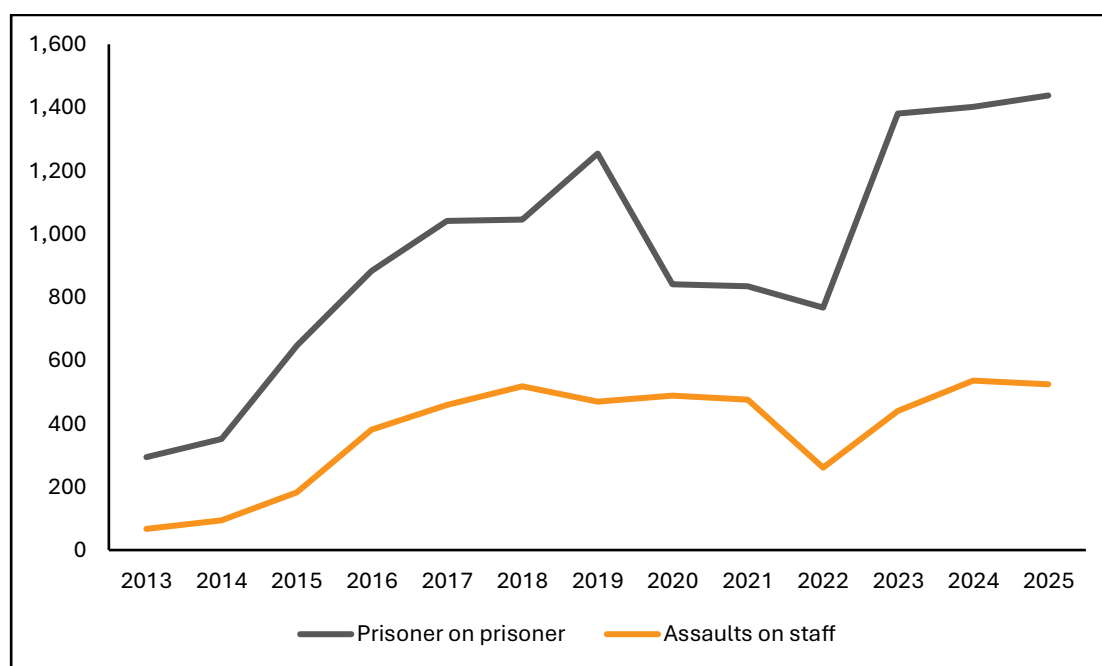
- 76.** The introduction of measures to combat the spread of Covid-19 in prisons contributed to a significant decline in the number of safety related incidents officially recorded across England and Wales. In Wales, there was a reduction in the number of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults (39 per cent), assaults on staff (46 per cent), and incidents of self-harm (24 per cent) between 2020 and 2022 (Jones, 2023).⁸³

⁸³ All data relating to ‘Safety Statistics in Custody’ at HMP Parc include incidents within the adult facility and the Young Persons’ Unit. The Ministry of Justice confirmed in 2018 that they do not have a mechanism for ‘separating incidents involving under-18s from those involving adults’ at the prison.

77. Following the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, and against a backdrop of continued growth in the prison population, the number of assault incidents in prisons has risen sharply in Wales, with a substantial increase recorded since 2022 (see Figure 3.11).

Figure 3.11

Prisoner-on-Prisoner assaults and Assaults on Staff and in Wales, 2013 to 2025



78. In 2025, there were further increases (3 per cent) in the number of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults in Wales.⁸⁴ Although the number of recorded incidents fell at HMP Cardiff (13 per cent) and Usk/Prescoed (13 per cent), there were increases at HMP Berwyn (9 per cent), HMP Swansea (3 per cent) and HMP Parc (1 per cent) last year (Ministry of Justice, 2026u).⁸⁵

⁸⁴ From 1,401 in 2024 to 1,438 in 2025.

⁸⁵ HMP Berwyn: From 599 in 2024 to 655 in 2025; HMP Cardiff: From 191 in 2024 to 166 in 2025; HMP Parc: From 543 in 2024 to 548 in 2025; HMP Swansea: From 60 in 2024 to 62 in 2025; HMP Usk/Prescoed: From 8 in 2024 to 7 in 2025.

79. Despite year-on-year increases since 2022, the number of assaults on prison staff in Wales fell (two per cent) last year.⁸⁶ While assaults on staff increased at HMP Cardiff (18 per cent) and HMP Parc (16 per cent) in 2025, the number of recorded incidents fell at HMP Swansea (37 per cent) and HMP Berwyn (16 per cent) (Ministry of Justice, 2026u).⁸⁷
80. Although the Ministry of Justice's *Safety in Custody* statistics include information on the number of assaults on prison staff, these data do not provide details of the number of assaults that have been reportedly committed by prison staff. Despite well documented accounts and testimonies of staff violence against prisoners (e.g. Davis, 2003; Scraton and McCulloch, 2009; Woolf, 1991), Scott (2020) has argued that there remains a 'crisis of visibility' when it comes to prison officer violence in England and Wales.
81. An inquiry into inhumane or degrading treatment in the prison estate by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (2020: 6) uncovered evidence of 'unjustified violence' by prison staff towards prisoners in England and Wales. The Committee (2020: 6) found that the problem is compounded by the fact that the necessary accountability procedures are 'underdeveloped' including reporting systems and oversight structures that can help to monitor and tackle prison officer violence.
82. Data obtained from the Ministry of Justice (2025k) under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 revealed that, in 2023/24, there were at least nine cases in which prison staff in Wales were subject to investigation or Conduct and Discipline proceedings in relation to allegations of 'Assault/Unnecessary use of force' against a prisoner. Six of these cases were recorded at HMP Berwyn.⁸⁸ Despite previously providing these data, the

⁸⁶ From 536 in 2024 to 524 in 2025.

⁸⁷ HMP Berwyn: From 264 in 2024 to 221 in 2025; HMP Cardiff: From 50 in 2024 to 59 in 2025; HMP Parc: From 195 in 2024 to 227 in 2025; HMP Swansea: From 27 in 2024 to 17 in 2025. There was no total available for HMP Usk/Prescoed in 2025.

All data relating to 'Safety Statistics in Custody' at HMP Parc include incidents within the adult facility and the Young Persons' Unit. The Ministry of Justice confirmed in 2018 that they do not have a mechanism for 'separating incidents involving under-18s from those involving adults' at the prison.

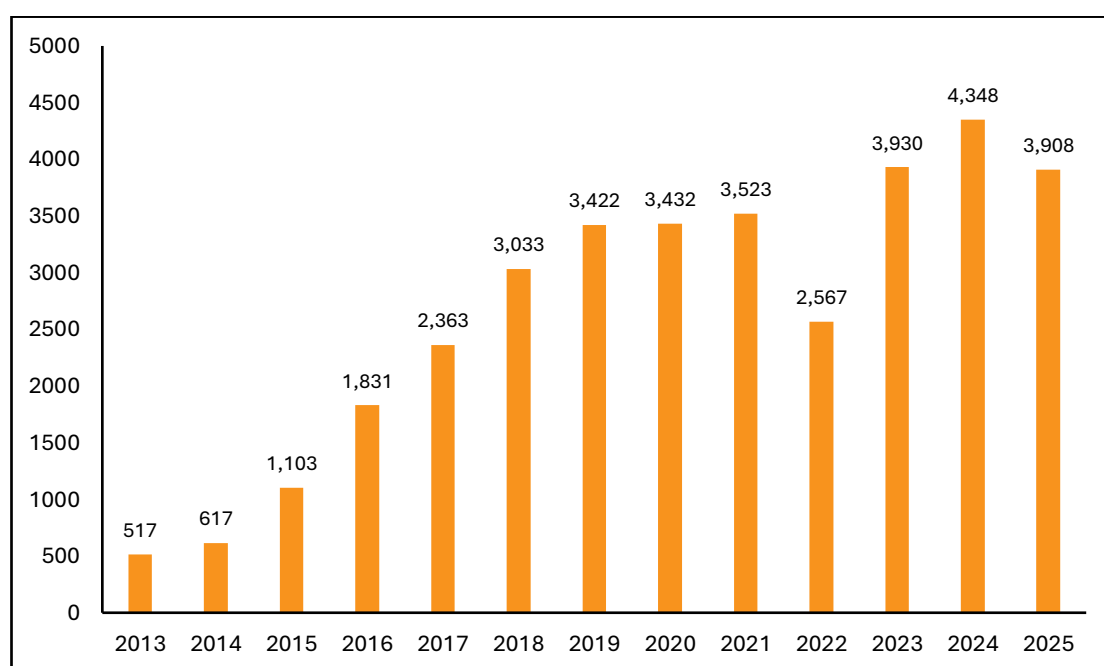
⁸⁸ A total for HMP Swansea was not provided as values of one or two are suppressed by the Ministry of Justice to prevent disclosure in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

Ministry of Justice refused a request for the equivalent 2024/25 figures in April 2026 on the grounds that the information was intended for future publication. The Ministry stated that the data would be released as part of its routine ‘Conduct and Discipline’ statistical publication, scheduled for November 2026.

83. In September 2025, five staff members at HMP Parc were sacked following an investigation into leaked messages that made fun of self-harm incidents and an assault committed by a member of staff. South Wales Police confirmed in September that criminal proceedings into the case had ended (Lewis, 2025).

Figure 3.12

Self-harm incidents in Wales, 2013 to 2025



84. Having reached their highest ever level in 2024 (Jones, 2025), the number of self-harm incidents recorded in Welsh prisons decreased by 10 per cent in 2025 (see Figure 3.12).

This at a time when self-harm incidents across England and Wales as a whole fell by eight per cent.⁸⁹

- 85.** Although the number of self-harm incidents increased at HMP Swansea (11 per cent) last year, incidents fell across all other prisons in Wales, including HMP Cardiff (61 per cent), HMP Usk/Prescoed (25 per cent), HMP Berwyn (seven per cent), and HMP Parc (one per cent) in 2025 (Ministry of Justice, 2026u).⁹⁰
- 86.** Of the 13,394 individuals who self-harmed in prison in England and Wales in 2025, 848 had a recorded origin address in Wales. At a time when the number of individuals who self-harmed in England and Wales decreased by four per cent, the number of Welsh prisoners (based on home address) who self-harmed declined by 17 per cent last year (McKinnell, 2026j).⁹¹

Figure 3.13

Prisoners being held in Care and Separation Units in Welsh prisons, 2025⁹²

	March	June	September	December
Berwyn	42	50	43	37
Cardiff	29	40	52	48
Parc	19	16	22	17
Swansea	55	41	47	71*
Total	152	147	164	173

⁸⁹ Wales: From 4,348 in 2024 to 3,908 in 2025.

England and Wales: From 79,060 in 2024 to 72,753 in 2025.

⁹⁰ HMP Berwyn: From 1,692 in 2024 to 1,578 in 2025; HMP Cardiff: From 545 in 2024 to 212 in 2025; HMP Parc: From 1,914 in 2024 to 1,903 in 2025; HMP Swansea: From 185 in 2024 to 206 in 2025; HMP Usk/Prescoed: From 12 in 2024 to 9 in 2025.

⁹¹ From 1,018 individuals in 2024 to 848 in 2025.

⁹² No information is held for HMP Usk/Prescoed as the prison does not have a Care and Separation Unit.

*According to the Ministry of Justice, the sharp rise recorded at HMP Swansea in December 2025 was due to an increase in positive body scan readings.

87. A thematic report in 2024 into the use of care and separation units (CSUs) in English prisons found that CSUs have become the ‘default setting’ for managing and caring for prisoners, often ‘with severe or challenging mental health needs’ (Independent Monitoring Board, 2024: 2). Although the Prison Rules 1999 state that prisoners will be placed in segregation because their behaviour may ‘put people in danger’, ‘cause problems for the rest of the prison’, or for their own safety, CSUs are a ‘frequently used tool’ for managing those with mental health problems, including prisoners at risk of self-harm (Independent Monitoring Board, 2024: 2).
88. Data on the number of prisoners held in Care and Separation Units in Welsh prisons was provided to the Wales Governance Centre in July 2026 following a request to the Ministry of Justice (2026v) under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. These data show that a total of 173 prisoners were held in Care and Separation Units in Wales across the month of December 2025. The majority of these were recorded at HMP Swansea (71), followed by HMP Cardiff (48), HMP Berwyn (37) and HMP Parc (17) (see Figure 3.13).⁹³

⁹³ According to the Ministry of Justice, the significant increase recorded at HMP Swansea in December 2025 can be attributed to ‘a rise in positive body scan readings’. There are no data relating to HMP Usk and Prescoed as they do not have a Care and Separation Unit in place.

4 THE COURTS AND SENTENCING⁹⁴

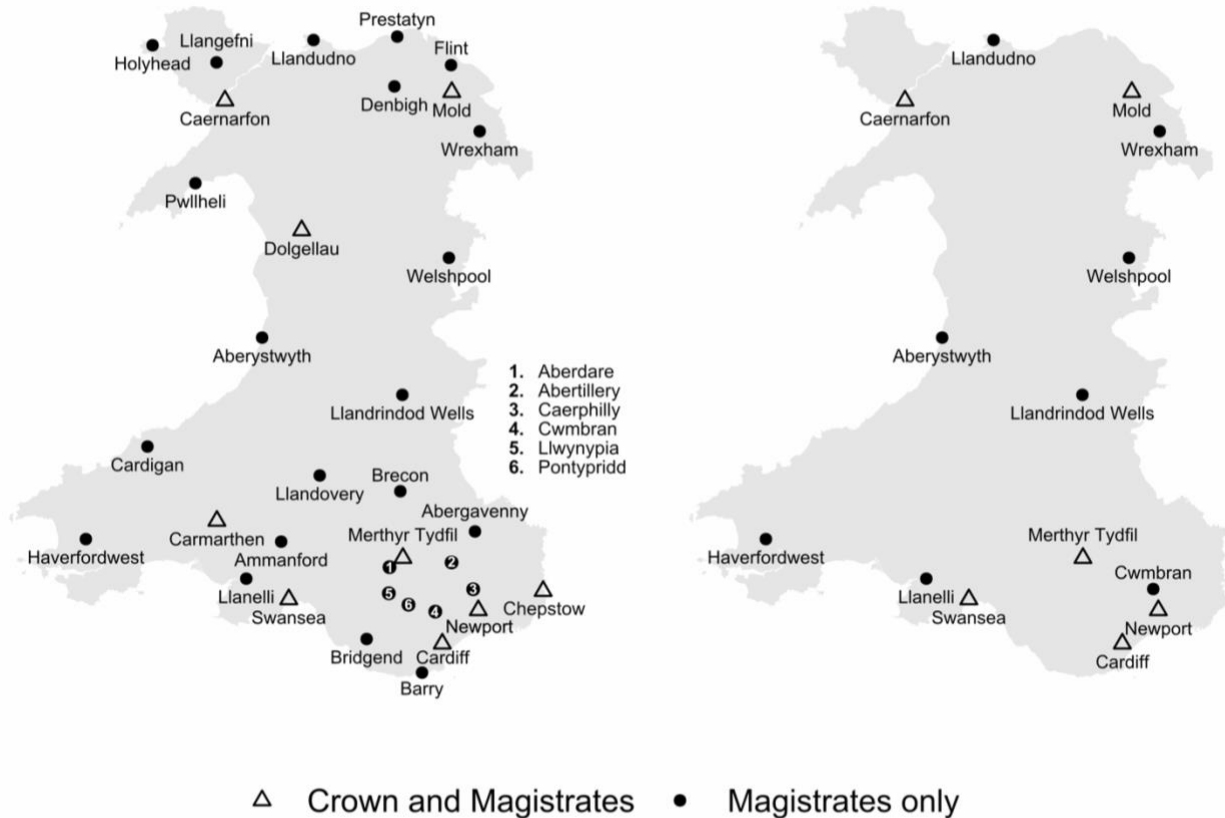
1. The Covid-19 restrictions put in place by the UK Government, particularly in relation to court proceedings, were responsible for major disruption to the ‘normal system flow of individuals’ through the criminal justice system in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2021a: 2). A significant consequence of the restrictions has been the creation of a major backlog in the number of open criminal cases at the Crown Court in England and Wales. According to the *Independent Review of the Criminal Courts*, led by Sir Brian Leveson, ‘broader systemic inefficiencies’, the growing complexity of criminal trials, and the increased caseloads following the pandemic have exacerbated the capacity problems facing the system (Independent Review of the Criminal Courts, 2025: 123). At the end of December 2025, there were over 80,000 outstanding criminal cases at the Crown Court in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2026w).
2. In Wales, the backlog has placed additional pressure upon a court system already under significant strain. Since 2010, 23 Crown and magistrates’ courts have closed across Wales, fuelling concerns around insufficient access to justice and the capacity of the Welsh court system to handle an increasing volume of cases (Jones and Wyn Jones, 2022; Newman and Dehaghani, 2023) (see Map 4.1).
3. Disaggregated criminal court data show that the backlog of cases in the magistrates’ court and Crown Court in Wales is growing. In 2025, the average number of outstanding cases in the magistrates’ court reached 16,062, an increase of 16 per cent in one year (Ministry of Justice, 2026x).⁹⁵

⁹⁴ The Ministry of Justice announced changes to the way in which it develops and processes criminal court data in 2024. Although the Ministry of Justice (2024e:5) claim that the changes ‘have a limited impact on overall existing trends across the time series’, there have been some alterations to the data included in previous Wales Governance Centre *Factfiles*. The data included in this report present the most up-to-date data available.

⁹⁵ From 13,808 in 2024 to 16,062 in 2025.

Map 4.1

Crown and magistrates' courts in Wales, 2010 (left) to 2023 (right) ⁹⁶



4. At the end of December 2025, a total of 16,881 cases were outstanding at the magistrates' court in Wales. This compared to 12,902 outstanding cases in December 2024.
5. During an evidence session of the Senedd's Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee in February 2026, the Lady Chief Justice of England and Wales, Baroness Carr, acknowledged the challenges facing the criminal courts. Despite these problems, however, Baroness Carr maintained that Wales was performing strongly in the Crown

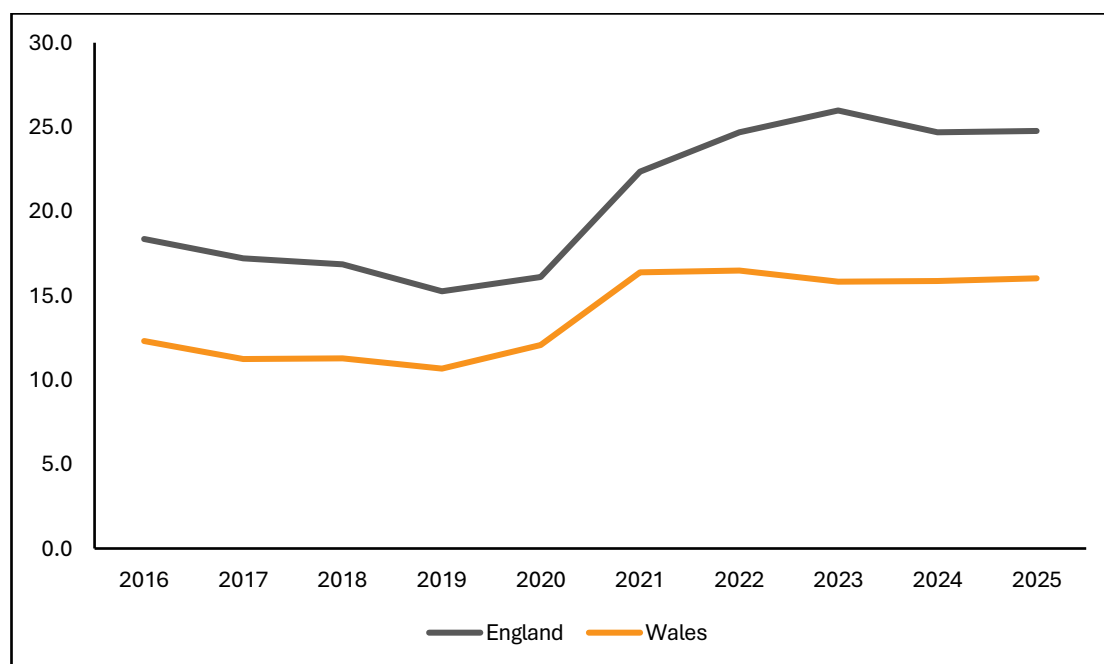
⁹⁶ Adapted from Jones and Wyn Jones (2022).

Court, with waiting times considerably shorter than those in England (Senedd's Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee, 2026).⁹⁷

6. Ministry of Justice (2026y) data show that England has consistently recorded longer average Crown Court waiting times than Wales in every year since 2016. Over this period, the average waiting time in England was 20.6 weeks, compared with 13.8 weeks in Wales (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1

Average Crown Court waiting times (in weeks) in England and Wales, 2016 to 2025



7. The backlog in cases at the Crown Court in Wales, however, remains severe. In 2025, the average number of outstanding cases increased by a further seven per cent.⁹⁸ While there were a total of 6,582 'receipts' last year, only 6,325 cases were 'disposed' of (Ministry of Justice, 2026w).

⁹⁷ The 'waiting time' is the duration between case receipt and first main hearing for all defendants dealt with at the Crown Court.

⁹⁸ From 2,681 in 2024 to 2,877 in 2025.

8. By December 2025, there were 2,892 outstanding cases in the Crown Court in Wales, a nine per cent increase compared with the previous year (2,665).
9. The backlog in cases across England and Wales has seen the number of prosecutions decline dramatically since the outbreak of Covid-19. In Wales, prosecutions fell by more than a quarter (27 per cent) in 2020, with prosecutions falling at a slightly higher rate (31 per cent) in England (Ministry of Justice, 2026h).⁹⁹
10. Despite a gradual recovery in prosecution and conviction levels following the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of prosecutions and convictions in Wales fell by four per cent and five per cent respectively in the last year.¹⁰⁰
11. Since 2013, data published by the Ministry of Justice show that 2017 remains the only year where the conviction rate in England (88.8 per cent) exceeded the level reached in Wales (88.2 per cent). On average, the proportion of cases resulting in a conviction has been consistently higher in Wales (88.5 per cent) than in England (87 per cent) over this period (see Figure 4.2) (Ministry of Justice, 2026h).¹⁰¹
12. In 2025, the conviction rate in Wales (89.9 per cent) was once again higher than the level recorded in England (87.9 per cent).

⁹⁹ Wales: From 95,655 prosecutions in 2019 to 69,737 in 2020.

England: From 1,254,793 in 2019 to 865,973 in 2020.

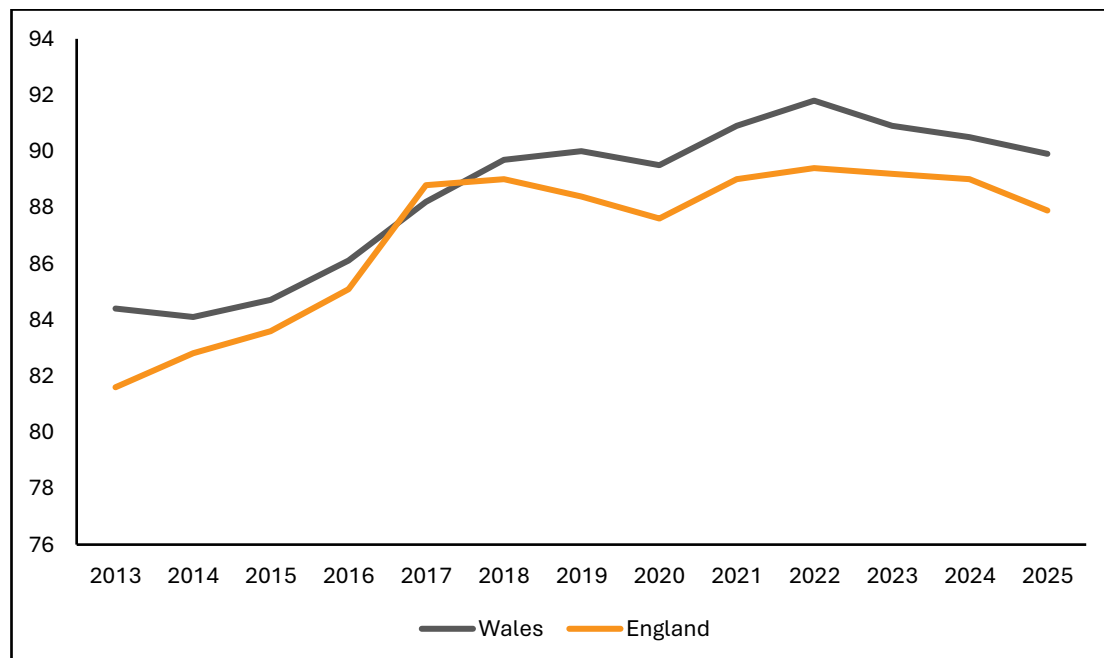
¹⁰⁰ From 93,829 prosecutions in 2024 to 89,761 in 2025.

From 84,916 convictions in 2024 to 80,729 in 2025.

¹⁰¹ The Ministry of Justice announced changes to the way in which it develops and processes criminal court data in 2024. Although the Ministry of Justice (2024e:5) claim that the changes 'have a limited impact on overall existing trends across the time series', there have been some alterations to the data included in previous Wales Governance Centre *Factfiles*. The data included in this report present the most up-to-date data available.

Figure 4.2

Conviction rates in Wales and England, 2013 to 2025



- 13.** The reduction in the flow of cases through the criminal courts has also impacted on the number of individuals being sentenced across Wales. Consistent with the fall in prosecutions and convictions, the number of those sentenced at courts in Wales fell by five per cent in 2025.¹⁰²
- 14.** In total, there were 4,087 fewer people sentenced at courts in Wales in 2025 than the previous 12 months.¹⁰³
- 15.** Despite a reduction in the number of those sentenced across Wales in 2025, the number of immediate custodial sentences handed out in Wales increased by 11 per cent last year.¹⁰⁴ Although the reasons for this apparent anomaly remain unclear and require further investigation, the trend may be partly explained by an increase in the

¹⁰² From 84,820 in 2024 to 80,733

In 2025, the number of people sentenced in Wales remained six per cent lower than the level recorded in 2019.

¹⁰³ From 84,820 in 2024 to 80,733 in 2025.

¹⁰⁴ From 5,382 in 2024 to 5,963 in 2025.

proportion of sentencing outcomes resulting in immediate custody. While 6.4 per cent of those sentenced in Wales received an immediate custodial sentence in 2024, this figure rose to 7.4 per cent in 2025.

16. In contrast to the reductions recorded in Wales, the number of prosecutions (three per cent), convictions (two per cent) and individuals sentenced (two per cent) at courts in England all increased in 2025.¹⁰⁵ This included a nine per cent rise in the number of immediate custodial sentences imposed last year (Ministry of Justice, 2026h).¹⁰⁶

IMPRISONMENT RATES

17. Changing sentencing practices and the increasing use of immediate custodial sentences have played a majorly significant role in driving up prisoner numbers in England and Wales since the 1990s (Roberts and Ashworth, 2016; Millie et al. 2003; Sentencing Council, 2018). However, while increases from the early 1990s have almost exclusively been attributed to the rise in the number of offenders sentenced to immediate custody (Ministry of Justice, 2016), and inflated sentence lengths (Howard League for Penal Reform, 2024), in recent years the growing remand and recall population have significantly added to the prison population (Independent Review of Prison Capacity, 2025).
18. In May 2024, The Institute for Criminal Policy Research published the fourteenth edition of the *World Prison Population List* (Fair and Walmsley, 2024). First produced by the Home Office in 1999, the most recent report provides a breakdown of imprisonment rates for 223 prison systems worldwide using a calculation based on the number of people held in prison in national borders. Since it was first published in 1999, England and Wales has recorded the highest (or joint highest) rate of imprisonment in Western Europe in eight of the fourteen *World Prison Population Lists*.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Prosecutions: From 1,235,347 in 2024 to 1,273,084 in 2025; Convictions: From 1,099,867 in 2024 to 1,119,053 in 2025; Sentenced: From 1,099,357 in 2024 to 1,119,702 in 2025.

¹⁰⁶ England: From 75,254 in 2024 to 82,102 in 2025.

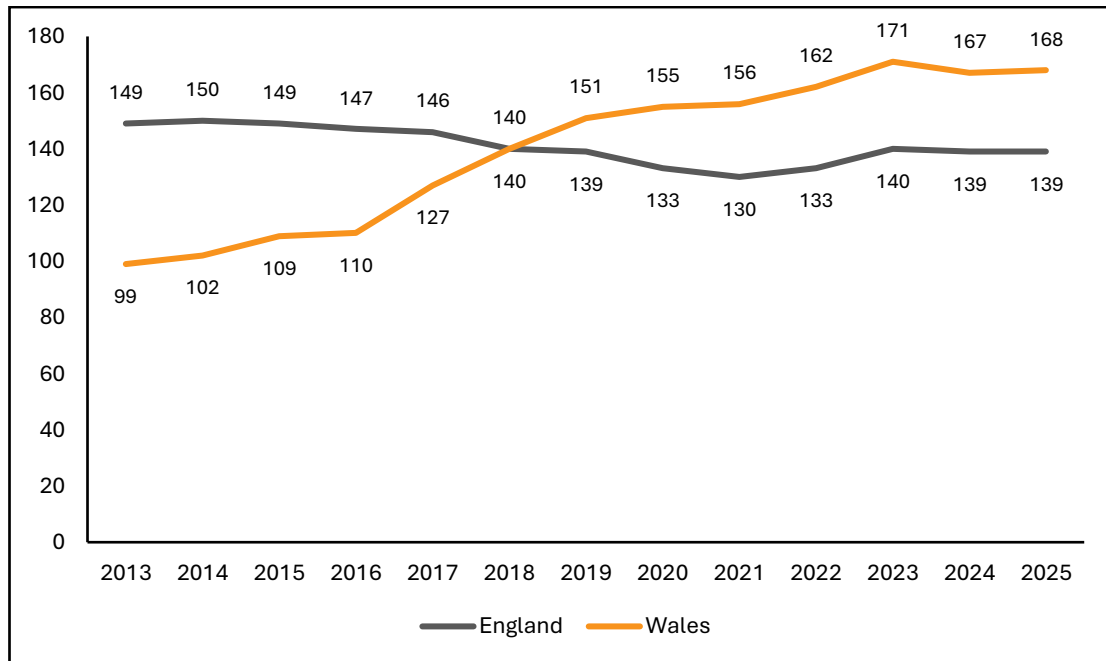
¹⁰⁷ England and Wales (145 per 100,000) had the joint highest prison population along with Scotland (145 per 100,000) in the most recent edition of the *World Prison Population List* (Fair and Walmsley, 2024).

19. On average, there were 87,296 people in prison on any given day in England and Wales in 2025 (Ministry of Justice, 2026b).
20. Taking all fourteen published *World Prison Population Lists* together, England and Wales has recorded the highest average prison population rate (140 per 100,000) in western Europe since 1999.
21. With a combined population of 62,009,993, the England and Wales imprisonment rate was 141 prisoners per 100,000 population in 2025 (Office for National Statistics, 2026).¹⁰⁸
22. There were 81,950 people held in 119 English prisons in 2025 (Ministry of Justice, 2026m). Based on the ‘in-country’ method used in the *World Prison Population List*, England’s rate of imprisonment was 139 per 100,000 people last year.
23. On average, 5,347 people were held in Welsh prisons in 2025 (Ministry of Justice, 2026m). Based upon the number of prisoners held in the Welsh prison estate, Wales had an ‘in-country’ imprisonment rate of 168 prisoners per 100,000 in 2025.
24. Wales has now recorded a higher ‘in-country’ imprisonment rate than England every year since 2019 (see Figure 4.3).

¹⁰⁸ England: 58,834,812; Wales: 3,175,181.
England and Wales prison population: 87,296.

Figure 4.3

Prison population rates per 100,000 in England and Wales using ‘in-country’ method, 2013 to 2025



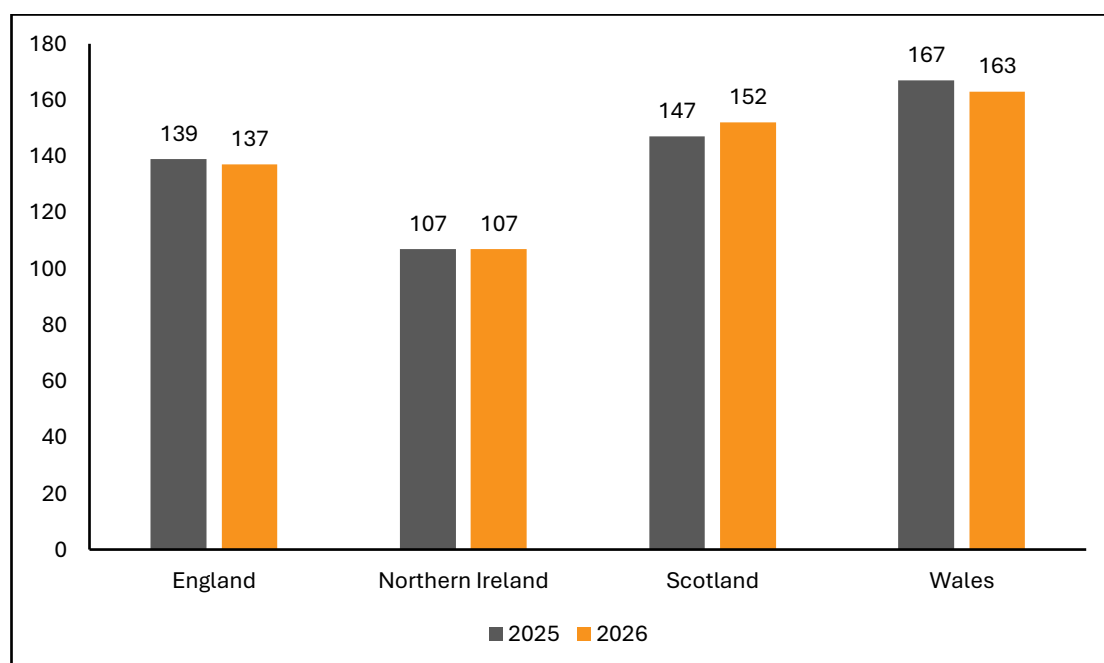
- 25.** In 2021, the then UK Conservative Government’s *Prisons Strategy* White Paper re-outlined the government’s long-standing commitment to expanding prison capacity in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2021b). Through its *Four New Prisons Programme*, the Ministry of Justice (2022b: 2) planned to create ‘at least’ 6,240 additional prison places across four sites in England (Jones et al., 2022). Since being elected in July 2024, the UK Labour government has reiterated its commitment to prison expansion, including the construction of 14,000 prison places by 2031 (Ministry of Justice, 2024f). In August 2026, the newly appointed Prime Minister, Andy Burnham (2026), further underlined this commitment, pledging to deliver the ‘fastest prison building programme since the Victorian era’ in England and Wales.
- 26.** The decision to expand the size of HMP Parc by a further 345 places will see Wales’ ‘in country’ imprisonment rate increase further. Based on an average of the 2025 prison data, Wales’ ‘in-country’ imprisonment rate will eventually rise to 179 per 100,000 of

the population once HMP Parc is expanded. This number not only exceeds the rate currently recorded anywhere else in western Europe, but will surpass the average for the whole of Europe (177 per 100,000) included in the most recent *World Prison Population List* (Fair and Walmsley, 2024).

27. As debates over prison capacity continue to intensify across England and Wales against the backdrop of the government’s early prisoner release scheme, a snapshot of 2026 data show that the ‘in country’ imprisonment rate in Wales remains significantly higher than the level recorded in England. Drawing upon prison population data for June 2026, the ‘in-country’ rate of imprisonment in Wales was 163 per 100,000, compared to a rate of 137 per 100,000 in England (see Figure 4.4) (Ministry of Justice, 2026l).¹⁰⁹

Figure 4.4

Prison population rates per 100,000 in the United Kingdom using ‘in-country’ method, June 2025 and June 2026¹¹⁰



¹⁰⁹ England: Population – 58,834,812; Prisoner population – 80,593.

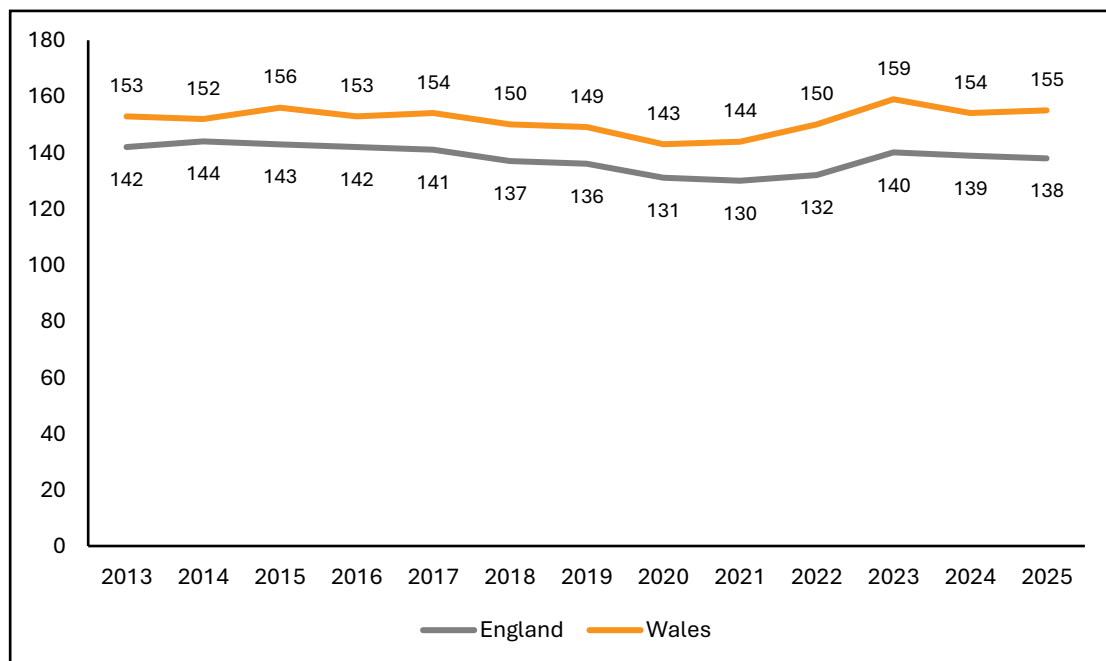
Wales: Population – 3,175,181; Prisoner population – 5,168.

¹¹⁰ Prison population (June 2025): England: 82,034; Northern Ireland: 2,071; Scotland: 8,145; Wales: 5,300.
Prison population (June 2026): England: 80,593; Northern Ireland: 2,071; Scotland: 8,421; Wales: 5,168.

28. While Scotland recorded the joint highest imprisonment rate (140 per 100,000) in western Europe in the *World Prison Population List* published in May 2024 (Fair and Walmsley, 2024), the imprisonment rate in Wales continues to exceed the level recorded in any other country in western Europe.
29. Although prisoner numbers are rising across all parts of the United Kingdom (UK), data from June 2026 show that Wales comfortably boasts the highest UK imprisonment rate (163 per 100,000), followed by Scotland (152), England (137), and Northern Ireland (107) (National Records of Scotland, 2026; Northern Ireland Department of Justice, 2026; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2026; Scottish Prison Service, 2026).¹¹¹

Figure 4.5

Prison population rates per 100,000 in England and Wales using ‘home address’, 2013 to 2025



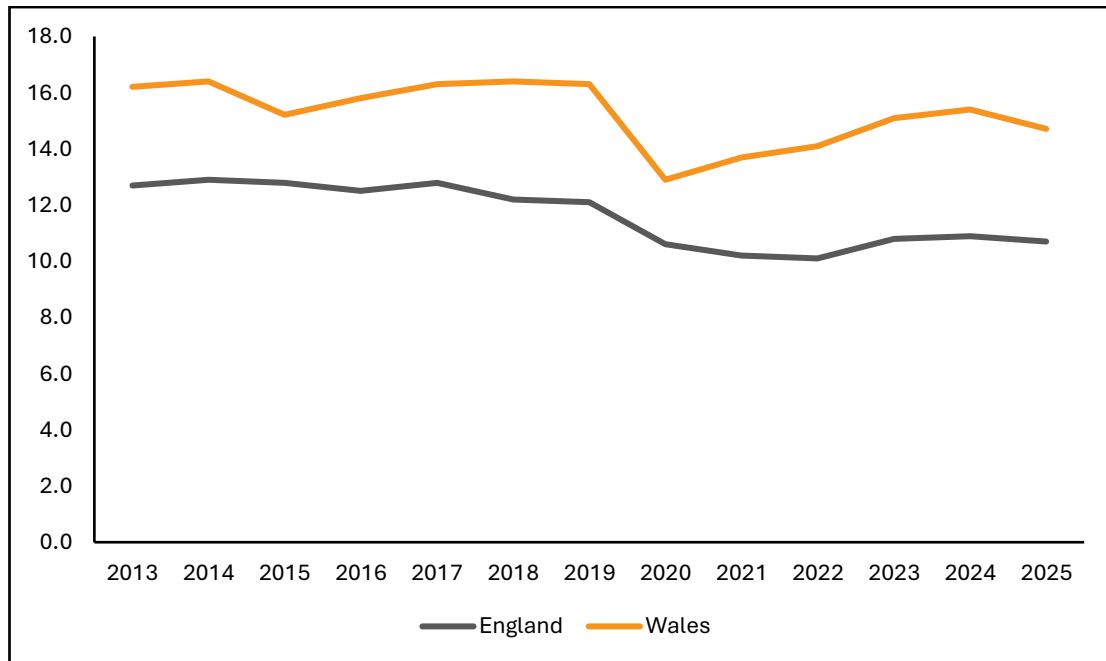
¹¹¹ Scotland: Population – 5,545,500; Prisoner population – 8,421.
Northern Ireland: Population – 1,928,400; Prisoner population – 2,071.

- 30.** The Wales Governance Centre's *Sentencing and Immediate Custody in Wales* (2019) report was the first to use disaggregated data to calculate imprisonment rates in England and Wales based on prisoners' home address. According to Ministry of Justice data, a total of 86,354 people with a home address in either England or Wales were in prison in 2025 (Ministry of Justice, 2026c).
- 31.** 'Home address' data show that Wales has recorded a higher rate of imprisonment than England in every year since 2013 (see Figure 4.5).
- 32.** In 2025, there were 155 Welsh prisoners per 100,000 of the Welsh population. This compared to a rate of 138 English prisoners per 100,000 of the population of England.¹¹²
- 33.** To bring the Welsh imprisonment rate into line with that of England in 2025, the population of Wales would need to increase by approximately 380,000. Alternatively, the English prisoner population would need to rise by around 10,000 prisoners (12 per cent) to produce an imprisonment rate equivalent to that recorded in Wales last year.
- 34.** In 2025, one in every 646 people from Wales was in prison, compared with one in every 722 people from England.

¹¹² England: Population – 58,834,812; English prisoners (based on home address): 81,437.
Wales: Population – 3,175,181; Welsh prisoners (based on home address): 4,917.

Figure 4.6

The female imprisonment rate (per 100,000 women) in England and Wales, 2013 to 2025¹¹³

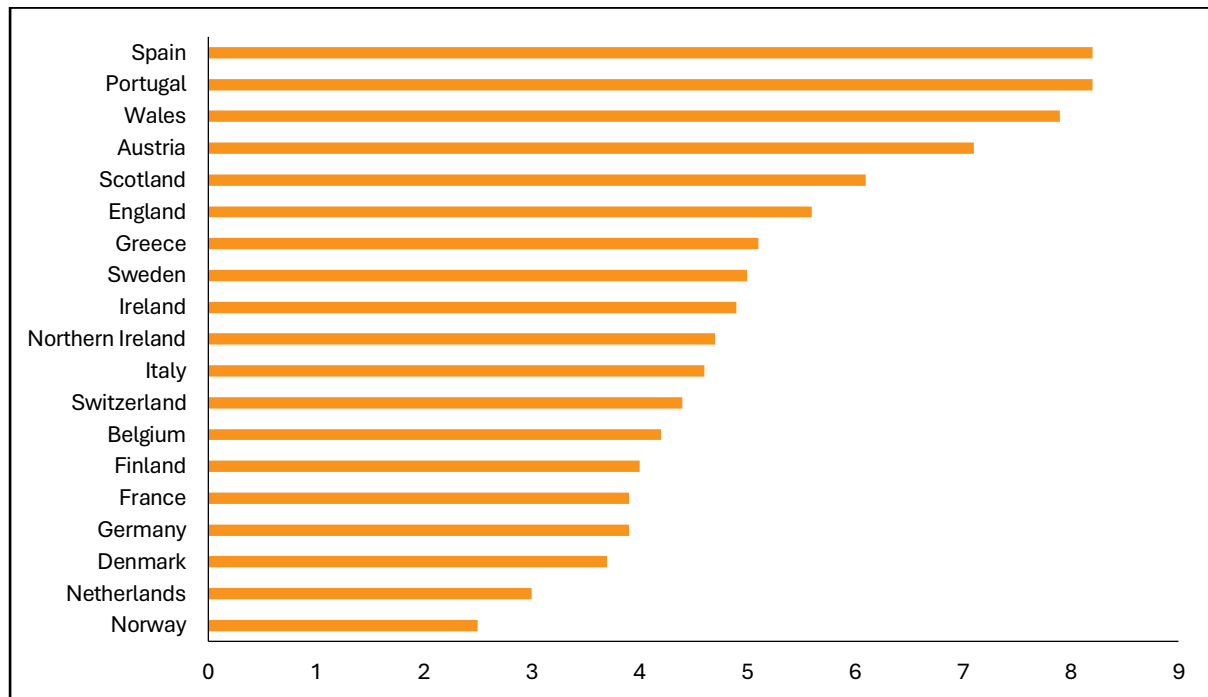


- 35.** *The Welsh Criminal Justice System: On the Jagged Edge* uncovered for the very first time that Wales has consistently recorded a higher female prison population rate (per 100,000 women) than England (see Figure 4.6) (Jones and Wyn Jones, 2022).
- 36.** When measured as a rate per 100,000 of the total population (all sexes), the Welsh female imprisonment rate in 2024 (7.9 per 100,000) would have ranked third highest in western Europe (Fair and Walmsley, 2025). Only the rates recorded in Spain (8.2 per 100,000) and Portugal (8.2 per 100,000) exceeded the female imprisonment rate in Wales (7.9 per 100,000) in 2024 (see Figure 4.7).

¹¹³ The population data used here are from multiple years (Office for National Statistics, 2026).

Figure 4.7

The female imprisonment rate (per 100,000) in western Europe, 2024



37. Despite sparking some initial interest and concern (House of Commons Westminster Hall Debate, 22 January 2020; Morris, 2019; Rees, 2019), little has been done to understand or explain Wales' high imprisonment rate (Jones and Wyn Jones, 2022). Despite several opportunities to do so, UK and Welsh Government officials have repeatedly failed to account for the fact that Wales has consistently recorded a higher rate of imprisonment than England, not to mention any other country in western Europe. When asked by the Senedd's Equality and Social Justice Committee (2025) for his 'reaction' to Wales's table topping imprisonment rate in July 2025, Lord Timpson failed to offer any kind of explanation for the rate consistently recorded in Wales. Similarly, when questioned by the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee later that year about why Wales has a higher imprisonment rate than England, Lord Timpson simply conceded: 'I do not know'.

38. One suggested explanation for the high rate of imprisonment in Wales is that the use of community sentences has declined in recent years (National Assembly for Wales Debate, 22 January 2019). Between 2010 and 2025, there has been a 58 per cent decrease in the number of community sentences handed out at courts in Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2026h).¹¹⁴ Although the number of community sentences handed out in Wales increased in 2025, the level remains below the number recorded prior to the outbreak of Covid-19.¹¹⁵
39. According to HM Inspectorate of Probation (2019: 5), this decline has reflected the ‘lack of judicial confidence’ that magistrates and judges have had in the probation service since the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 was introduced almost a decade ago. These changes, however, fail to explain why the rate in Wales is higher than it is in England, where identical changes were made to probation services, and further underlines the need for research into this urgent and important problem.
40. In response to the continuing failure by those formally responsible for justice in Wales to account for Wales’s consistently high imprisonment rate, the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee (2026: 15) recommended in June 2026 that the Ministry of Justice and the Welsh Government co-commission an ‘academic review’ to understand ‘what is driving the relatively high imprisonment rate in Wales’. The Committee asked that the findings of this review are shared with members in twelve months’ time to support its continuing scrutiny of prisons and penal policy in Wales.
41. Despite the UK Government’s decision to ‘partially accept’ the House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee’s recommendation, the Ministry of Justice’s (2026k: 5) response emphasised the need to use the research to ‘better understand what drives offending’ in Wales. The government’s emphasis on establishing a link between ‘offending’ and Wales’ imprisonment rate, however, risks overlooking the broader social, political and criminal justice factors that shape entry into the criminal justice system. This is a point well-established in academic research and further underlined by

¹¹⁴ From 11,518 in 2010 to 4,852 in 2025.

¹¹⁵ There were 5,621 community sentences handed out in 2019 compared with 4,852 in 2025.

the fact that Wales consistently records lower levels of crime than England (Houchin, 2005; Irish Penal Reform Trust, 2026; Jones and Wyn Jones, 2022; Reiman and Leighton, 2010). Furthermore, while the Ministry sought to highlight the role that the construction of HMP Berwyn in north Wales has played in increasing the number of prisoners held in Wales, its emphasis on the ‘in-country’ imprisonment rate rather than the ‘home address’ measure risks deflecting further attention away from the fundamental question: why are a greater proportion of people *from* Wales in prison than in any other country in western Europe?

CONCLUSION

Following the outcome of May's Senedd election and the appointment of a new UK Prime Minister in July, it is perhaps tempting to frame the narrative over the last year as one defined by significant change. A closer examination of the data on prisons, punishment and sentencing in Wales, however, reveals that the past 12 months have been characterised more by continuity than transformation. Despite some notable shifts, including reductions in the levels of self-harm and deaths in prison custody in Wales, many of the troubling trends highlighted in previous *Factfiles* have persisted, with several deteriorating further. The number of Welsh prisoners held on remand and recalled to custody, for instance, has continued to rise; the number of women receiving short-term custodial sentences has increased; the courts backlog has grown further; and Wales's imprisonment rate continues to exceed that of any other country in western Europe.

For the newly elected Welsh Government, much of the data presented throughout this report raise important questions about its responsibilities over key areas of social policy. On housing and homelessness, for example, the latest figures show that the number of prison leavers recorded as rough sleeping on the day of their release increased for a fourth consecutive year in 2025/26. High numbers of deaths among prison leavers supervised in the community, particularly those involving drug poisoning, raise serious doubts over whether the Welsh Government's initiatives to address substance use and support individuals during the transition from custody to the community are fit for purpose. The persistence of racial disparities across multiple stages of the criminal justice system likewise calls into question the effectiveness of the Welsh Government's (2024) efforts to reduce inequality and promote anti-racism in Wales. More fundamentally, however, these challenges once again raise broader questions about whether the Welsh Government has the powers and policy levers necessary to address the underlying causes of many of the problems outlined here.

The concerns raised in this latest *Factfile* also add to wider calls made over the last year to address many of the problems identified, and often first highlighted, in this *Factfile* series. The need for wider and improved access to Welsh justice data, for example, was reiterated by the

House of Commons Welsh Affairs Committee (2026b) in June and is further underlined by the findings presented here. Indeed, although *some* key sources of information are now publicly available through the *Welsh Justice Data: Annual Release*, there has been a marked deterioration in the way requests for other sources of information are handled by the Ministry of Justice over the past year. In many cases, requests for data previously obtained through the Freedom of Information Act 2000 have simply gone unanswered, with no acknowledgement or substantive response received (see Appendix 1). This ongoing problem only reinforces the need for continued discussions between the Ministry of Justice, Welsh Government and Wales Governance Centre on improving access to justice data in Wales. There is also an urgent need to understand the factors underpinning Wales's exceptionally high imprisonment rate. While the UK Government's Minister of State for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending, Lord Timpson, was unable to account for this trend, the Welsh Affairs Committee's (2026b:15) recommendation that an 'academic review' be commissioned to investigate the issue further is one that both the Ministry of Justice and Welsh Government ought to take forward without delay.

Beyond these continuing challenges and frustrations, there remains some cause for optimism. The Welsh Government's decision to convene a roundtable on the Women's Justice Blueprint in response to concerns raised in last year's *Factfile* demonstrates a willingness to engage with the available data and pursue evidence-led approaches. The publication of the second *Welsh Justice Data: Annual Release* once again provides an important foundation for ongoing research and analysis on Welsh criminal justice. Meanwhile, the expansion of the Senedd to 96 Members, alongside the recent appointment of a Senior Research Officer for Justice Policy in the Senedd, is likely to further strengthen the capacity for serious, sustained and meaningful scrutiny of justice issues in Wales throughout the Seventh Senedd.

As we approach six months into the tenure of the new Welsh Government, it is hoped that the evidence presented throughout this report can help inform the development of bold, ambitious and evidence led policies over the coming year and beyond. While debates about the future constitutional direction of justice in Wales are both necessary and important, the analysis provided here also underlines that meaningful efforts to deliver change *must* begin with a clear understanding of how the system currently operates. Only by confronting the realities

highlighted throughout this report can politicians and policymakers hope to overcome the many challenges facing communities across Wales.

APPENDIX 1

Freedom of Information requests submitted to the Ministry of Justice in preparation for this report that had not received a response at the time of writing

Question or Topic	Date Submitted	Response
A breakdown of those supervised by probation services in Wales and England by offence group and ethnicity.	22 June 2026	No response
The number of those on post-release licence in Wales broken down by ethnic group.	22 June 2026	No response
Welsh people (based on home address) in prison who are mothers/fathers of children under the age of 18.	7 August 2026	No response
The number of Welsh women pregnant while in prison.	7 August 2026	No response
Welsh women recalled to prison in Wales for a breach of license, not related to a further offence.	22 June 2026	No response
The proportion of custodial sentences are served by Welsh prisoners (based on home address) broken down by ethnicity.	22 June 2026	No response
The number of Welsh prisoners (based on home address) released broken down by the prison they were released from.	22 June 2026	No response
The number of prisoners released from Welsh prisons on a Friday in 2024 and 2025.	10 August 2026	No response

Those released on Home Detention Curfew from Welsh prisons and the number of Welsh prisoners (based on home address) released on Home Detention Curfew in 2025.	28 August 2026	Acknowledgement email on 28 August 2026.
		No response

The number of those released from Welsh prisons under SDS40 in the 12 months to December 2025 who were released with no fixed address to return to.	13 August 2026	Acknowledgement email on 13 August 2026.
		No response

The number of Welsh-speaking prisoners in prisons in England and Wales.	22 June 2026	No response
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The number of Welsh-speaking prison staff are there in prisons in Wales.	22 June 2026	No response
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Welsh prisoners (based on home address) on remand by prison and their origin local authority.	7 August 2026	No response
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Welsh prisoners (based on home address) broken down by their security category.	6 August 2026	No response
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The number of Welsh prisoners (based on home address) who self-harmed in prison.	22 June 2026	Acknowledgement email on 22 June 2026.
		No response

The number of Welsh prisoners (based on home address) whose deaths were recorded as self-inflicted.	22 June 2026	Acknowledgement email on 22 June 2026.
		No response

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