# Prison Population Projections 2022 to 2027, England and Wales

This bulletin presents prison population projections for England and Wales from November 2022 to March 2027. It is produced to aid policy development, capacity planning and resource allocation within the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS).

## Main points

**Long-term prison population is expected to increase particularly because of increases in police and prosecutorial demand**

The prison population is projected to increase, with a central estimate of 94,400 by March 2025 and a range of 93,100 to 106,300 by March 2027. This projected long-term increase is predicated on several factors, including increasing police officer numbers (which could increase charge volumes and in turn prison demand), and changes in sentencing policy to keep the most serious offenders in prison for longer.

**There is considerable uncertainty around the presented central projection**

Projections account for best available evidence, but there is considerable uncertainty around how the courts will recover from COVID-19 backlogs, the impact of the additional police officers, and the future crime mix. Any differences in assumptions for other factors such as sentencing behaviours and future changes in policy will all result in variation from these projections.

**The projected future population is lower than that in the 2021 published projection**

The total prison population for March 2025 is now (in the central scenario) estimated to be about 1,900 lower than in the 2021 publication. This is because the latest projection reflects the most recent assumptions around demand in the Criminal Justice System and how the Crown Court might continue to work through outstanding cases. These assumptions around future behaviour of the system have been informed by the latest available operational data and agreed between stakeholders at the Home Office and MoJ.

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

The prison population of adult males, adult females, children (15- to 17-year-olds) and offenders aged 50 years and over are all expected to increase over the projection period due to the same underlying factors.

# Introduction

This bulletin presents prison population projections for England and Wales from November 2022 to March 2027. It is produced to aid policy development, capacity planning and resource allocation within the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS). The latest published useable operational capacity[1] (17th February 2023) is 84,844[2].

The projections are produced using a model of flows of offenders into and out of prison which estimates the resulting prison population each month. A key driver for future prison population (and a major source of uncertainty for these projections) is the volume and composition of cases entering the criminal courts, i.e. upstream demand. To illustrate the impact of these upstream demand assumptions, three plausible scenarios have been agreed between the MoJ, the Home Office and the Crown Prosecution Service, and this publication presents the prison population projection as a range based on these scenarios. The projected prison population range presented here only estimates the impact of differing upstream demand assumptions and therefore does not represent the full range of uncertainty surrounding the projections. The low and high scenarios are shown as a range from November 2022 to March 2027 while the central scenario is presented only up to March 2025 due to increased uncertainty beyond this point. This presentational approach differs from the previous publication which had a single scenario for the whole projection period.

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns restricted the courts' ability to process cases through 2020 and 2021, and the mix of cases brought to criminal courts changed during this time. The Criminal Bar Association strike action between April and October 2022 also affected court proceedings, and in turn the prison population. Short to medium-term prison demand estimates are based on assumptions on how the courts will continue to recover from these system shocks. Since there is considerable uncertainty around these assumptions, the prison population will likely differ from what has been projected – there is a discussion regarding uncertainty in Section 2.

The projections include the anticipated impact of the Government's aim to increase police officer numbers to 148,433 by March 2023[3]. They also incorporate the estimated impacts of agreed sentencing policies, including the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act[4], and the Release of Prisoners Order 2020[5] which include provisions to increase custody time for violent and sexual offenders sentenced to a standard determinate sentence of 4 to 7 years and over 7 years, respectively.

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

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

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

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prison-population-statistics

[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-officer-uplift-quarterly-update-to-december-2022

[4] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/32/contents/enacted

[5] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/158/made

# 1. Total prison population projection and custody type breakdown

**The prison population in England and Wales was 83,687[6] as of Friday 17th February 2023. It is projected to increase steadily to reach 94,400 prisoners by March 2025 and between 93,100 and 106,300 by March 2027.**

In the first few years of the projection period, the projected rise in the prison population is primarily due to an increase in receptions of determinate sentenced offenders. This is because courts are assumed to dispose of more cases than they receive in order to clear the additional trial backlog that arose during COVID-19 restrictions and the Criminal Bar Association strike action.

The total prison population is projected to continue to increase over the full projection period. This is partly driven by rising police officer numbers which are expected to increase charge volumes and therefore increase the future prison population.

There are several sources of uncertainty for long-term prison population, particularly around future levels of demand entering the Criminal Justice System (CJS). This publication presents three prison population projections to assess the impact of differing potential upstream demand scenarios which have been agreed between the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the Home Office and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). Due to uncertainty in these projections, the low and high scenarios are presented as a range from November 2022 to March 2027 and the central estimate is shown up to March 2025. Presenting the long-term range in this way reflects the level of uncertainty due to a number of factors, including how the CJS will continue to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Criminal Bar Association strike action, as well as the unknown future trends in crime types and volumes of charges.

These projections reflect three plausible scenarios for future police and prosecutorial activity, and the likely impacts on the CJS. All three scenarios take account of expected increases in police officer numbers delivered via Home Office's police uplift programme and project higher long-term prison demand, but vary factors such as charges per police officer, the crime mix entering the courts, and average custodial sentence lengths (ACSLs):

- **High upstream demand** – police and CPS crime mix and charges per officer start to return to pre-COVID (2019) levels, resulting in a large increase in the volume of cases coming into court. Additionally, ACSLs return to 2019 levels.

- **Low upstream demand** – police and CPS crime mix and charges per officer stay at lower levels observed in 2021 and do not return to pre-COVID behaviour. Similarly, ACSLs reflect 2021 levels.

- **Central upstream demand** – crime mix remains as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. While there are some increases in charges per officer, it remains below pre-pandemic levels. Additionally, ACSLs reflect levels observed from 2019 to 2021.

These scenarios are not intended to reflect the full range of demand risk for the CJS, but rather to estimate the plausible range of police and prosecutorial activity – a large driver of future prison demand over the mid to long-term. The projected prison population range presented in this publication therefore does not represent the highest and lowest possible

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[6] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prison-population-statistics

prison demand or the full range of uncertainty surrounding the projections. There are several additional sources of uncertainty, detailed in Section 2.

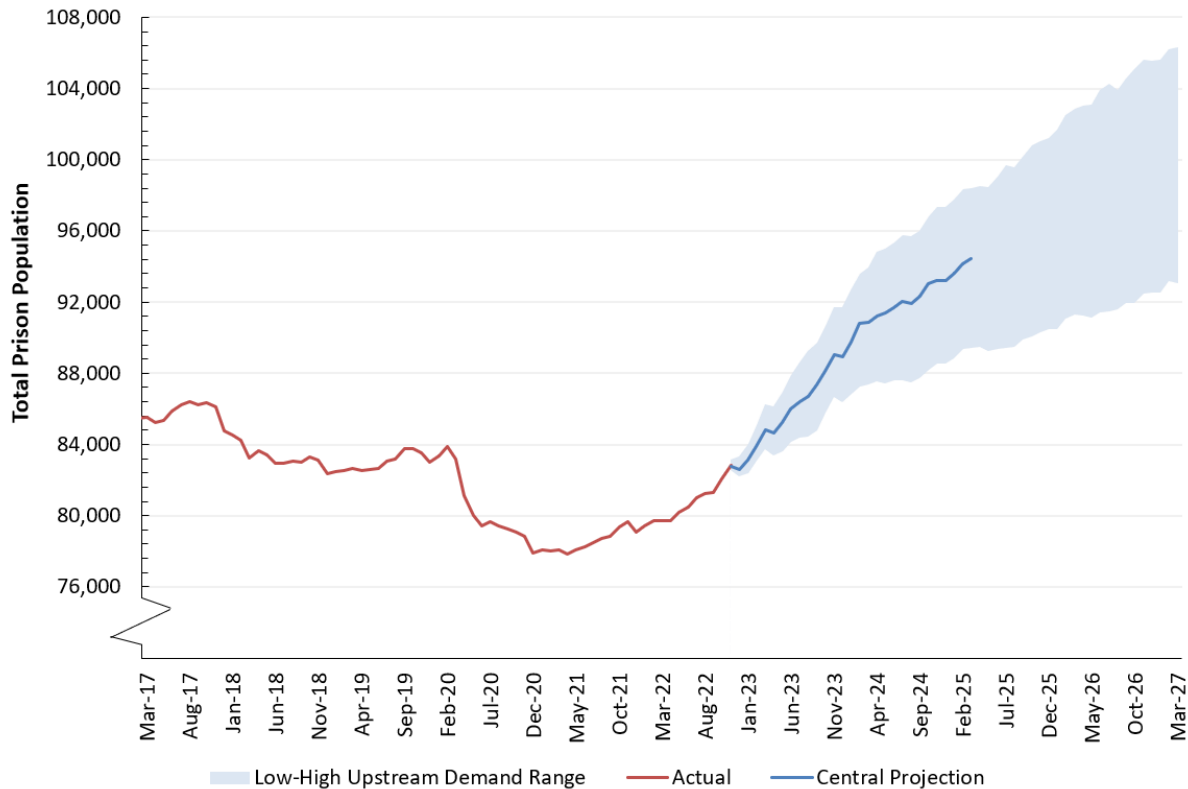**Figure 1.1: Total prison population projection, November 2022 to March 2027[7] (Source: Table A4).**



Figure 1.1 presents the actual prison population between March 2017 and November 2022, with a central population projection from November 2022 to March 2025, and low and high population projections from November 2022 to March 2027.

Table 1.1 presents the prison population projection at a sub-population level, reported at an end of November position.

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

**Table 1.1: Total prison population by custody type[8] at end November 2022[9] and projections for November 2023 to November 2026[10]**

|  | Total | Remand | Determinate | Indeterminate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| November 2022 | **82,905** | 14,733 | 48,068 | 8,529 |
| November 2023 | **89,100** | 13,100 | 55,200 | 8,300 |
| November 2024 | **93,200** | 12,500 | 59,200 | 8,200 |
| November 2025 | **90,300 - 101,100** | 9,700 - 12,500 | 58,900 - 66,200 | 8,100 - 8,100 |
| November 2026 | **92,500 - 105,600** | 9,700 - 12,700 | 60,700 - 70,000 | 8,000 - 8,100 |

|  | Recall | Non-Criminal | Fine Defaulters |
|---|---|---|---|
| November 2022 | 10,779 | 768 | 28 |
| November 2023 | 11,700 | 800 | 50 |
| November 2024 | 12,500 | 800 | 50 |
| November 2025 | 12,800 - 13,500 | 800 | 50 |
| November 2026 | 13,200 - 14,100 | 800 | 50 |

All numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred, numbers below a hundred have been rounded to the nearest 50. Components may not sum due to rounding.

The determinate population is forecast to grow over the whole projection period and the increase in this category is the main driver for the projected rise in the total population since the determinate sub-population is the single largest group. The projected growth in the determinate population is driven by an increase in the number of offenders entering prison with a determinate sentence, coupled with changes in sentencing policy which will keep the most serious offenders in prison for longer. In the short-term, determinate prison receptions are expected to increase due to criminal courts working to reduce the backlog of outstanding cases; additional police officers are assumed to cause a long-term increase in determinate prison receptions as a result of increased charge volumes.

The number of people remanded in custody is projected to decrease over the projection period. The remand population was at a historic high of 14,733 at the end of November 2022, due to the high volume of outstanding cases awaiting trial in the Crown Court. The backlog started to increase through 2020 and 2021 because the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns restricted the courts' ability to process cases – published data[11] shows the backlog of cases in the Crown Court increased over the pandemic, reaching 60,900 cases in June 2021. This outstanding caseload fell to 58,200 at the end of March 2022 but increased again from April, primarily due to the Criminal Bar Association strike action. The backlog rose to 62,800 at the end of September 2022, however, more recent management information published by His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS)[12] suggest this trend had started to reverse following the end of Criminal Bar

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[8] Non-criminal prisoners are held for civil offences or under the immigration act. A civil non-criminal prisoner is someone held in prison because of a non-criminal matter, for example, non-payment of council tax or contempt of court. The non-criminal population also includes immigration detainees that have finished serving their sentence and are being kept in prison by immigration authorities.
[9] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1131446/Population_31Dec2022.ods
[10] The table shows our central projection for prison population and the range estimated from reasonable low and high upstream demand scenarios. This shaded area therefore estimates the impact of plausible future trends in crime types and levels of police and prosecutorial activity, however this does not reflect the full range of demand risk. The uncertainty around these projections is large and increases over time. See Section 2 for more information about the sources of uncertainty.
[11] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-court-statistics-quarterly-july-to-september-2022
[12] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/hmcts-management-information-november-2022

Association strike action in October. The volume of outstanding cases is expected to continue to fall over the projection period, and therefore the size of the remand population is also projected to decrease as the time taken for courts to process cases improves.

The indeterminate population consists of offenders who serve Imprisonment for Public Protection[13] (IPP) and life sentences. The sub-population is forecast to continue to fall over the projection period driven by the gradual decline of IPP offenders. Offenders can no longer receive an IPP sentence due to its abolition in 2012, with current IPP offenders being released by the Parole Board. Any such released offenders subsequently recalled will be counted in the recall projection.

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

The non-criminal[15] population includes prisoners held for civil offences and immigration detainees held in prisons. This sub-population is assumed to remain constant over the projection period. The number of fine defaulters in custody is also assumed to stay at current levels.

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

- The impacts of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022[16], which includes provisions for changing the automatic release point for violent and sexual offenders sentenced to a standard determinate sentence of 4 to 7 years;

- The impacts of the Release of Prisoners Order 2020, which increases custodial sentences for offenders convicted of a relevant violent or sexual offence with a custodial sentence of 7 years or more[17];

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[13] Sentences of Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPPs) were created by the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and started to be used in April 2005. Offenders sentenced to an IPP are set a minimum term (tariff) which they must spend in prison. After they have completed their tariff, they can apply to the Parole Board for release. The Parole Board will release an offender only if it is satisfied that it is no longer necessary for the protection of the public for the offender to be confined.

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

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

[16] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/32/contents/enacted

[17] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/158/made

- The impacts of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021[18], including extending extraterritorial jurisdiction over specified offences (necessary for ratification of the Istanbul Convention);

- The impacts of the Government's ambition in relation to charges of adult rape cases set out in the Rape Review[19];

- The impacts of the Nationality and Borders Act 2022[20], including tougher sentences for those who pilot a small boat or smuggle migrants into the UK via other dangerous or illegal means;

- The impacts of revised sentencing guidelines for sexual offences against a child[21];

- The impacts of mandating domestic abuse and safeguarding checks in all cases where electronic monitoring is proposed[22].

Estimated impacts for these policies are assumed to be consistent for the three scenarios.

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[18] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/17/contents/enacted

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

[20] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/36/contents/enacted

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

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

# 2. Uncertainty in the projection

**Several factors have contributed to the uncertainty around the 2022 projections. Three main sources of uncertainty are (a) recovery of the Criminal Justice System following the COVID-19 pandemic and the Criminal Bar Association strike action in 2022; (b) the impact of the Government's aim to increase police officer numbers; and (c) not yet fully realised or future policy changes which have the potential to change prison receptions, or the amount of time offenders spend in custody.**

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

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

## Uncertainty around the recovery of the Criminal Justice System

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns restricted the courts' ability to process cases through 2020 and 2021, leading to an increase in the volume of outstanding criminal cases waiting for trial or sentencing in the Crown Court. The Criminal Bar Association strike action between April and October 2022 again limited capacity in the courts and led to a further increase in the backlog of cases.

Recent published statistics[23] show that prosecutions and convictions have been increasing as the CJS recovers following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, however in the year to June 2022 volumes of both were still about 15% lower than the year to June 2019. Excluding summary offences[24] (which have a lower propensity to receive a custodial sentence), the proportion of offenders sentenced to immediate custody has also changed in recent years; this percentage increased from 32% in 2018 and 2019 to 35% in the year to June 2020, before falling again to 33% for the year ending June 2022. The types of cases prioritised during the pandemic and pleas associated with these cases are likely to have contributed to these short-term fluctuations.

Published statistics[23] show that average custodial sentence length (ACSL) has increased – ACSL has consistently risen over the last 10 years, up by 8.1 months from 14.5 months in 2012 to 22.6 months in 2022. In the year to June 2022 46% of custodial sentences were for 12 months or more, up from 38% in the year to June 2019.

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[23] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-system-statistics-quarterly-june-2022
[24] There are three broad types of offence, based on severity: indictable only, triable either-way and summary offences. Indictable only offences are the most serious and must be tried at the Crown Court; summary offences are the least serious and must be tried at magistrates' courts; and triable either-way offences are of intermediate severity and may be tried at either court based on the circumstances of the case.

The same published statistics[23] also show a change in the mix of offence types for custodial sentences in the 12 months to June 2022, relative to 2018 to 2019 – the proportions of violence against the person, sexual, and drug offences increased, while the proportions of theft, robbery, and fraud offences decreased. These changes could be short-term effects resulting from courts prioritising different types of cases during the pandemic or could be indicative of a longer-term shift in crime trends. Variations in the proportions of different offence types being dealt with by the courts can have a substantial impact on the volume of prison receptions.

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

### Uncertainty around future crime types and volumes of charges

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

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

### Uncertainty due to other policy impacts

The prison demand projections also include the impacts of policy changes. For some policies already in effect the impacts are not yet fully represented in the prison population i.e. the policy impact on the prison population will increase from that seen at the beginning of the projection period. Conversely, other policies are expected to commence over the projection period, and therefore their impact is not reflected in the prison population at the beginning of the projection period. The policy overlays included in these prison projections were based on the most up to date data available and the best assumptions of future impact at the time of assessment. However, there is inherent uncertainty around these overlays due to being unable to precisely predict the volume and nature of future cases flowing into the CJS.

### Uncertainty and limitations due to modelling methodology

The modelling methodology, described in Sections TG1, TG2 and TG3, is another source of uncertainty. The modelling approach used to produce the prison population projections presented in this bulletin is a representation of a complex real-world system and does not

capture every aspect which impacts prison population. As a result, even if assumptions prove accurate and are unchanged for the whole projection period, the projections will not match the actual prison population perfectly.

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

# 3. Comparison against 2021 total population projection

**As of November 2022, the prison population was 3,700 places lower than the 2021 projection. The central prison population projection for March 2025 is about 1,900 below the 2021 publication.**

The actual prison population has increased by about 3,200 since the time of the previous publication, rising from 79,700 at the end of November 2021 to 82,900 at the end of November 2022. The actual prison population at the end of November 2022 was 3,700 below the level projected in the 2021 publication. Recent data suggests volumes of court receipts in 2021 and 2022 were below the levels assumed for the 2021 projection, leading to lower-than-expected prison receptions. This is partially explained by the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic through the second half of 2021 – projections in the 2021 publication were based on assumptions about the economy reopening in summer 2021, but additional lockdowns and extended social distancing measures restricted recovery in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) more than anticipated. The Criminal Bar Association strike action between April and October 2022 also affected courts' capacity to deal with trial work and further slowed the flow of offenders from bail into the prison population. These factors together have reduced prison receptions compared to the volumes estimated in the previous projection, and therefore the rate of increase in the prison population has been lower than the projected trajectory.

The 2022 projections reflect the most recent data and assumptions on demand from police officer numbers, crime mix, court receipts, the prison population, prison receptions and discharges[25]. Assumptions about future crime mix and demand from police officer numbers for the 2021 projection are similar to those used for the high scenario in this publication (detailed in Section 1). The 2022 central scenario therefore assumes lower long-term upstream demand than the 2021 projection did.
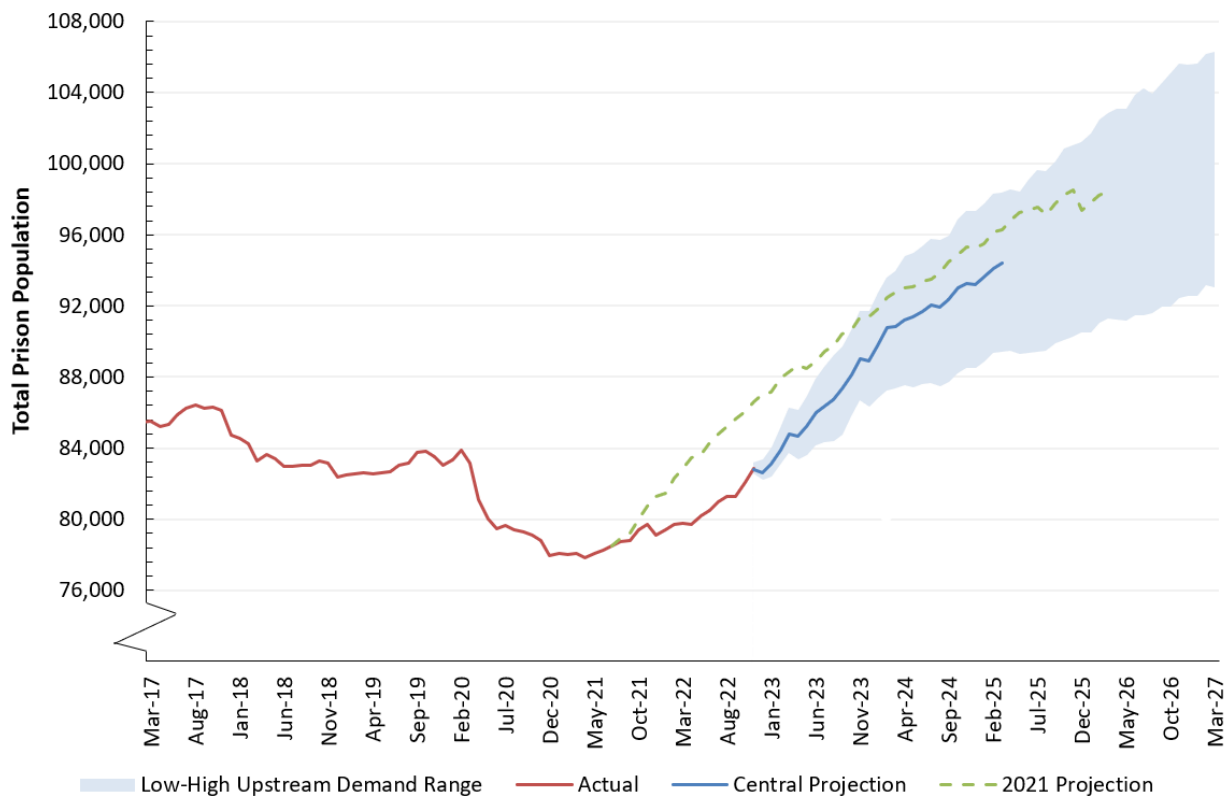
A comparison of the 2021 projection against actuals to date and the latest projections is presented in Figure 3.1.

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[25] Details of the datasets which have been used are described in Section TG3.

**Figure 3.1 Comparison of July 2021 total prison population projection against actuals and latest November 2022 projections[26] (Source: Tables A4 and A5)**



The determinate population has increased from 46,800 offenders at the end of July 2021 to 48,100 at the end of November 2022, and therefore the 2022 projections for this sub-population start from a higher baseline compared to 2021. In both projections the determinate population is expected to increase over the next few years. In the central 2022 projection the determinate sentenced population is estimated to be 59,200 by November 2024 compared to 61,700 in the 2021 projection.

The recall population has also risen since the 2021 publication, increasing from 9,100 at the end of July 2021 to 10,800 at the end of November 2022. The latest projections account for this growth – the 2022 projection estimates a recall population of 12,500 in November 2024 compared to 11,400 in the 2021 projection.

The number of people remanded in custody has increased from 12,800 at the end of July 2021 to 14,700 at the end of November 2022, mostly due to delays in court trials as a result of the Criminal Bar Association strike action. This sub-population is expected to decrease, as courts recover, reaching 12,500 at the end of November 2024 (compared to 13,200 in the 2021 projection).

The indeterminate population has decreased by about 100 between July 2021 and November 2022. This trend is expected to continue for the whole projection period, falling to about 8,200 prisoners serving indeterminate sentences by November 2024.

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

**Table 3.1 Comparisons between prison population projections from 2021 and 2022 (central scenario), by type of custody[27] [28]**

| | Total | | | Remand | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **2021** | **2022** | **Difference** | **2021** | **2022** | **Difference** |
| November 2022 | 86,600 | *82,905 | -4% | 13,500 | *14,733 | 9% |
| November 2023 | 91,400 | 89,100 | -3% | 13,800 | 13,100 | -5% |
| November 2024 | 95,300 | 93,200 | -2% | 13,200 | 12,500 | -5% |
| | Determinate | | | Indeterminate | | |
| | **2021** | **2022** | **Difference** | **2021** | **2022** | **Difference** |
| November 2022 | 53,800 | *48,068 | -11% | 8,400 | *8,529 | 1% |
| November 2023 | 57,700 | 55,200 | -4% | 8,300 | 8,300 | 0% |
| November 2024 | 61,700 | 59,200 | -4% | 8,300 | 8,200 | -1% |
| | Recall | | | Non-Criminal | | |
| | **2021** | **2022** | **Difference** | **2021** | **2022** | **Difference** |
| November 2022 | 10,100 | *10,779 | 7% | 800 | *768 | 2% |
| November 2023 | 10,800 | 11,700 | 8% | 800 | 800 | 2% |
| November 2024 | 11,400 | 12,500 | 10% | 800 | 800 | 2% |
| | Fine Defaulters | | | | | |
| | **2021** | **2022** | **Difference** | | | |
| November 2022 | 0 | *28 | 31% | | | |
| November 2023 | 0 | 50 | 22% | | | |
| November 2024 | 0 | 50 | 22% | | | |

All numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred, numbers below a hundred have been rounded to the nearest 50. Components may not sum due to rounding. *Populations are actual prison population values taken 30th November 2022.

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

[28] The table shows our central projection, however the uncertainty around this projection is large. See Section 2 for more information about the sources of uncertainty.

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

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

Table 4.1 shows projections of prison population aged 50 to 59, 60 to 69 and over 70 years old. The prison population is projected to increase from November 2022 to November 2024 for all of these age groups, as is the overall prison population.

**Table 4.1: Prison population aged over 50, 60 and 70 years old, November 2022 actuals and projected November 2023 to November 2024[29]**

|  | Total (all ages) | 50 and over | 50 to 59 | 60 to 69 | 70 and over |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| November 2022 | 82,905 | *14,193 | *8,666 | *3,718 | *1,809 |
| November 2023 | 89,100 | 14,300 | 8,700 | 3,800 | 1,900 |
| November 2024 | 93,200 | 14,700 | 8,900 | 3,800 | 2,000 |

All numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred, numbers below a hundred have been rounded to the nearest 50. Components may not sum due to rounding. *These actuals were provided from unpublished MI.

The 50-year-old and over population is projected to increase from 14,193 as at November 2022 to 14,700 in November 2024.

The 50 to 59, 60 to 69 and over 70 years old sub-populations are estimated to remain constant as proportions of the total prison population at 10%, 4% and 2%, respectively.

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

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

# 5. Projection of age and sex cohorts

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

Table 5.1 shows projections of prison population by those aged under 18 and adults by sex. All sub-populations increase over the projection period because assumptions around the impacts of court recovery and additional police officers affect all age and sex groups.

**Table 5.1: Prison population by age group and sex, November 2022 actuals and projected November 2023 to November 2024[30]**

|  | Total | Juvenile | Female 18+ | Male 18+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| November 2022 | 82,905 | 326 | 3,245 | 79,334 |
| November 2023 | 89,100 | 500 | 3,700 | 84,900 |
| November 2024 | 93,200 | 500 | 3,800 | 88,900 |

All numbers are rounded to the nearest hundred, numbers below a hundred have been rounded to the nearest 50. Components may not sum due to rounding.

The adult male (18 and over) population is projected to increase from 79,334 as at the end of November 2022 to 88,900 by November 2024. Supporting Table A2 provides a further breakdown of the young adult population (aged 18 to 20 inclusive, both male and female), which is also projected to increase from the current population of 3,241 (November 2022) to 4,100 by November 2024.

The juvenile population covers only offenders held in His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) estates and includes males in the 15 to 17 age group. Note that figures do not cover those young offenders held in Secure Children's Homes or Secure Training Centres[31]. The juvenile population decreased in 2020 and has remained roughly constant between 300 and 400 since the end of 2020. The number of 15- to 17-year-olds in HMPPS custody is now projected to increase to 500 by November 2024.

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[30] The table shows our central projection, however the uncertainty around this projection is large. See Section 2 for more information about the sources of uncertainty.

[31] Following an interim policy change announced in December 2022, the age of young people transitioning to the Adult Estate was raised from 18 years to their 19th birthday, and is managed through the principles and procedures outlined within the Youth Custody Service Transitions Policy Framework: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1066602/2022-04-04_YCS_Transitions_PF.pdf

Details on the differences between the sectors are outlined below:
Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) accommodate children between 15 to 18 years old and are similar in design to Adult Prison, with environments adapted for children and young people.
Secure Training Centres (STCs) accommodate children and young people between 12 to 18 years old and provide a higher staff to child/young person ratio and are set-up for children and young people who may require a high level of support and regime offer.
Secure Children's Homes (SCHs) accommodate children and young people aged between 10 to 18 years old and provide nurturing home environments and respond to the physical, emotional, and behavioural needs for highly complex children and young people.

The adult female population is projected to increase from 3,245 as at November 2022 to 3,800 by November 2024. The adult female prison population has fallen in recent years (from 3,770 at the end of June 2019 to 3,116 at the end of March 2021). Since then, it has remained broadly constant, between 3,100 and 3,300. The decrease was likely driven by a drop in prosecutions and sentencing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the limited time between the publication of the Female Offender Strategy[32], which aims to improve outcomes for female offenders by treating custody as a last resort, and the start of the pandemic means it is difficult to disentangle any effects of the strategy. Any future impacts of the Female Offender Strategy have therefore been excluded from the baseline projection.

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[32] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/female-offender-strategy

# 6. Links to related Ministry of Justice statistics

For further information on:

- The latest statistics on court receipts visit:
  www.gov.uk/government/collections/criminal-court-statistics

- The latest statistics on the Criminal Justice System, including information on sentencing, visit:
  www.gov.uk/government/collections/criminal-justice-statistics-quarterly

- The latest statistics and commentary on the prison population visit:
  www.gov.uk/government/collections/offender-management-statistics-quarterly

- The Story of the Prison Population 1993-2020 visit:
  https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/story-of-the-prison-population-1993-to-2020

- Weekly prison population and capacity figures visit:
  www.gov.uk/government/collections/prison-population-statistics

# TG1. Modelling methodology

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

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

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

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

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

The projection model is based on latest available data from various sources including court proceedings and performance data and sentencing data. Latest P-NOMIS extracts, referenced in offender management statistics[33], are utilised to model prison receptions and population data.

The method used for generating projections of the prison population in England and Wales for the 2022 to 2027 projections is similar to the approach used to generate the previous 2021 to 2026 projections published on 25th November 2021. Sections TG2 and TG3 provide further details of the methods used to produce the prison population projections and the assumptions behind them.

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[33] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/offender-management-statistics-quarterly

# TG2. Caveats on prison population projections

The projections presented reflect the impact of the latest trends and assumptions in sentencing, in the age band, sex, and offence of defendants entering the system and in the flow of defendants through the courts. Estimated impacts of changes to legislation and guidance which took place before November 2022 have been accounted for (as detailed in Section 1).

The recovery of courts from the COVID-19 pandemic, the short-term impact of Criminal Bar Association strike action, and the Government's aim to increase police officer numbers have all resulted in considerable uncertainty in these projections. Even without these effects, the actual future prison population is impossible to predict precisely. Changes to criminal justice processes could influence the numbers of offenders being brought to the point of sentence or the way that offenders are managed. Changes to sentencing behaviour may also be different from those modelled.

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

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

# TG3. Detail of models and assumptions

**Overview of the modelling approach**

The methods used to generate this set of prison population projections are similar to the approach taken for the previous projections (2021 to 2026 projections published on 25th November 2021).

Since there is uncertainty around future levels of demand entering the Criminal Justice System (CJS), this publication presents the prison population projections as a range, based on three plausible upstream demand scenarios which have been agreed between the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the Home Office and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). Due to increased long-term uncertainty, the central scenario is presented only up to March 2025. This is a change from the approach in the previous publication, where a single line was presented up to March 2026.

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

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

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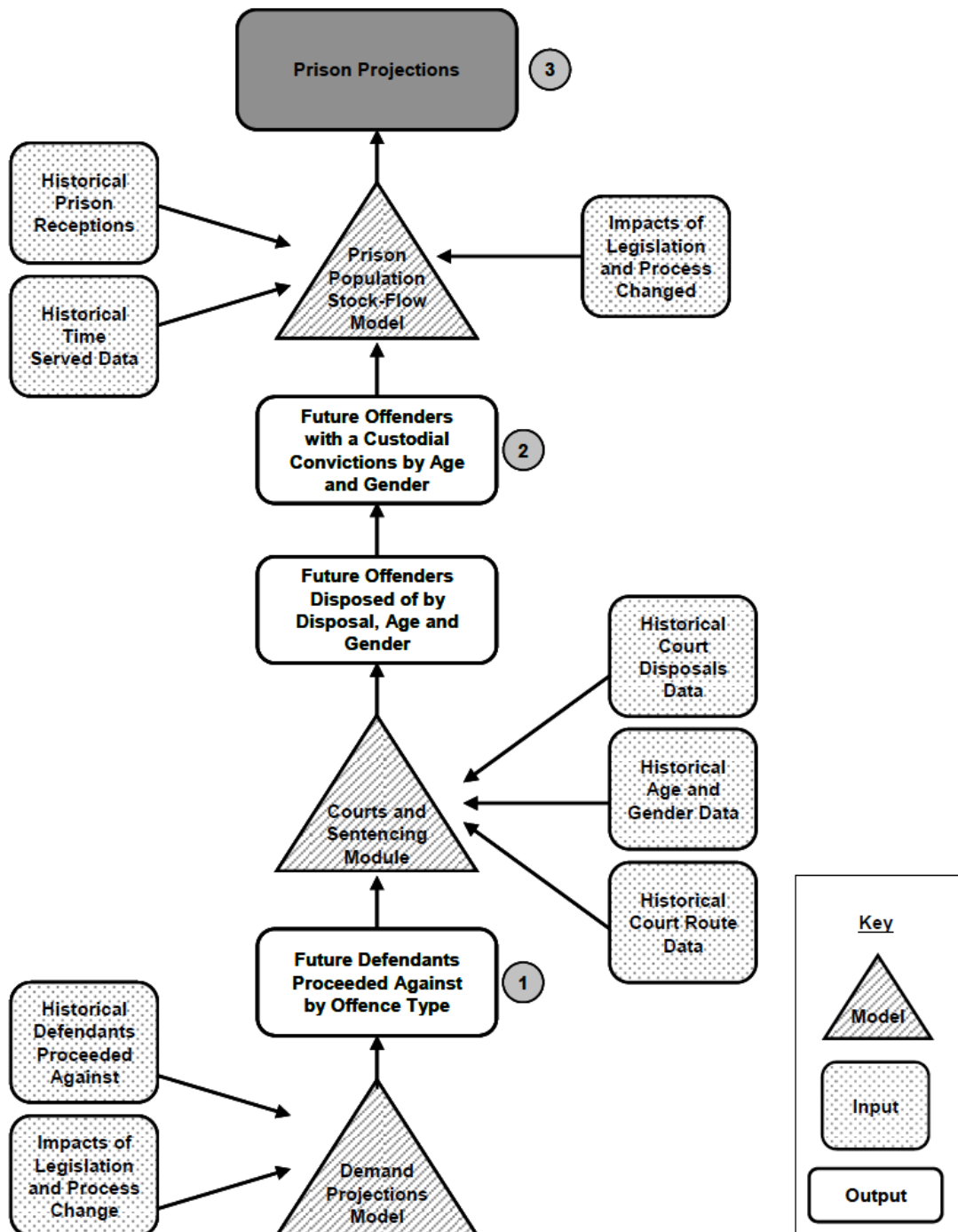


## 1) Producing projections of defendants coming into court

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

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

## 2) Converting the demand projections into volumes of completed court cases

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

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

## 3) Converting completed court cases into volumes of prison inflows

The sentencing module takes projections of court disposals (Section 2 of TG3 above) and derives projected volumes of custodial sentences. The conversion of court disposals into custodial sentences is based on court proceedings data for defendants sentenced in the 6 months to April 2022 inclusive.

The projected custodial sentences are then converted into prison receptions using conversion ratios derived from historical proportions. Custodial sentences include offenders who may already be serving a sentence for a previous crime or those who would serve their whole custodial sentence on remand, meaning that they would not be a new reception to prison. The ratio of prison receptions from custodial sentences has varied in recent months, but it is assumed that the long-term conversion ratios will return to those seen in the 6 months to April 2022 inclusive. Therefore, more recent volumes of custodial sentences and prison receptions are used to calculate the conversion ratio for the initial months of the projection, with the ratio gradually changing over time to return to the expected long-term ratio by mid-2023.

## 4a) Producing prison population projections

Prison population projections are produced using separate models for individual sub-populations, combined with the impacts of new policies including the Government's aim to increase police officer numbers. The following sub-populations in prison are modelled using stock-flow structures based on the generic structure shown in Figure TG3.2: determinate sentence, life sentence, Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) and recalls. The stock-flow structures begin with the starting-point prison population, model the flow of offenders into and out of prison, and count the resulting prison population at the end of each month.

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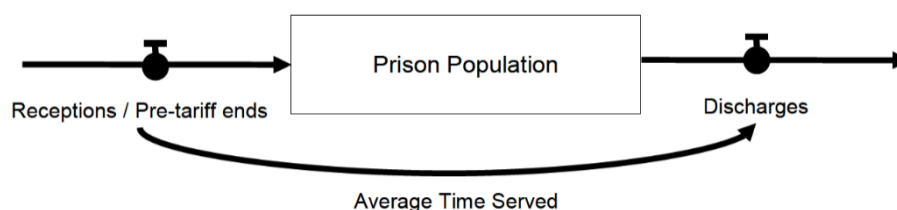


The **remand population** projection is based on the relationship between the number of outstanding triable cases in Crown Court (split by indictable only and triable either-way[34]) and the remand population from November 2018 to August 2022 inclusive. This relationship is quantified using linear regression. This is then used to produce a remand population projection by applying it to outstanding indictable only and triable either-way Crown Court cases that have been projected using the method described in Section 2 of TG3 above.

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

For the **IPP and life sentence (indeterminate) population**, outflows depend on the tariff lengths prisoners receive, and on the frequency and outcome of Parole Board hearings. The values of these parameters are set and calibrated to reflect the most recent management information on Parole Board outcomes.

For the **recall population,** indeterminate recalls are treated explicitly based on data and assumptions around future release and recall rates, and conditional on Parole Board capacity as per the indeterminate population. The determinate recalled population is projected by estimating the size of the eligible pool of offenders subject to licence conditions, split by sentence length band, and applying a monthly 'rate of recall' to this pool to estimate new recallees. A profile of average time spent recalled into custody is then applied to estimate re-releases, thus simulating the determinate sentenced recall population. The size of the eligible pool of offenders subject to licence conditions, split by sentence length band, is calculated from the determinate discharge projections (described above in this section).

The **non-criminal population** and the **fine defaulter population** are assumed to remain constant across the projection period at the population level observed in the most recent available data prior to projections.


## 4b) Accounting for the impacts of policy effects

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

Exceptions to this approach include the impacts of the additional police officers and impacts of the Government's ambition in relation to charges of adult rape cases set out in the Rape

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

Review. The effects of these policy changes are included earlier in the modelling pipeline, with estimated volumes of additional charges incorporated into the core upstream demand assumptions. These additional charges are then modelled through the whole CJS using the courts and sentencing models and the stock-flow method described above. In each case, policy impacts are projected according to the unique aspects of the policy in question.

**4c) Splitting out projections by age and sex**

The determinate population modelling allows age-bands and sex to be modelled explicitly. The sex and age of a newly received offender (from the prison receipt projection) is attributed using the distributions of age and sex of offenders entering prison in scenario-specific time periods aligning with the time periods used to define sentence length assumptions, detailed in Section 1. The model then ages existing and newly received offenders whilst they are in prison to determine movements in/out of age-bands at any point (e.g. offenders moving from the 21 to 49 years old age-band to the 50 to 59 years old age-band as they age during their time in custody).

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

In the case of the non-criminal, fine, remand, recall, life, and additional populations as a result of policy impacts, sex and age distributions are assumed to remain at the average observed in the previous 6 months of data available prior to projections.

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

## Further Information

### National Statistics Status

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

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

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

### Contact
Press enquiries should be directed to the **Ministry of Justice Press Office**:

> Tel: 020 3334 3536
> Email: newsdesk@justice.gov.uk

Other enquiries about these statistics should be directed to the Analytical Services division of the Ministry of Justice:

> **Jatin Shah**, Head of Criminal Justice System Analysis
> Ministry of Justice, Post Point 4, 10 South Colonnade, London, E14 4PU
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**Next update:** November 2023 (provisional)
**URL:** www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-population-projections-ns

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