

Prisons and Imprisonment in Wales

2024 Factfile

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November 2025



Canolfan
Llywodraethiant Cymru

Wales Governance
Centre

Preface

About Us

The Wales Governance Centre is a research centre that forms part of Cardiff University's School of Law and Politics. The Centre's work on criminal justice began in 2018 with the launch of the *Justice and Jurisdiction* project. The project was funded by a combination of the Economic and Social Research Council, the Welsh Government and Cardiff University and concluded in 2020. A total of 11 reports were produced throughout the project and the information gathered heavily informed *The Welsh Criminal Justice System: On the Jagged Edge*, which was published by University of Wales Press in October 2022.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to staff at the Ministry of Justice who have handled and dealt with the many requests for information that have been made throughout the course of this research. I would also like to thank those who prepared, planned, supported and campaigned for (over many years) the very first *Welsh Justice Data: Annual Release*. I am also indebted to Katie Bodinger at Cardiff University for her continued help and unwavering support.

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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 recent *Welsh Justice Data: Annual Release*, as well as a raft of previously unseen data obtained via the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The aim of this latest Factfile is to contribute to a more territorially refined, critical, and informed discussion on imprisonment, criminal justice, and devolution in Wales. Some of the key facts and findings included in this report are outlined below.

THE PRISON POPULATION

- Having reached its highest level in 2023 since the Wales Governance Centre began collecting disaggregated data, the Welsh prisoner population fell by two per cent in 2024.
- Almost a third (30 per cent) of Welsh people in prison were being held in English prisons last year.
- Data obtained for the very first time show there were 192 Welsh-speaking prisoners held in Welsh prisons in 2024.
- The number of Welsh prisoners on remand continued to rise last year. Despite reaching record levels in 2023 (730), the number of Welsh prisoners on remand rose by a further 10 per cent in 2024 (804).
- At HMP Cardiff, more than half (56 per cent) of all prisoners were being held on remand in 2024.
- When combined, a third (33 per cent) of the Welsh prison population were either on remand or in prison having been recalled to custody in 2024.

WOMEN AND ETHNICITY

- Despite repeated commitments by the UK Government and Welsh Government to reduce the number of Welsh women in prison, the number of Welsh female prisoners increased for the fourth consecutive year in 2024 .
- Analyses of sentencing data show that in 2024 the number of women handed immediate custodial sentences in Wales reached its highest level since the outbreak of Covid-19.
- There was a 51 per cent increase in the number of women sentenced to immediate custody for one month or less in 2024. In total, around a quarter (24 per cent) of all women sentenced to immediate custody in Wales were handed sentences of up to one month or less last year.
- 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. While remand prisoners comprised 15 per cent of the Welsh female prison population when the *Blueprint* was published in 2019, almost a quarter (23 per cent) of Welsh women in prison were on remand last year.
- The number of women remanded at the magistrates' court in Wales increased by 25 per cent in 2024.
- Those belonging to a Black ethnic group in Wales were the most over-represented ethnic group in prison in 2024. There were 62 Black people from Wales in prison for every 10,000 of the population in 2024, compared to just 15 White people per 10,000 of the population.
- The average custodial sentence length in Wales between 2017 and 2024 was 9.4 months higher for Black defendants (25.2 months) than those from a White ethnic group (15.8 months).

- Between 2017 and 2024, almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of Black defendants were remanded into custody at the Crown Court in Wales. This compares to just over half (52 per cent) of White defendants.

PRISONS IN WALES

- The average number of people held in the Welsh prison estate fell by two per cent in 2024.
- Since HMP Berwyn opened in 2017, the number of English prisoners held in Wales has increased by 191 per cent.
- On average, 1,861 prisoners from England were being held in Wales in 2024. That is the equivalent population of HMP Parc and represents a further increase on the level recorded in 2023 (1,780).
- The Ministry of Justice's early prison release scheme (SDS40) added to growing concerns over prisoner homelessness in England and Wales in 2024. There were 2,227 people released from Welsh prisons under SDS40 between September 2024 and March 2025.
- The number of those released from Welsh prisons without a fixed address to return to increased by 34 per cent in 2024.
- 560 prison leavers managed by Welsh probation services were rough sleeping on the day of their release in 2024/25.
- There were a record number (21) of deaths across the Welsh prison estate in 2024, 17 of which were recorded at HMP Parc.
- There were four self-inflicted deaths recorded across the Welsh prison estate in 2024, three of which were at HMP Parc.

- Of the 13,897 individuals who self-harmed in prison in England and Wales last year, 1,018 had a recorded origin address in Wales.
- There were increases in prisoner-on-prisoner assaults (2 per cent), assaults on staff (22 per cent), and self-harm incidents (11 per cent) across the Welsh prison estate in 2024.

THE COURTS AND SENTENCING

- Criminal court data show that the backlog of cases in the magistrates' court and Crown Court in Wales is growing. At the end of December 2024, there were 11,850 outstanding cases at the magistrates' court and 2,663 outstanding cases at the Crown Court.
- Although the 'in-country' imprisonment rate fell in Wales in 2024, the level recorded in Wales (167 per 100,000) continues to far exceed the rate recorded in any other country in western Europe.
- Disaggregated data also show that Wales has recorded a higher 'home address' imprisonment rate than England in each year since 2013.
- Based on home address, there were 154 Welsh people per 100,000 of the Welsh population in prison in 2024. This compared to a rate of 139 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 (7.6 per 100,000) would have ranked third highest in western Europe in 2024.

NOTES ON TEXT

Welsh and English prison population data are now published by the Ministry of Justice as part of its *Welsh Justice Data: Annual Release*. All data relating to the ‘home address’ of prisoners are based on a prisoner’s origin address (home address on reception into custody). 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 offender’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; these figures are excluded from the data included in this report.

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 2024*. 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 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

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

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>

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, 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 habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats or stations)’.

The *Factfile* includes data on the number of Welsh prisoners (based on home address) who self-harmed in 2024. According to the Ministry of Justice (2025/01), 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 has been added by matching onto the prison NOMIS system. The Ministry of Justice (2025/01) 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 note that there were a small number of individuals with no recorded address.

INTRODUCTION

Sentencing and prisons have been at the forefront of the UK Labour Government's political agenda since being elected in July 2024. Amidst rising prisoner numbers in England and Wales and repeated warnings of a looming 'capacity crisis', the Ministry of Justice introduced emergency early release measures (SDS40) in September 2024, with a total of 26,456 granted early release in the six months to March 2025 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/02). Despite offering some temporary respite to a system that was 'within days of collapse' (Independent Review of Prison Capacity, 2025: 61), however, prisons in England and Wales continue to be blighted by the many problems documented in previous *Factfiles*. These include, to name a few, rising levels of violence (HMIP, 2025a); self-harm (HMIP, 2025b), deaths in custody (INQUEST, 2025), and inadequate prison healthcare (Independent Monitoring Board, 2025).

For some, however, the last 12 months have offered *some* cause for optimism. In particular, a spree of independent reviews launched by the UK Government has added further significant weight to growing calls for urgent change. At a time when the number of remand prisoners in England and Wales is rising (see para 1.24), Part I of Sir Brian Leveson's *Independent Review of the Criminal Courts* (2025) underscored the need to tackle the existing case backlog in the criminal courts to reduce the remand population. The *Independent Sentencing Review's* (2025) proposals to overhaul sentencing policies and practices have also been widely welcomed by penal reformers and campaigners (Nacro, 2025; Prison Reform Trust, 2025). Its recommendations include measures to strengthen and improve alternatives to custody, support progression from custody into the community, and reduce the reliance on prison sentences in England and Wales.

But despite accepting many of the *Independent Sentencing Review's* recommendations, widespread concerns remain about the Westminster government's approach and intentions. The UK Government's Sentencing Bill, presented to Parliament in September, has abandoned some of the review's proposals and significantly watered down others (Leapman, 2025). At the same time, the government in Westminster continues on its seemingly relentless quest to expand prison capacity in England and Wales. This includes the Ministry of Justice's plans to

invest £2.3 billion to construct four new prisons by 2031. This as part of the government's efforts to 'lock up dangerous criminals' and 'keep the streets safe' (Ministry of Justice, 2024/01).³

In this latest *Prison Factfile*, we once again reflect on Wales' place within the broader context of these developments, policies, and debates. For the very first time, the *Factfile* draws upon Wales-only data made publicly available within the Ministry of Justice's (2025/03) inaugural *Welsh Justice Data: Annual Release*.⁴ The report also continues to present data gathered through the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and there is a continued focus on what sources of Wales-only data remain inaccessible, as well as what new and original sources of data have been added. By generating this analysis and making key sources of previously unavailable data accessible to a wider audience, this latest *Factfile* once again demonstrates what is possible when Wales is the subject of serious, in-depth research. By continuing to ask searching and far-reaching questions about the operation of the system in Wales, this report hopes to contribute to political, academic and public debates on Welsh criminal justice. Amidst rising levels of self-harm in Welsh prisons, the continuing use of short-term sentences, further rises in the use of remand, entrenched racial disproportionality, and yet another year where Wales tops western Europe's imprisonment charts, the need for a serious and sustained discussion over the current and future state of the Welsh criminal justice system simply cannot be overstated.

³ 65 per cent of people sentenced to immediate custody in England and Wales in 2024 were convicted of a non-violent offence.

⁴ The Wales Governance Centre was asked by the Ministry of Justice to identify a list of key 'priority areas' in January 2025 after a series of Freedom of Information requests for Wales-only data had been rejected by the Ministry of Justice in November 2024 on the basis that they were deemed to be 'vexatious' in nature.

1 THE PRISON POPULATION

- 1.1** The size and growth of the England and Wales prison population was the subject of considerable political discussion and debate in 2024. Following the election of the UK Labour Government in July, an automatic early release scheme (SDS40) was introduced in September to help alleviate the pressures being placed on prisons by rising prisoner numbers (Crerar et al. 2024). At the same time, however, rioting and demonstrations in July and August resulted in 497 people being handed immediate custodial sentences, adding further to the population pressures (Syal, 2025).
- 1.2** Despite the impact made by the disturbances last summer, the total number of prisoners in England and Wales decreased by two per cent in the 12 months to December 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/04).⁵
- 1.3** When broken down by ‘home address’, however, slightly different trends emerged between Wales and England in 2024. While the number of Welsh people in prison decreased by two per cent last year (Ministry of Justice, 2025/05), the English prison population (based on home address) fractionally increased (1 per cent) (Ministry of Justice, 2025/06).⁶
- 1.4** One possible explanation for the differing trends in England and Wales is the impact made by the 2024 ‘summer riots’. While Ministry of Justice data show that 651 individuals were sentenced for offences relating to the disorder, only five of these cases were recorded in Wales. In total, 99 per cent of those sentenced for cases in connection with the public disorder were in England (Ministry of Justice, 2025/07). A request for a breakdown of the number of Welsh people (based on home address) sentenced to immediate custody for offences in connection with the ‘summer disorder’ was refused

⁵ From 87,489 in December 2023 to 85,372 in December 2024.

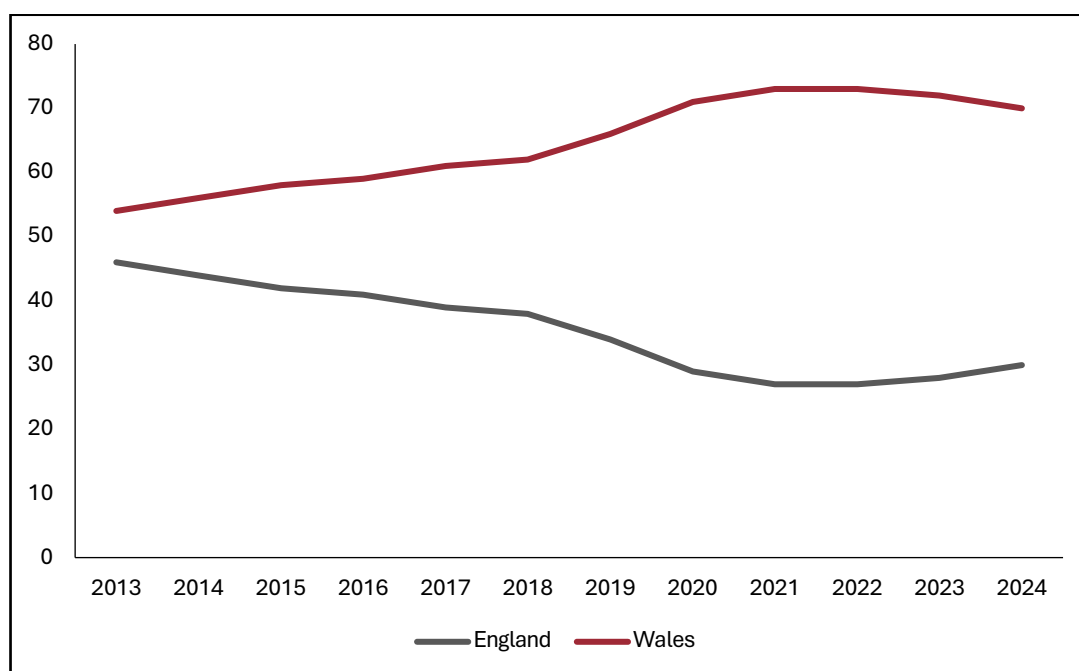
⁶ English prisoners: From 80,715 in 2023 to 81,420 in 2024.
Welsh prisoners: From 5,034 in 2023 to 4,918 in 2024.

in September 2025 on the basis that the Ministry of Justice (2025/08) does ‘not hold any information in the scope’ of the request.

1.5 Although distances and dispersal continue to present a problem for thousands of Welsh prisoners (and their outside contacts) every year, the expansion of HMP Parc in 2015 and the opening of HMP Berwyn in 2017 has led to a significant increase in the number of Welsh prisoners being held in the Welsh prison estate over the last decade (see Figure 1.1).⁷

Figure 1.1

The percentage of Welsh prisoners being held in prisons in Wales and England, 2013 to 2024



1.6 The majority of Welsh people in the Welsh prison estate in 2024 were held at HMP Parc (41 per cent), followed by HMP Berwyn (19 per cent), HMP Cardiff (18 per cent), HMP Swansea (11 per cent), HMP Usk (six per cent) and HMP Prescoed (five per cent).

⁷ 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.

- 1.7** Although the number held in Wales has increased in recent years, a significant number of Welsh prisoners continue to be held in prison accommodation in England. In 2024, almost a third (30 per cent) of prisoners from Wales were being held in English prisons, a slight increase on the level recorded in 2023.⁸
- 1.8** At the end of December 2024, Welsh people were being held in 109 prisons in England (Ministry of Justice, 2025/05).
- 1.9** The only adult prisons Welsh prisoners were *not* held in across England in December 2024 were HMP Cookham Wood, HMP Exeter, HMP and YOI Hatfield, HMP Humber, HMP Kirklevington Grange, HMP Leicester, and HMP and YOI Norwich.⁹
- 1.10** 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 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/09).
- 1.11** Prison population data broken down by offence type show that almost a third (32 per cent) of Welsh people were in prison for violent offences in 2024. The second largest offence category for Welsh prisoners were those suspected or convicted of drug related offences (19 per cent) (Ministry of Justice, 2025/10).
- 1.12** Across England and Wales, the proportion of older people in prison has risen dramatically over the last two decades (Prison Reform Trust, 2023). 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.

⁸ On average, 1,475 Welsh prisoners were being held in English prisons in 2024. This compared to 1,432 Welsh prisoners held in England in 2023.

⁹ HMP Cookham Wood changed from a Young Offender Institution to male adult prison in August 2024.

- 1.13** 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 population in 2017, this figure had risen to 18 per in 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/11).¹⁰
- 1.14** The majority of Welsh people in prison in 2024 identified either as having ‘no religion’ (45 per cent) or as Christian (39 per cent) (Ministry of Justice, 2025/12).
- 1.15** 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 between 2020 and 2024 identified as Muslim.¹¹
- 1.16** 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; Jones, 2017; Jones and Davies, 2025). Although the Ministry of Justice (2024/02) published data on the number of Welsh-speaking prisoners for the first time in 2024, this was done so on an ‘ad hoc’ basis. Requests submitted under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, therefore, remain the most reliable route to routinely accessing data on the number Welsh-speaking prisoners in England and Wales.
- 1.17** Official Ministry of Justice (2025/13) data show that, on average, there were 192 Welsh-speaking prisoners in Wales in 2024. Based on the average number of Welsh people (based on home address) held in Welsh prisons in 2024, the Ministry of Justice’s figures show that just 5.3 per cent of the Welsh prison population were Welsh-speaking in 2024. 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.

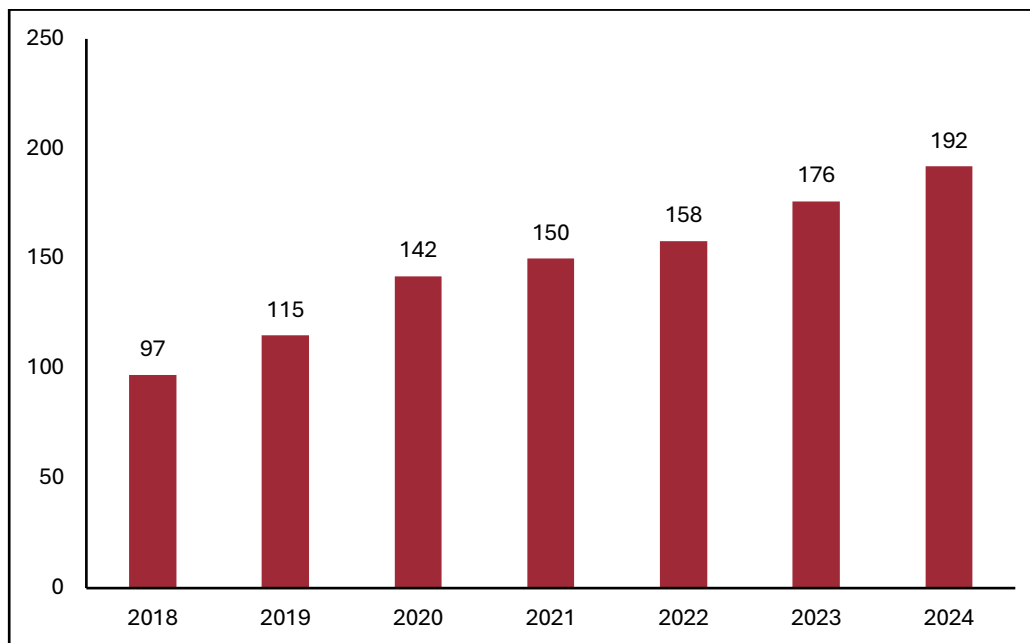
¹⁰ From 742 in 2017 to 885 in 2024.

There were 359 Welsh people in prison aged 60 or above in 2024.

¹¹ There were 473 Muslim prisoners from Wales in 2023.

Figure 1.2

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



- 1.18** 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).
- 1.19** At HMP Berwyn, where around two-thirds (65 per cent) of the prison population were from outside of Wales at the end of December 2024, Welsh speakers comprised just 4.1 per cent of the prison's overall population.
- 1.20** 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 at the prison. This included examples of prison staff at 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).

1.21 On average, there were 57 Welsh-speaking prisoners held in English prisons in 2024. At the end of December 2024, Welsh-speaking prisoners were being held in 34 prisons in England (Ministry of Justice, 2025/13).

1.22 Ministry of Justice (2025/14) data show that there were 32 Welsh-speaking (band 3-5) prison officers in Wales (excluding HMP Parc) in 2024. On average, one in ten (10 per cent) prison officers in Wales were Welsh-speaking last year.

Figure 1.3

The proportion of Welsh prisoners who are Welsh speakers broken down by prison in Wales, December 2024

| | Welsh-speaking prisoners | Welsh prisoners | % who are Welsh- speakers |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Berwyn | 79 | 663 | 11.9 |
| Cardiff | 12 | 572 | 2.1 |
| Parc | 47 | 1,435 | 3.3 |
| Prescoed | 4 | 155 | 2.6 |
| Swansea | 14 | 341 | 4.1 |
| Usk¹² | 23 | 201 | 11.4 |
| Total | 179 | 3,367 | 5.3 |

1.23 A significant challenge to emerge out of the Covid-19 pandemic has been the creation of a major backlog in criminal cases at the Crown Court in England and Wales (see 4.2). Due to a high volume of outstanding cases, the number of prisoners on remand awaiting trial or sentencing has markedly increased since 2019 (Ministry of Justice, 2024/03).

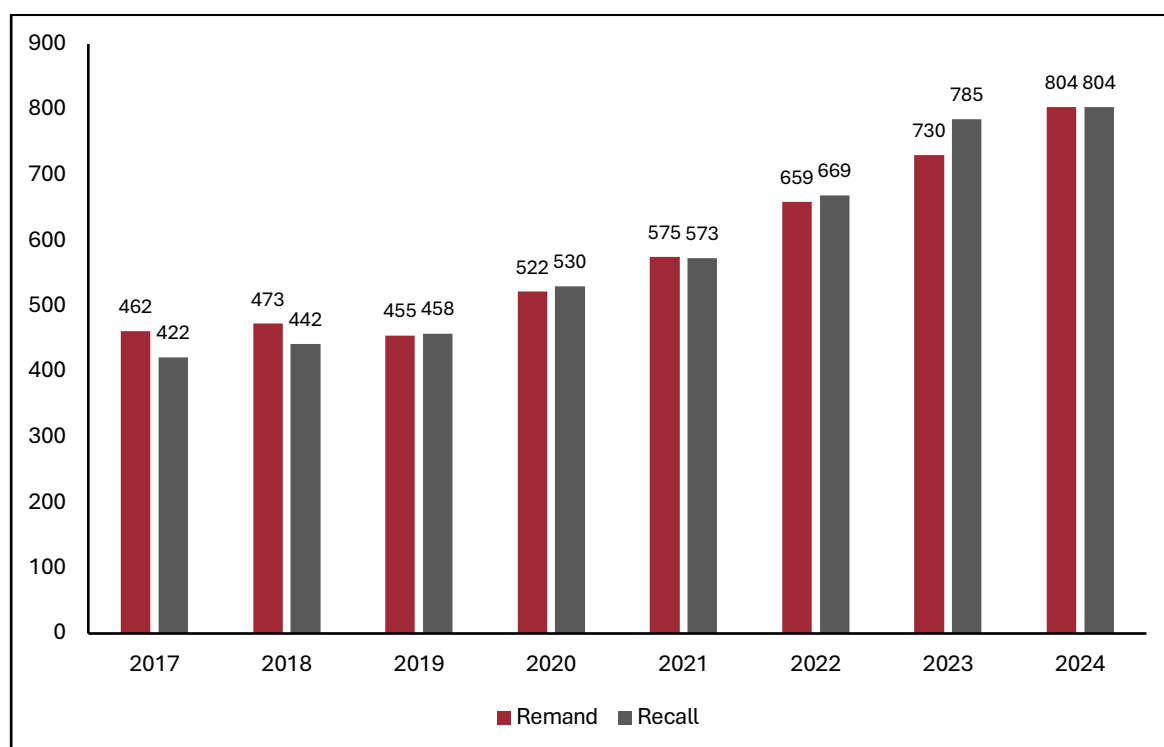
¹² There was a 425 per cent increase in the number of Welsh-speaking prisoners at HMP Usk in 2024. According to HMPPS, this sharp rise is due to an ‘improvement to local recording practices’ at the prison.

1.24 The number of remand prisoners in England and Wales increased by a further six per cent in 2024.¹³ This included a seven per cent rise in the number of prisoners awaiting trial, and a six per cent increase in those awaiting sentencing (Ministry of Justice, 2025/04).¹⁴

1.25 *Prisons and Sentencing in Wales: 2023 Factfile* found that the number of Welsh prisoners on remand reached its highest level in 2023 (730) since the Wales Governance Centre began collecting data by sentence type in 2017. In 2024, however, the number of prisoners from Wales on remand rose by a further 10 per cent (804) (Ministry of Justice, 2025/15).

Figure 1.4

Welsh prisoner remand and recall population, 2017 to 2024



¹³ From 16,005 in December 2023 to 17,023 in December 2024.

¹⁴ Untried: From 10,487 in December 2023 to 11,195 in December 2024.

Unsentenced: From 4,483 to 5,518 in December 2023 to 5,825 in December 2024.

- 1.26** Welsh prisoners on remand comprised 16 per cent of the overall Welsh prison population in 2024. This compared to just 10 per cent of the prison population in 2019.
- 1.27** At HMP Cardiff, more than half (56 per cent) of all prisoners were being held on remand in 2024. This compared with 47 per cent in 2023 and just under a third (31 per cent) of prisoners in 2019 (before the outbreak of Covid-19) (Ministry of Justice, 2025/16).
- 1.28** Alongside those held on remand, prisoners who have been recalled to custody have also contributed significantly to rising prisoner numbers since 2019 (Rowland, 2024). This rise can be explained by the use of longer determinate sentences and an increase in the number of prisoners serving indeterminate sentences or sentences with an extended licence period (Ministry of Justice, 2024/03).
- 1.29** 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 did not apply to people 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).
- 1.30** 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).

- 1.31** Although the unreleased and recalled breakdown is unknown,¹⁵ there were 52 Welsh prisoners serving Indeterminate Sentences for Public Protection in 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/15).¹⁶ One of which, Leroy Douglas from Cardiff, was sentenced to two-and-a-half years for a robbery offence in 2005, but continues to be held in prison (Lewis and Moffat, 2025).
- 1.32** The increasing use of recall can also be explained by major problems in probation services in England and Wales (Grehan, 2024; HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2020). A study by Mullen et al. (2022:10) identified that a shift towards ‘risk management’ culture has resulted in probation officers being ‘too quick’ to recall people to custody. To try and combat the rise in recalls, 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.
- 1.33** Despite an overall reduction in the number of Welsh prisoners, the recall population increased by two per cent in 2024. 804 Welsh people were in prison having been recalled to custody last year (Ministry of Justice, 2025/15).¹⁷
- 1.34** While those recalled to prison comprised approximately nine per cent of the Welsh prison population in 2017, recalled prisoners accounted for 16 per cent of Welsh prisoners in 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/15).
- 1.35** When combined, a third (33 per cent) of the Welsh prison population were either on remand or in prison having been recalled to custody in 2024.
- 1.36** In 2024, there were 2,163 recalls into custody for breach of post-release licence by the probation service in Wales, excluding those returned to custody in connection with having been charged with a further offence (Ministry of Justice, 2025/17).

¹⁵ A Freedom of Information request for a breakdown of those unreleased and recalled was submitted to the Ministry of Justice on 2 October 2025 but no response was received.

¹⁶ There were 170 Welsh IPP prisoners in 2017.

¹⁷ From 785 in 2023 to 804 in 2024.

- 1.37** There was a 45 per cent increase in the number of people recalled to custody for breach of post-release licence by the probation service in Wales in 2024. This compared to a 40 per cent increase recorded in England.¹⁸
- 1.38** Despite the fact that six per cent of the total probation caseload in England and Wales were managed by Welsh probation services in 2024,¹⁹ eight per cent of all recalls into custody for breach of post-release licence were recorded in Wales last year (Ministry of Justice, 2025/17; 2025/18).²⁰

¹⁸ England: From 18,814 in 2023 to 26,296 in 2024.

Wales: From 1,496 in 2023 in 2,163 in 2024.

¹⁹ 14,546 people were supervised by Welsh probation services in 2024. The total for England and Wales was 239,985 in 2024.

²⁰ There were a total of 28,459 recalls for breach of post-release licence conditions in England and Wales in 2024.

2 WOMEN AND ETHNICITY

WOMEN

- 2.1** 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.
- 2.2** 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 initiatives and policies over the last decade. In May 2019, the Welsh Government and Ministry of Justice (2019: 1) published a *Women’s Justice Blueprint* to help deliver services that are ‘distinct to Wales’ and included a commitment to help reduce the number of Welsh women in the criminal justice system (Welsh Government and Ministry of Justice, 2019).²¹
- 2.3** 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) .
- 2.4** However, despite repeated commitments to reduce the number of Welsh women in prison, prisoner numbers in England and Wales are still projected to rise. In its *Prison Population Projections 2024 to 2029*, the Ministry of Justice’s (2024/03) estimate that the number of adult female prisoners in England and Wales will rise by 11 per cent from 3,524 in September 2024 to 3,900 in September 2028. Based on disaggregated data

²¹ The strategy was initially unveiled as the *Female Offending Blueprint for Wales*.

from December 2024, this will see the number of Welsh women in prison increase from 241 to 268 by the end of 2028.

- 2.5** One of the major problems surrounding the ‘jagged edge’ of justice in Wales is that policies devised by UK Government justice officials in Whitehall routinely fails to take account of the devolved legislative and policy landscape (Jones and Wyn Jones, 2022). Although the Ministry of Justice’s (2024/03) latest projections include the caveat that their estimates do not take into account the impact that the newly established *Women’s Justice Board* or its *Female Offender Strategy* will have on future numbers in England and Wales, there is no mention or consideration given to the impact that the Welsh Government’s ‘flagship’ *Women’s Justice Blueprint* may have in Wales.
- 2.6** Although the total number of Welsh prisoners (based on home address) marginally fell in 2024, the number of Welsh women in prison increased by 2 per cent last year (Ministry of Justice, 2025/19).²²
- 2.7** In December 2024, Welsh women were being held in all 12 women’s prisons in England, with over three-quarters (77 per cent) of women placed at either HMP Eastwood Park in Gloucestershire (160) or HMP Styal in Cheshire (26).
- 2.8** 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 review of women within the criminal justice system, 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.
- 2.9** On multiple occasions the Wales Governance Centre has requested data on the number of Welsh women in prison who are mothers to children under the age of 18. In response to a request in September 2023, the Ministry of Justice (2023) confirmed that

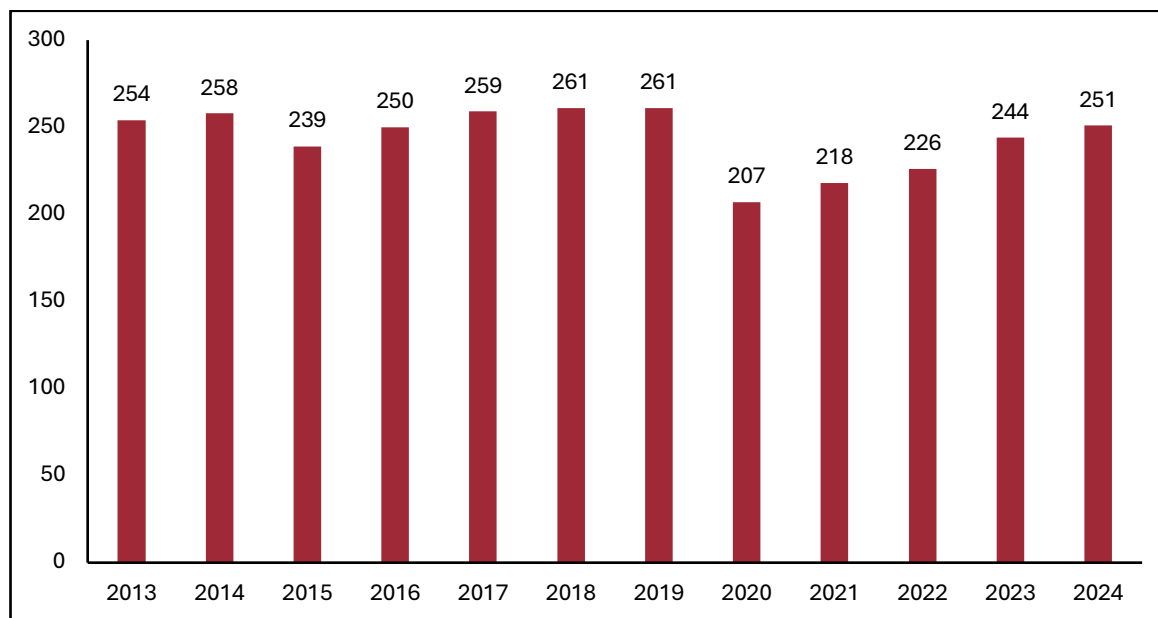
²² From 244 Welsh female prisoners in 2023 to 251 in 2024.

they held the data but 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 Data* (BOLD) in July 2024, they did not provide any Welsh disaggregation. In response to a follow-up request asking for a Welsh breakdown of the information included in the BOLD data set, the Ministry of Justice once 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 a new request for these data was submitted by the Wales Governance Centre in August 2025, this was once again turned down by the Ministry of Justice (2025/20).

- 2.10** Ministry of Justice (2025/21) 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 in 2024/25.
- 2.11** A request for disaggregated information on the number of women from Wales included in the pregnancy and births data was rejected in July 2024. The Ministry of Justice (2024/04) 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 request for a Welsh breakdown of the latest pregnancy and births statistics was submitted in preparation for this latest *Factfile* but was once again refused by the Ministry of Justice (2025/22).

Figure 2.1

The number of Welsh women in prison, 2013 to 2024



2.12 Analyses of sentencing data show that in 2024 the number of women handed immediate custodial sentences in Wales reached its highest level since the outbreak of Covid-19 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/23).²³

2.13 The number of immediate custodial sentences handed out to women in Wales increased by 13 per cent in 2024.²⁴ While 2 per cent of all women sentenced in Wales were handed an immediate custodial sentence in 2019, the immediate custody rate for women increased to 3.6 per cent last year.

2.14 Previous research by the Wales Governance Centre has shown that women in Wales are more likely to be given shorter custodial sentences than men (Jones, 2019a; 2020; 2023; 2024). 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

²³ 425 immediate custodial sentences were handed to women at courts in Wales in 2024.

²⁴ From 376 in 2023 to 425 in 2024.

women sentenced to short-term custodial sentences more likely to re-offend than those sentenced to a court order (Hillier and Mews, 2018).

- 2.15** Almost four in five (78 per cent) women sentenced to immediate custody in Wales were handed sentences of 12 months or less in 2024. This compared to 66 per cent of men sentenced to custody in Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2025/23).²⁵
- 2.16** In 2024, around a quarter (24 per cent) of all women sentenced to immediate custody in Wales were handed sentences of up to one month or less. This compared to 12 per cent of men sentenced to immediate custody last year.²⁶
- 2.17** There was a 51 per cent increase in the number of sentences of one month or less handed to women at courts in Wales in 2024.²⁷ On average, almost two women a week were sentenced to prison for one month or less at courts in Wales in 2024.
- 2.18** Over two-thirds (69 per cent) of women sentenced to prison for a month or less at courts in Wales in 2024 were convicted of theft. 14 per cent of women handed sentences of one month or less were convicted of summary non-motoring offences last year.²⁸
- 2.19** 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, 459 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 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/23).

²⁵ There were 333 sentences of 12 months or less handed to women in 2024 and 3,092 handed to men.

²⁶ 101 sentences of one month or less were handed to women in Wales in 2024. This compared to 554 sentences of one month or less given to men.

²⁷ From 67 in 2023 to 101 in 2024.

²⁸ 70 sentences of one month or less were handed to women convicted of theft offences in 2024.

- 2.20** 90 per cent of all custodial sentences of one month or less given to women in Wales were at the magistrates' court in 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/24).²⁹
- 2.21** Analysis of court data by police force area show that just under half (47 per cent) of women sentenced to immediate custody at the magistrates' court in North Wales in 2024 received a sentence of one month or less. This compared to 35 per cent of women in Gwent, 30 per cent in South Wales, and 30 per cent in Dyfed Powys.
- 2.22** Between 2017 and 2024, 39 per cent of women who received an immediate custodial sentence at magistrates' courts in North Wales were sentenced to prison for one month or less. This compared to 29 per cent of women sentenced in Gwent, 28 per cent in Dyfed-Powys, and 27 per cent in South Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2025/24).
- 2.23** 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 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'.
- 2.24** 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).
- 2.25** 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

²⁹ 91 sentences of one month or less were handed to women at the Magistrates' Court in 2024.

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.

- 2.26** Unveiled as an 'alternative' to imprisonment for women convicted of 'low-level offences' (Ministry of Justice, 2020), according to HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) (2022) 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'.
- 2.27** However, despite the UK Government's claims that the Residential Women's Centre will provide vital services to women and offer an 'alternative' to imprisonment, widespread concerns have already been raised about what the Howard League for Penal Reform (2022: 2) have described as an 'unevidenced experiment in wholly new residential provision'.
- 2.28** 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'.
- 2.29** 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).
- 2.30** 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 (Ministry of Justice, 2024/03). To compound these fears, disaggregated data show that a higher percentage of recalls happen in Wales.

- 2.31** Between 2017 and 2024, a total of 1,009 women were recalled to custody in Wales for breach of post-release licence, excluding those returned to custody in connection with having been charged with a further offence (Ministry of Justice, 2025/25).
- 2.32** In 2024, 61 per cent (133) of all women recalled to custody in Wales were serving sentences of under 12 months. This is the same level (61 per cent) recorded for women recalled in England last year (Ministry of Justice, 2025/25).³⁰
- 2.33** Nine per cent of all women recalled to custody in England and Wales in 2024 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, 2025/25).³¹
- 2.34** 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. These plans, however, are likely to do little for the increasing number of women in Wales who are being handed longer-term prison sentences.
- 2.35** Since 2017, the average custodial sentence length for women sentenced in Wales has increased from 7.2 months (2017) to 11.5 months (2024).³² While just 2.3 per cent of women sentenced to immediate custody in 2017 received a sentence of four years or more, the proportion had more than trebled to 8 per cent of women in 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/23).³³

³⁰ 1,367 women sentenced to less than 12 months were recalled to custody in England in 2024.

³¹ England: 2,242; Wales: 219.

³² The Ministry of Justice announced changes to the way in which it develops and processes criminal court data in 2024 (including sentence length). Although the Ministry of Justice (2024/05: 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.

³³ 34 sentences of 4 years or more were handed to women in Wales in 2024.

- 2.36** With more women being sentenced to prison for longer in Wales, questions remain over what benefits, if any, the Residential Women’s Centre will bring to women in Wales. This includes the increasing number of Welsh women in prison who are awaiting trial or sentencing.
- 2.37** 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. 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 2024, almost a quarter (23 per cent) of Welsh women in prison were being held on remand (Ministry of Justice, 2025/26).
- 2.38** On average, there were 57 Welsh women in prison on remand in 2024. This compared to 47 Welsh women the previous year.
- 2.39** There was a 16 per cent rise in the number of women remanded across all courts in Wales in 2024.³⁴ In total, 555 women were remanded into custody at either the magistrates’ court (350) or Crown Court (205) in Wales last year (Ministry of Justice, 2025/27).
- 2.40** 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.

³⁴ From 478 in 2023 to 555 in 2024.

- 2.41** Due to the smaller size of the prison estate, women are often remanded in prisons further away from home than men, a problem even more pronounced in the Welsh context (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2023).
- 2.42** 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 (2022: 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.
- 2.43** The number of women remanded at the magistrates’ court in Wales increased by 25 per cent in 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/27).³⁵
- 2.44** 2.5 per cent of all women appearing at the magistrates’ court in Wales were remanded in 2024, compared with 1.9 per cent in 2023. In 2019, the year that the *Women’s Justice Blueprint* was unveiled, 0.8 per cent of women in Wales were remanded at the magistrates’ court.
- 2.45** Of those women remanded *and* sentenced at the magistrates’ court in Wales, over half (54 per cent) went on to receive a non-custodial sentence in 2024. At the Crown Court, a third (34 per cent) of women remanded *and* sentenced there received a non-custodial sentence in 2024.³⁶

³⁵ From 280 in 2023 to 350 in 2024.

³⁶ Those classified as receiving a non-custodial sentence here include those given a suspended sentence, a community sentence, a fine, an absolute discharge, a conditional discharge, compensation, or otherwise dealt with.

Magistrates’ court: 129 women were remanded into custody and sentenced in 2023 and 70 received a non-custodial sentence.

Crown Court: 171 women remanded into custody were sentenced in 2024 and 58 received a non-custodial sentence.

2.46 38 per cent of women on trial at the Crown Court in Wales were remanded in 2024. 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 2023 (36 per cent) (Ministry of Justice, 2025/27).³⁷

ETHNICITY

2.47 The Ministry of Justice’s 2024 report, *Statistics on Ethnicity and the Criminal Justice System 2022*, identified that minority ethnic groups are ‘over-represented’ within most stages of the criminal justice system in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2024/06: 3).³⁸ The findings showed that minority ethnic groups are more likely to be stopped and searched by police, arrested, and that a larger proportion of Black, Asian, and Mixed defendants are remanded in custody for indictable offences when compared to White defendants at the Crown Court (Ministry of Justice, 2024/06).

2.48 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).

2.49 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.³⁹ 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

³⁷ 337 women were bailed at the Crown Court in 2024 and 205 were remanded.

³⁸ *Ethnicity and the Criminal Justice System 2024* will be published by the Ministry of Justice on 27 November 2025.

³⁹ Similar guidance was also issued for judges sentencing young adults, pregnant women, and survivors of abuse.

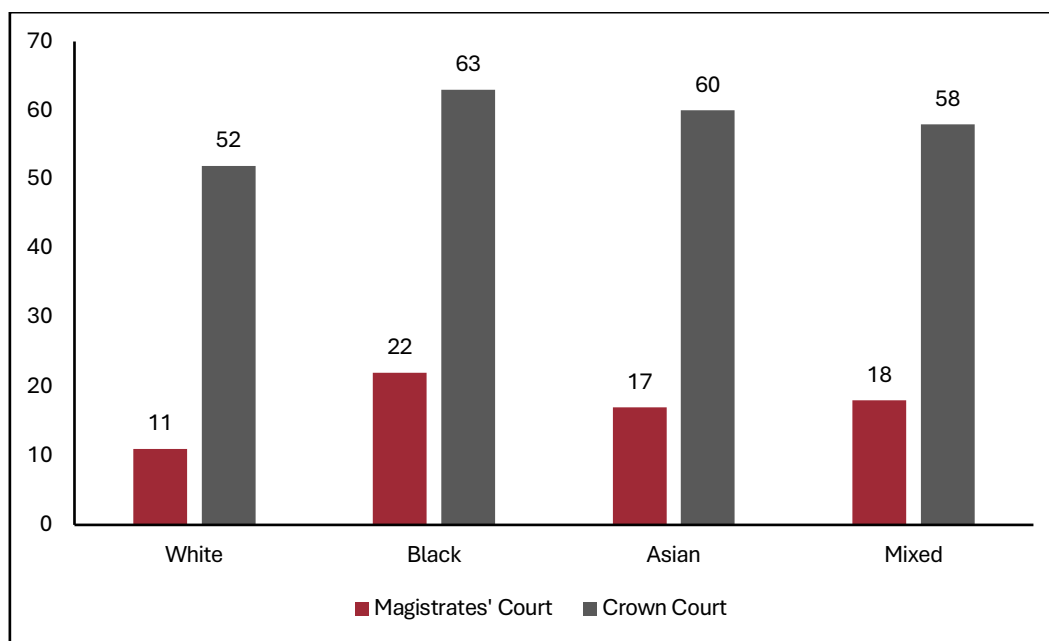
might be addressed' (Sentencing Council, 2025: 5). Despite the Sentencing Council's efforts, however, the plans were abandoned in March 2025 following an intervention by the then Justice Secretary, Shabana Mahmood, over fears that the proposals would have created a 'two-tier' justice system in England and Wales (Zeffman and Nevett, 2025).

2.50 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.

2.51 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 Wales* (Jones, 2019b), the *Welsh Criminal Justice System: On the Jagged Edge* (Jones and Wyn Jones, 2022), *Prisons in Wales* (Jones, 2023), and *Prisons and Sentencing in Wales* (Jones, 2024) 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 2024.

Figure 2.2

The average remand rate (%) at the magistrates' court and Crown Court in Wales broken down by ethnic group, between 2017 and 2024



2.52 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.

2.53 Between 2017 and 2024, almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of Black defendants were remanded into custody at the Crown Court in Wales.⁴⁰ This compares to just over half (52 per cent) of White defendants (Ministry of Justice, 2025/27) (see Figure 2.2).

2.54 A fifth (22 per cent) of all Black defendants appearing at the magistrates' court in Wales between 2017 and 2024 were remanded into custody. This compares to 11 per cent of White defendants, 18 per cent of Mixed defendants, and 17 per cent of defendants from an Asian background (Ministry of Justice, 2025/27).⁴¹

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

⁴¹ 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.

Figure 2.3

The percentage of English and Welsh people in the general population and in prison by ethnic group in 2024⁴²

| Ethnic Group | Prisoners | % of Prison population | % of General population | Rate of Representation in Prison |
|----------------|-----------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| England | | | | |
| White | 57,712 | 70.9 | 81.1 | 0.87 |
| Black | 10,195 | 12.5 | 4.2 | 3 |
| Asian | 6,748 | 8.3 | 8.8 | 0.94 |
| Mixed | 3,945 | 4.9 | 3 | 1.6 |
| Wales | | | | |
| White | 4,339 | 88.2 | 93.8 | 0.94 |
| Black | 171 | 3.5 | 0.9 | 3.9 |
| Asian | 162 | 3 | 2.4 | 1.3 |
| Mixed | 161 | 3.3 | 1.6 | 2.1 |

2.55 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 2024, followed by those from a Mixed background and individuals belonging to an Asian ethnic group (see Figure 2.3) (Ministry of Justice, 2025/28; Office for National Statistics, 2022b).

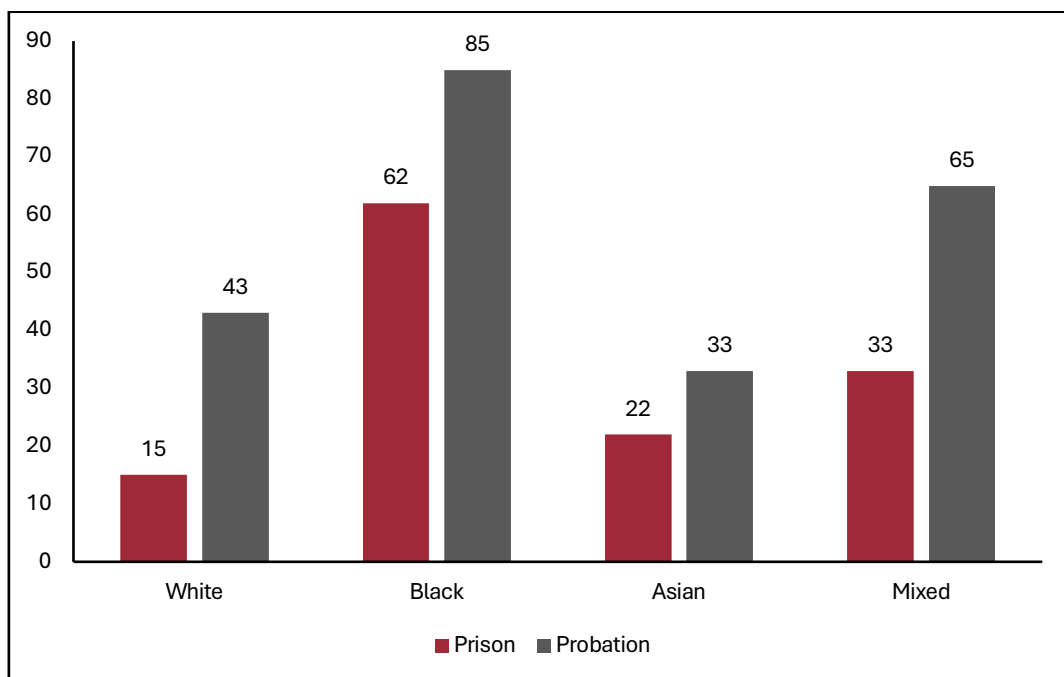
⁴² The 'Asian' category included here does not include those identified as 'Chinese' in the 2021 census or within the Ministry of Justice's prison population statistics. Population by ethnicity (2021 census): White (2,915,843); Black (27,554); Asian (74,577); Mixed (48,602).

2.56 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 2024.

2.57 English prisoners from a Black and Mixed ethnic group were also over-represented in prison in 2024. The level of over-representation for each of these groups, however, was higher in Wales than it was in England last year (see Figure 2.3) (Ministry of Justice, 2025/29; Office for National Statistics, 2022b).

Figure 2.4

Rates of imprisonment and probation supervision per 10,000 people by ethnic group in Wales in 2024⁴³



⁴³ The 'Asian' category included in the prison data does not include those identified as 'Chinese' in the 2021 census or within the Ministry of Justice's prison population statistics. Population by ethnicity (2021 census): White (2,915,843); Black (27,554); Asian (74,577); Mixed (48,602). The Ministry of Justice's probation statistics, however, include those identified as 'Chinese' within the Asian category. The rate calculated for the Asian probation population include those who identify as Chinese (14,454). Population by ethnicity (2021 census): White (2,915,843); Black (27,554); Asian (89,031); Mixed (48,602).

- 2.58** There were 62 Black people from Wales in prison for every 10,000 of the population in 2024. This rate compared to just 15 White people per 10,000 of the population. There were 22 Asian people in prison per 10,000 and 33 people from a Mixed background per 10,000 in prison in 2024 (see Figure 2.4).
- 2.59** While White and Asian individuals were under-represented among the Welsh probation population in 2024, Ministry of Justice (2025/30) data show that people from a Black and Mixed ethnic group were over-represented.
- 2.60** For every 10,000 Black people living in Wales, 85 were under probation supervision in 2024. This compared to a rate of 65 per 10,000 for individuals from a Mixed background, 43 for White and 33 for those from an Asian ethnic group (see Figure 2.4).
- 2.61** Research has also shown that individuals from minority ethnic groups are more likely to receive longer custodial sentences. The Ministry of Justice's (2024/24) *Statistics on Ethnicity and the Criminal Justice System 2022* showed that Asian, Black, and Mixed defendants in England and Wales receive longer custodial sentences than White defendants sentenced for indictable offences.
- 2.62** The average custodial sentence length in Wales between 2017 and 2024 was 9.4 months higher for Black defendants (25.2 months) than those from a White ethnic group (15.8 months) (Ministry of Justice, 2025/23).
- 2.63** In 2024, the average length of a custodial sentence in Wales for Black defendants was 22.9 months, compared to 15.2 months for White defendants.
- 2.64** 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 (63 per cent) served a higher proportion of their determinate sentences in prison, followed by Black (61 per cent), White (57 per cent) and Asian (57 per cent) prisoners (Jones, 2020).

- 2.65** 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, 2024/07). A Freedom of Information request for 2024 data was submitted to the Ministry of Justice on 2 October 2025 but no response was provided.
- 2.66** 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) 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.

3 PRISONS IN WALES

3.1 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 2025, the prison held a total of 1,861 prisoners, including sentenced (1,676), remand (183) and those held for non-criminal offences (two) (Ministry of Justice, 2025/31).
- HMP Cardiff is a category B reception and resettlement prison that holds adult males served by courts in the local area. The prison holds a mixture of remanded, unsentenced, sentenced and recalled prisoners. At the end of June 2025, the population at HMP Cardiff was 742, the majority of which were on remand (403), followed by those who were sentenced (336) and prisoners held for non-criminal offences (three) (Ministry of Justice, 2025/31).
- 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. In June 2025, there were a total of 1,777 prisoners being held at the adult facility, including sentenced (1,669), remand (106), and non-criminal prisoners (two) (Ministry of Justice, 2025/31).
- 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 2025, the prison held a total of

388 prisoners, with 194 sentenced, 192 on remand, and two imprisoned for non-criminal offences (Ministry of Justice, 2025/31).

- 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 2025, HMP Usk and HMP Prescoed had a combined population of 506 prisoners, all of which were sentenced (Ministry of Justice, 2025/31).

POPULATION

3.2 The average number of people held in the Welsh prison estate surpassed 5,000 for the first time in 2022. Since HMP Berwyn became operational in 2017, the average number of prisoners held in Wales has increased by 34 per cent. There were 5,314 people held in the Welsh prison estate in 2024.⁴⁴

3.3 Despite an overall reduction in the prison population in Wales, prisoner numbers marginally increased at HMP Parc (1 per cent) and HMP Berwyn (1 per cent) in 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/32).

⁴⁴ From 3,962 in 2017 to 5,314 in 2024.

Figure 3.1

The average prison population in Wales by establishment, 2019 to 2024

| Prison | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Berwyn | 1,448 | 1,737 | 1,783 | 1,826 | 1,950 | 1,952 |
| Cardiff | 717 | 698 | 679 | 732 | 764 | 706 |
| Parc | 1,642 | 1,644 | 1,625 | 1,640 | 1,756 | 1,768 |
| Swansea | 417 | 362 | 319 | 375 | 416 | 392 |
| Usk/Prescoed | 523 | 462 | 454 | 497 | 520 | 496 |
| Total | 4,747 | 4,902 | 4,860 | 5,069 | 5,406 | 5,314 |

3.4 On average, 1,861 prisoners from England were being held in Welsh prisons in 2024. That is the equivalent population of HMP Parc and represents a further increase on the level recorded in 2023 (1,780) (Ministry of Justice, 2025/06).

3.5 More than a third (35 per cent) of all prisoners held in Wales in 2024 were from England.

3.6 Since HMP Berwyn opened in February 2017, the number of English prisoners held in Wales has risen by 191 per cent.⁴⁵ At the end of December 2024, 65 per cent of prisoners held at HMP Berwyn were from England.

3.7 In total, prisoners from 113 different local authorities in England were being held at HMP Berwyn in December 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/06).

3.8 Despite the claim 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

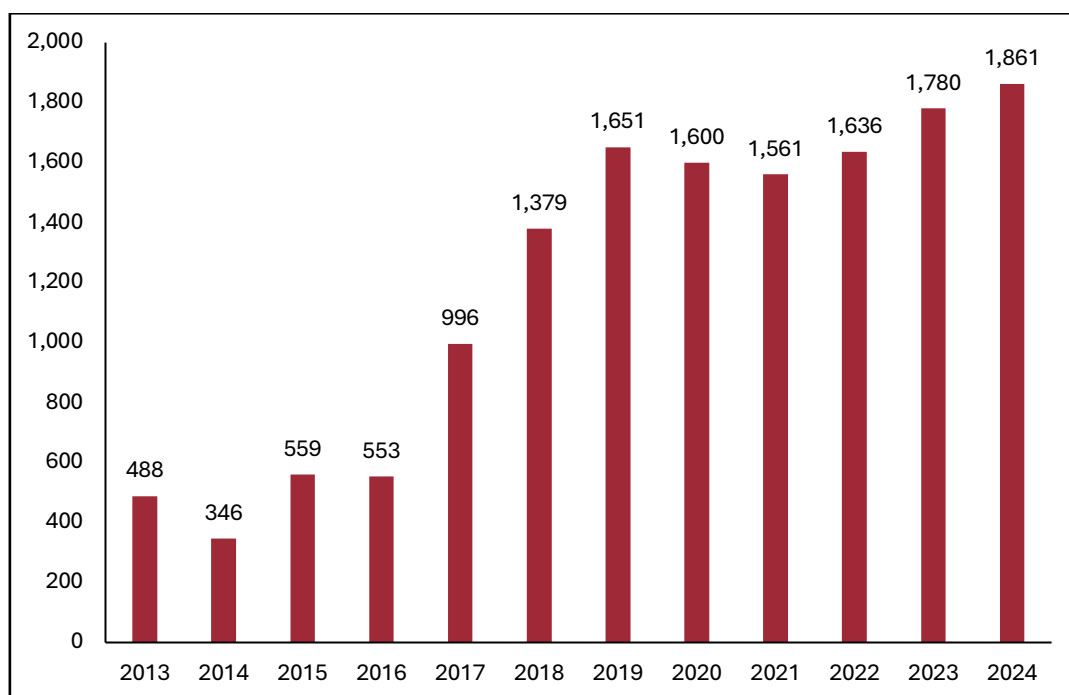
⁴⁵ From 622 in December 2016 to 1,807 in December 2024.

Committee, 2015: 11), prisoners from 80 English local authorities *outside* of North West England were also being held at HMP Berwyn in December 2024.

3.9 In total, 161 prisoners at HMP Berwyn had origin addresses in English local authorities outside the North West of England in December 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/06).

Figure 3.2

The average number of English prisoners held in Wales, 2013 to 2024



3.10 The number of first prison receptions in Wales increased by 5 per cent in 2024.⁴⁶ The largest increase was recorded at HMP Berwyn (19 per cent), followed by HMP Cardiff (14 per cent), HMP Swansea (5 per cent), and HMP Parc (3 per cent) (Ministry of Justice, 2025/33).

3.11 There were 550 additional receptions recorded at Welsh prisons in 2024 compared to the previous year.

⁴⁶ From 4,711 in 2023 to 5,261 in 2024.

Figure 3.3

The number of first prison receptions in Wales by establishment, 2019 to 2024

| Prison | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Berwyn | 57 | 826 | 1,100 | 943 | 1,029 | 1,228 |
| Cardiff | 2,459 | 2,047 | 2,457 | 1,973 | 1,924 | 2,197 |
| Parc | 345 | 275 | 353 | 321 | 391 | 401 |
| Swansea | 1,333 | 1,035 | 1,168 | 1,135 | 1,366 | 1,435 |
| Usk | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 4,194 | 4,183 | 5,078 | 4,372 | 4,711 | 5,261 |

3.12 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, the latest information 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 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/34).

3.13 More than half (57 per cent) of all prisoners arriving at HMP Berwyn in 2024 had no fixed address. This compared to a quarter of prisoners who arrived at HMP Cardiff (26 per cent), HMP Swansea (24 per cent) and 13 per cent of prisoners at HMP Parc (Ministry of Justice, 2025/34).⁴⁷

⁴⁷ The Ministry of Justice determined "No Fixed Address" (NFA) status using Basic Custody Screening Part 1 questions B3.1 ("What was your accommodation status before prison?") and B3.4 ("What type of housing did you live in before you came to prison?"). The system records only one No Fixed Address answer: if B3.1 is marked as NFA, B3.4 cannot be, and vice versa.

HMP Berwyn: 695; HMP Cardiff: 567; HMP Parc: 51; HMP Swansea: 337; HMP Usk/Prescoed: 0.

RELEASE AND HOMELESSNESS

- 3.14** 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).
- 3.15** 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.
- 3.16** 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 most recent annual rough sleeper count revealed that two-thirds (43 per cent) of those rough sleeping in Wales had a history of serving time in prison (Welsh Government, 2023).
- 3.17** 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).

- 3.18** The Ministry of Justice's early prison release scheme (SDS40) added to growing concerns over prisoner homelessness in England and Wales in 2024. For some, including HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, it was 'inevitable' that some prisoners would be released into homelessness and recalled to custody as a consequence of the UK government's policy (Vinter, 2024).
- 3.19** 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.
- 3.20** Between September 2024 and March 2025, there were 2,227 people released from Welsh prisons under SDS40 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/02). 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. The Ministry of Justice (2025/35) were unable to provide information to the Wales Governance Centre on the number of Welsh prisoners (based on home address) released as homeless under SDS40 because these data are drawn 'from different data sources'.

- 3.21** Ministry of Justice (2025/36) data obtained through the Freedom of Information Act 2000 show that 806 people were released from Welsh prisons without a fixed address to return to in 2024/25. This represents a 34 per cent increase on the level the year before.
- 3.22** On average, 15 people a week were released from Welsh prisons as homeless in 2024/25.
- 3.23** The majority of those released from prison as homeless in Wales were at HMP Cardiff (320), followed by HMP Berwyn (261), HMP Parc (111); HMP Swansea (110); and HMP Usk (four).
- 3.24** One in five (19 per cent) prisoners released from HMP Cardiff in the year ending March 2025 had no fixed address to return to. The number of those released from HMP Cardiff without a fixed address to return to increased by 13 per cent in 2024/25 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/36).⁴⁸
- 3.25** On average, six people a week were released from HMP Cardiff as homeless in 2024/25.
- 3.26** *Prisons and Sentencing in Wales: 2023 Factfile* revealed that the number of those managed by Welsh probation services who were rough sleeping upon release from prison had quadrupled since 2021/22 (Jones, 2024). The latest data show that the number of those rough sleeping had increased by a further 12 per cent in Wales in 2024/25 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/37).⁴⁹
- 3.27** Although the rate of rough sleeping upon release from prison continues to rise in Wales, it has done so at a much slower rate than England. In 2024/25, the number of those

⁴⁸ From 284 in 2023/24 to 320 in 2024/25.

⁴⁹ From 500 in 2023/24 to 560 in 2024/25.

managed by English probation services who were rough sleeping upon release increased by 46 per cent.⁵⁰

3.28 560 prison leavers managed by Welsh probation services were rough sleeping on the day of their release in 2024/25 (Ministry of Justice, 2024/39).

3.29 Almost one in ten (9 per cent) of those managed by Welsh probation services were rough sleeping on the day of their release from prison in 2024/25.

Figure 3.4

Type of accommodation on release from custody, 2019/20 to 2024/25⁵¹

| | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Settled Accommodation | 2,278 | 2,053 | 2,175 | 2,451 | 2,670 | 2,940 |
| Other Housed | 627 | 877 | 967 | 865 | 915 | 1,220 |
| Bail/Probation Accommodation | 482 | 433 | 574 | 721 | 900 | 1,190 |
| Homeless, Not Rough Sleeping | 581 | 400 | 314 | 106 | 105 | 45 |
| Rough Sleeping | 152 | 61 | 107 | 332 | 500 | 560 |
| Unknown | 1,284 | 911 | 295 | 197 | 100 | 140 |
| Total | 5,404 | 4,735 | 4,432 | 4,672 | 5,190 | 6,095 |

3.30 The number of those who were rough sleeping at 3 months post release from prison fell by 41 per cent in Wales in 2024/25 (Ministry of Justice, 2024/39). The number in England also decreased by 41 per cent last year.⁵²

⁵⁰ England: From 7,855 in 2023/24 to 11,440 in 2024/25.

Wales: From 500 in 2023/24 to 560 in 2024/25.

⁵¹ 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'. There were 20 cases where individuals were housed in Home Office Immigration Enforcement accommodation on release in 2024/25.

⁵² Wales: From 145 in 2023/24 to 85 in 2024/25.

England: From 3,230 in 2023/24 to 1,900.

- 3.31** While those rough sleeping at 3 months post release accounted for 4.7 per cent of the total outcomes recorded by Welsh probation services in 2023/24, this figure had decreased to 3.5 per cent in 2024/25.
- 3.32** Despite the continuing rise of rough sleepers in Wales, almost half (48 per cent) of those managed by Welsh probation services went into settled accommodation immediately following release in 2024/25 (Ministry of Justice, 2024/39). This compares to just 42 per cent of prison leavers entering settled accommodation in 2019/20.
- 3.33** The Welsh Government’s *Ending Homelessness* White Paper has recently set out the government’s plans to improve homelessness services for prison leavers in/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). The Homelessness and Social Housing Allocation (Wales) Bill was laid before the Senedd by the Cabinet Secretary for Housing and Local Government, Jane Bryant MS, in May 2025.

Figure 3.5

The number of prison releases in Wales by establishment, 2019 to 2024

| Prison | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Berwyn | 676 | 910 | 1,053 | 1,013 | 1,103 | 1,495 |
| Cardiff | 1,560 | 1,231 | 1,130 | 1,096 | 1,029 | 1,023 |
| Parc | 921 | 784 | 739 | 647 | 696 | 1,068 |
| Prescoed | 212 | 207 | 186 | 180 | 227 | 256 |
| Swansea | 845 | 789 | 619 | 717 | 746 | 748 |
| Usk | 59 | 83 | 61 | 64 | 54 | 69 |
| Total | 4,273 | 4,004 | 3,788 | 3,717 | 3,855 | 4,659 |

- 3.34** The number of releases from Welsh prisons increased by 21 per cent in 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/38). In total, 89 prisoners a week were released from Welsh prisons into the community last year, an average of 17 releases per day across Welsh prisons in 2024.⁵³
- 3.35** Data obtained via the Freedom of Information Act 2000 show that 1,899 Welsh prisoners (based on home address) were released under the SDS40 scheme between September 2024 and March 2025 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/39).
- 3.36** Prisoners given a determinate sentence are released from prison – in most cases automatically at the half-way point of their sentence⁵⁴ – under licensed supervision by the Probation Service. Released prisoners are subject to a set of standard licence conditions that require them to report regularly to the Probation Service. Those who are released under licence are subject to recall to prison immediately if the probation service reports that an individual has breached the conditions of their licence.
- 3.37** The number of supervised persons on licence in Wales increased by 16 per cent in 2024.⁵⁵ On average, there were 2,343 supervised persons on licence in Wales last year (Ministry of Justice, 2025/40).

SAFETY IN CUSTODY

- 3.38** The topic of prison and prisoner safety in Wales was catapulted to the forefront of public and political debate in 2024 following a series of deaths at HMP Parc. According to the then Minister of State at the Ministry of Justice, there had been nine deaths recorded at HMP Parc between March and May 2024 alone (Argar, 2024).

⁵³ 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.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2015-02-02/222892/>

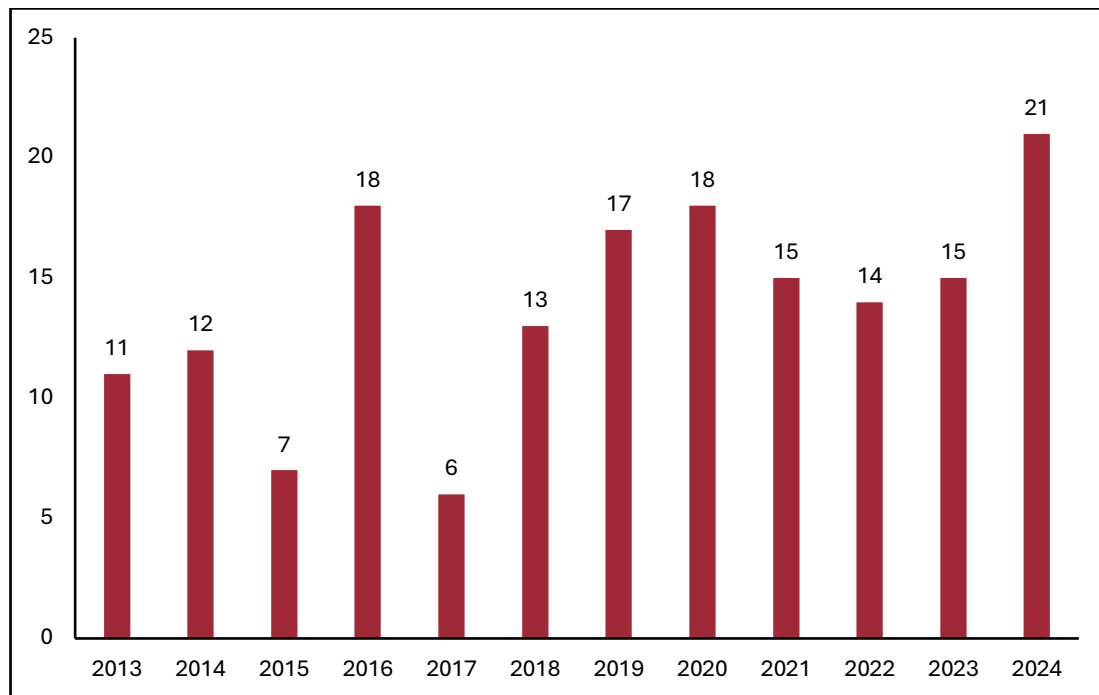
⁵⁴ For a detailed description of the differences between sentence lengths see Sentencing Council (2023).

⁵⁵ From 2,019 in 2023 to 2,343 in 2024.

3.39 There were a record number (21) of deaths across the Welsh prison estate in 2024, 17 of which were recorded at HMP Parc (Ministry of Justice, 2025/41).

Figure 3.6

The number of deaths in Welsh prisons, 2013 to 2024⁵⁶



3.40 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 are 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).

⁵⁶ Data for 2024 capture those deaths recorded up to June 2024.

3.41 According to Ministry of Justice (2025/42) data, there was a 71 per cent increase in the number of drug finds at HMP Parc in 2024/25,⁵⁷ including a 57 per cent rise in the number of psychoactive substances.⁵⁸

3.42 The recent deaths recorded in Wales have added further significant weight to longstanding concerns over 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 prisoner suffering from physical and mental health problems (INQUEST, 2020: 7-8).

Figure 3.7

The number of self-inflicted deaths in Wales by establishment, 2019 to 2024

| Prison | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | Total |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Berwyn | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Cardiff | 2 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 9 |
| Parc | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 5 |
| Swansea | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Usk/Prescoed | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 4 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 18 |

⁵⁷ From 659 in 2023/24 to 1,124 in 2024/25.

⁵⁸ From 304 in 2023/24 to 478 in 2024/25.

- 3.43** Ministry of Justice (2025/41) data show that there have been 18 confirmed self-inflicted deaths in Welsh prisons between 2020 and 2024. The majority of these deaths took place at HMP Cardiff (10), followed by HMP Parc (5), HMP Swansea (2) and HMP Berwyn (1).
- 3.44** There were four self-inflicted deaths recorded across the Welsh prison estate in 2024, three of which were at HMP Parc.
- 3.45** Disaggregated data obtained for the very first time from the Ministry of Justice show that of the 89 self-inflicted deaths recorded in England and Wales in 2024, four individuals had a recorded origin address in Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2025/43).
- 3.46** A report published by the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee (2018: 14) identified ‘natural cause’ deaths as the ‘leading cause of mortality’ in prisons in England and Wales. A recent study on healthcare in prisons in England and Wales found that prisoners are likely to die from ‘natural causes’ 20 years earlier than those held in the general population (The National Confidential Enquiry into Patient Outcome and Death, 2024).
- 3.47** 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).
- 3.48** 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).

- 3.49** Between 2020 and 2024, there were a total of 49 deaths across the Welsh prison estate with the cause of death attributed to ‘natural causes’ (Ministry of Justice, 2025/41). While a third (33 per cent) of all prisoners in the Welsh prison estate were held at HMP Parc during this period, over half (53 per cent) of all natural cause deaths in Wales were recorded at HMP Parc between 2020 and 2024.⁵⁹
- 3.50** In 2024, there were eight ‘natural cause’ deaths recorded at HMP Parc.
- 3.51** 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 (2024:1) 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, 2024:1). 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 failings’ had in fact contributed to Mr Nunes’ death. According to the Ombudsman (2024:4) ‘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.
- 3.52** 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 3.8).

⁵⁹ There were 26 natural cause deaths recorded at HMP Parc between 2020 and 2024.

Figure 3.8

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 |

3.53 The introduction of measures to combat the spread of Covid-19 in prisons contributed to a significant reduction in the number of safety related incidents recorded across England and Wales. In Wales, there was a decline 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).⁶⁰

3.54 Although the safety in custody measures suggested that significant improvements were made across England and Wales, the impact of Covid-19 restrictions and the associated regime changes in prisons ‘muddled the picture’ somewhat (Prison Reform Trust, 2023: 4). HMI Prisons (2021: 3) found that rather than ceasing, patterns of ‘violence, intimidation and bullying’ had simply ‘taken other forms’.

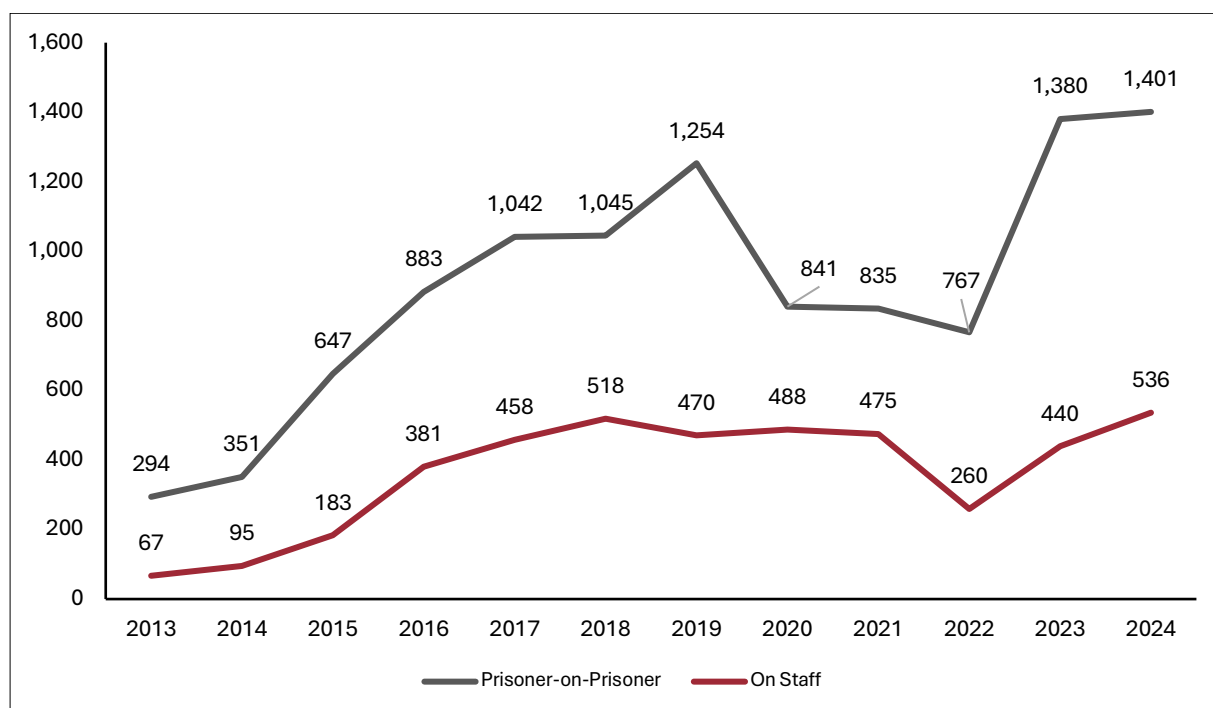
3.55 As prisons return to their ‘normal regimes’ and the prison population continues to rise across England and Wales, prison safety has rapidly deteriorated. In Wales, there have been year on year increases in the number of assault incidents since 2022.

⁶⁰ 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.

3.56 Although the total number of prisoner-on-prisoner assaults in Wales increased by 2 per cent in 2024, the number of incidents fell in four out of five Welsh prisons.⁶¹ The 15 per cent increase recorded at HMP Parc, however, was enough to cause the all-Wales level to rise (Ministry of Justice, 2025/41).⁶²

Figure 3.9

Prisoner-on-Prisoner assaults and Assaults on Staff and in Wales, 2013 to 2024



3.57 Assaults on prison staff also rose (22 per cent) in 2024.⁶³ At HMP Berwyn, there was a 42 per cent increase last year, with the number of recorded incidents also increasing at HMP Cardiff (22 per cent), HMP Swansea (17 per cent), and HMP Parc (3 per cent) (Ministry of Justice, 2024/44).⁶⁴

⁶¹ From 1,380 in 2023 to 1,401 in 2024.

⁶² HMP Berwyn: From 605 in 2023 to 599 in 2024; HMP Cardiff: From 207 in 2023 to 191 in 2023; HMP Parc: From 474 in 2023 to 543 in 2024; HMP Swansea: From 70 in 2023 to 60 in 2024; HMP Usk/Prescoed: From 24 in 2023 to 8 in 2024.

⁶³ From 440 in 2023 to 536 in 2024.

⁶⁴ HMP Berwyn: From 186 in 2023 to 264 in 2024; HMP Cardiff: From 41 in 2023 to 50 in 2024; HMP Parc: From 190 in 2023 to 195 in 2024; HMP Swansea: From 23 in 2023 to 27 in 2024. There was no total available for HMP Usk/Prescoed in 2023.

- 3.58** 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.
- 3.59** The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture’s (2020: 6) inquiry into inhumane or degrading treatment in the prison estate 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.
- 3.60** Data obtained from the Ministry of Justice (2025/44) through the Freedom of Information Act 2000 show that there were at least nine cases where prison staff in Wales were subject to either Investigations or Conduct and Discipline for charge of ‘Assault/Unnecessary use of force’ on a prisoner in 2023/24. Six of these cases were recorded at HMP Berwyn.⁶⁵
- 3.61** In September 2025, five staff members at HMP Parc were sacked following an investigation into leaked messages which 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).
- 3.62** Data obtained by the Wales Governance Centre show that there were 7,842 prescribed complaint forms (COMP1, COMP 1A, COMP 2) submitted by prisoners in Wales in

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.

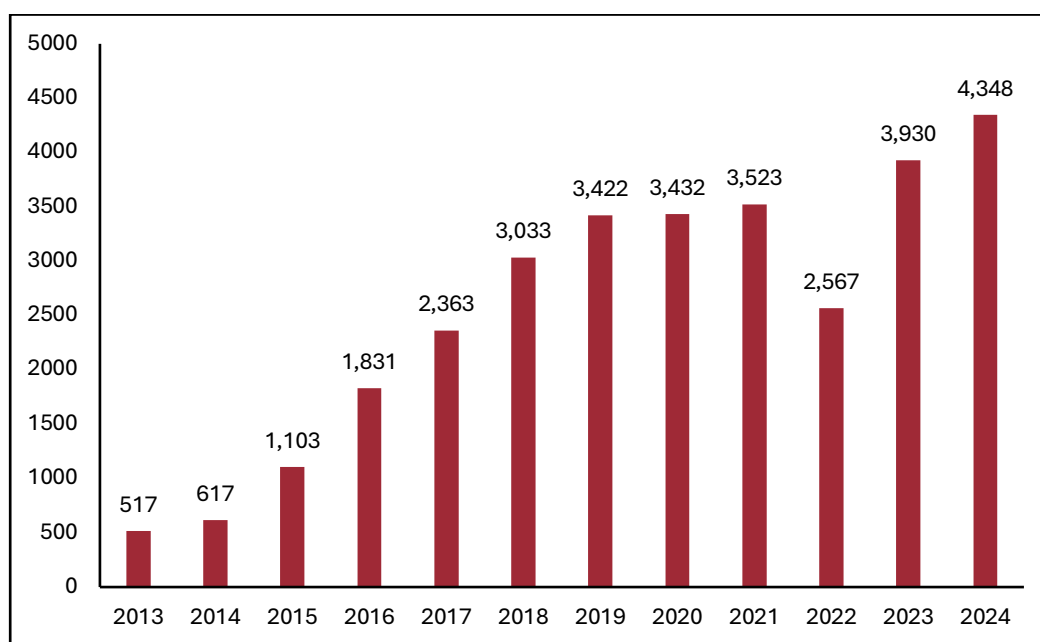
⁶⁵ A total for HMP Swansea was not provided as values of 1 or 2 are suppressed by the Ministry of Justice to prevent disclosure in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

2024. The majority of these were submitted by prisoners at HMP Berwyn (4,866), followed by HMP Cardiff (1,792), HMP Swansea (611), HMP Usk (424), and HMP Prescoed (149). HMP Parc are excluded from the data because they are a privately operated prison (Ministry of Justice, 2025/45).

3.63 Despite reaching their highest ever level in 2023 (Jones, 2024), the number of self-harm incidents recorded in Welsh prisons increased by a further 11 per cent in 2024.⁶⁶

Figure 3.10

Self-harm incidents in Wales, 2013 to 2024



3.64 Although the number of incidents fell at HMP Usk/Prescoed (56 per cent) and HMP Parc (10 per cent) last year, self-harm incidents rose at HMP Berwyn (48 per cent), HMP Cardiff (16 per cent), and HMP Swansea (17 per cent) in 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/41).⁶⁷

⁶⁶ From 3,930 in 2023 to 4,348 in 2024.

⁶⁷ HMP Berwyn: From 1,142 in 2023 to 1,692 in 2024; HMP Cardiff: From 470 in 2023 to 545 in 2024; HMP Parc: From 2,133 in 2023 to 1,914 in 2024; HMP Swansea: From 158 in 2023 to 185 in 2024; HMP Usk/Prescoed: From 27 in 2023 to 12 in 2024.

- 3.65** Of the 13,897 individuals who self-harmed in prison in England and Wales in 2024, 1,018 had a recorded origin address in Wales. At a time when the number of individuals who self-harmed in England and Wales increased by 8 per cent, the number of Welsh prisoners (based on home address) who self-harmed rose by 14 per cent last year (Ministry of Justice, 2025/01).⁶⁸
- 3.66** 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). Data on the number of prisoners held in Care and Separation Units in Welsh prisons was provided to the Wales Governance Centre in October 2025 following a request to the Ministry of Justice under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. These data have not been included here as a query seeking clarification about the data (and their meaning) has yet to be responded to.

⁶⁸ From 890 individuals in 2023 to 1,018 in 2024.

4 THE COURTS AND SENTENCING⁶⁹

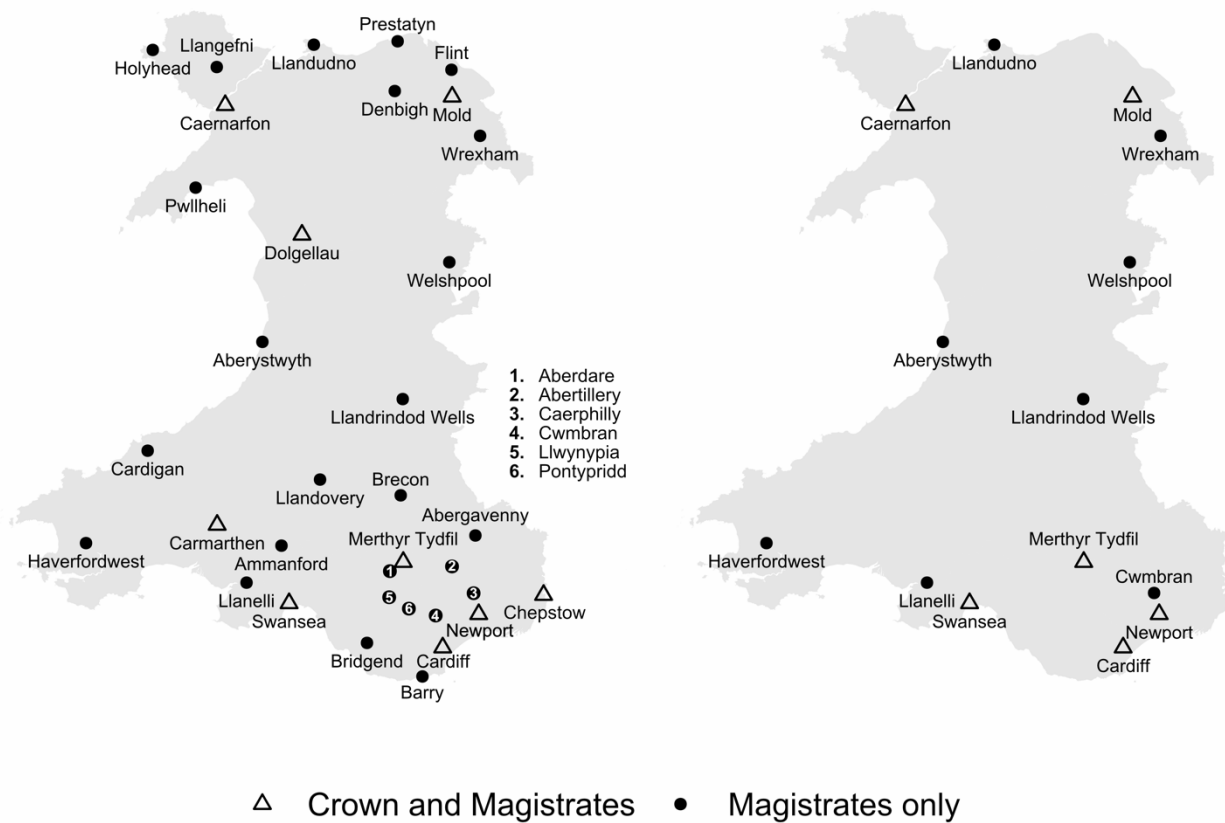
- 4.1** The Covid-19 restrictions put in place by the UK Government, particularly in relation to court proceedings, were responsible for major disruption to the ‘normal system flow of individuals’ through the criminal justice system in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2021a: 2).
- 4.2** A significant 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 2024, there were almost 75,000 outstanding criminal cases at the Crown Court in England and Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2025/46).
- 4.3** 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 (Jones and Wyn Jones, 2023; Newman and Dehaghani, 2023) (see Map 4.1).
- 4.4** Disaggregated criminal court data show that the backlog of cases in the magistrates’ court and Crown Court in Wales is also growing. In 2024, the average number of

⁶⁹ 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 (2024/05:5) 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.

outstanding cases in the magistrates' court reached 13,494 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/47).⁷⁰

Map 4.1

Crown and magistrates' courts in Wales, 2010 (left) to 2023 (right)⁷¹



4.5 At the end of December 2024, a total of 11,850 cases were outstanding at the magistrates' court in Wales.

⁷⁰ The magistrates caseload data for previous years has been revised by HMCTS following work to improve its data and management information. HMCTS found that the magistrates' courts open caseload data had been 'significantly overstated' in its previous statistics. These changes mean that comparisons between 2023 data have not been made here.

⁷¹ Adapted from Jones and Wyn Jones (2022).

- 4.6** The backlog at the Crown Court in Wales is also severe. The average number of outstanding cases in 2024 increased by 15 per cent.⁷² While there were a total of 6,785 ‘receipts’ last year, only 6,607 cases were ‘disposed’ of (Ministry of Justice, 2025/46).
- 4.7** In December 2024, there were 2,663 outstanding cases at the Crown Court in Wales. This represents a 7 per cent increase on the level recorded in 2023 (2,480).
- 4.8** 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 2020,⁷³ with prosecutions falling at a slightly higher rate (31 per cent) in England (Ministry of Justice, 2025/23). Although the number of prosecutions has steadily increased since 2020, the level recorded in Wales in 2024 still remains lower than the number before the outbreak of Covid-19.⁷⁴
- 4.9** The number of convictions recorded in Wales has also fallen since 2019. However, while the level has yet to return to its pre-pandemic level, convictions have increased in Wales by 34 per cent since 2020.⁷⁵
- 4.10** On average, the proportion of cases resulting in a conviction has been higher in Wales (87.9 per cent) than in England (86.6 per cent) since 2013 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/23).
- 4.11** In 2024, the conviction rate in Wales (89.5 per cent) was once again higher than the level recorded in England (87.9 per cent). Data published by the Ministry of Justice show that 2017 remains the only year where the conviction rate in England (88.7 per cent) has surpassed the level reached in Wales (88.2 per cent) since 2013 (see Figure 4.1) (Ministry of Justice, 2025/23).⁷⁶

⁷² From 2,327 in 2023 to 2,680 in 2024.

⁷³ From 95,655 prosecutions in 2019 to 69,737 in 2020.

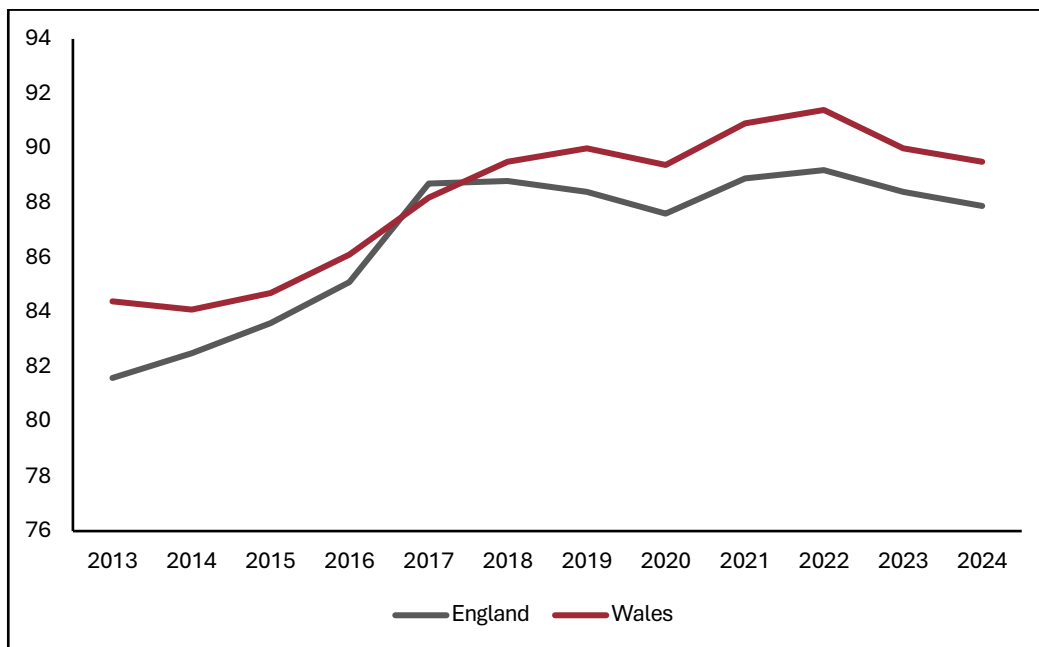
⁷⁴ From 95,655 in 2019 to 93,708 in 2024.

⁷⁵ From 62,396 in 2020 to 83,829 in 2024.

⁷⁶ 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 (2024/22:5) 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 4.1

Conviction rates in Wales and England, 2013 to 2024



4.12 The reduction in the flow of cases through the criminal courts has also impacted on the number of individuals being sentenced across Wales. In 2024, the number of people sentenced at the Crown Court in Wales remained lower (3 per cent) than the level recorded in 2019.⁷⁷

4.13 In England, the number of those sentenced at the Crown Court was 14 per cent higher in 2024 than it was in 2019.⁷⁸ While those sentenced at the Crown Court rose by 11 per cent in England in the year ending December 2024, the number only increased by 9 per cent in Wales.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ From 4,811 in 2019 to 4,687 in 2024.

⁷⁸ From 69,610 in 2019 to 79,591 in 2024.

⁷⁹ England: From 71,986 in 2023 to 79,591 in 2024.
Wales: From 3,981 in 2022 to 4,229.

4.14 The total number of immediate custodial sentences handed out in Wales increased by ten per cent in 2024. In England, immediate custodial sentences rose by 11 per cent last year (Ministry of Justice, 2025/23).⁸⁰

IMPRISONMENT RATES

4.15 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 (Ministry of Justice, 2024/09).

4.16 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*.⁸¹

4.17 On average, there were 86,802 people in prison on any given day in England and Wales in 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/04).

⁸⁰ Wales: From 4,296 in 2023 to 4,687 in 2024.

England: From 60,378 in 2022 to 67,005 in 2023.

⁸¹ 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 (Fair and Walmsley, 2024).

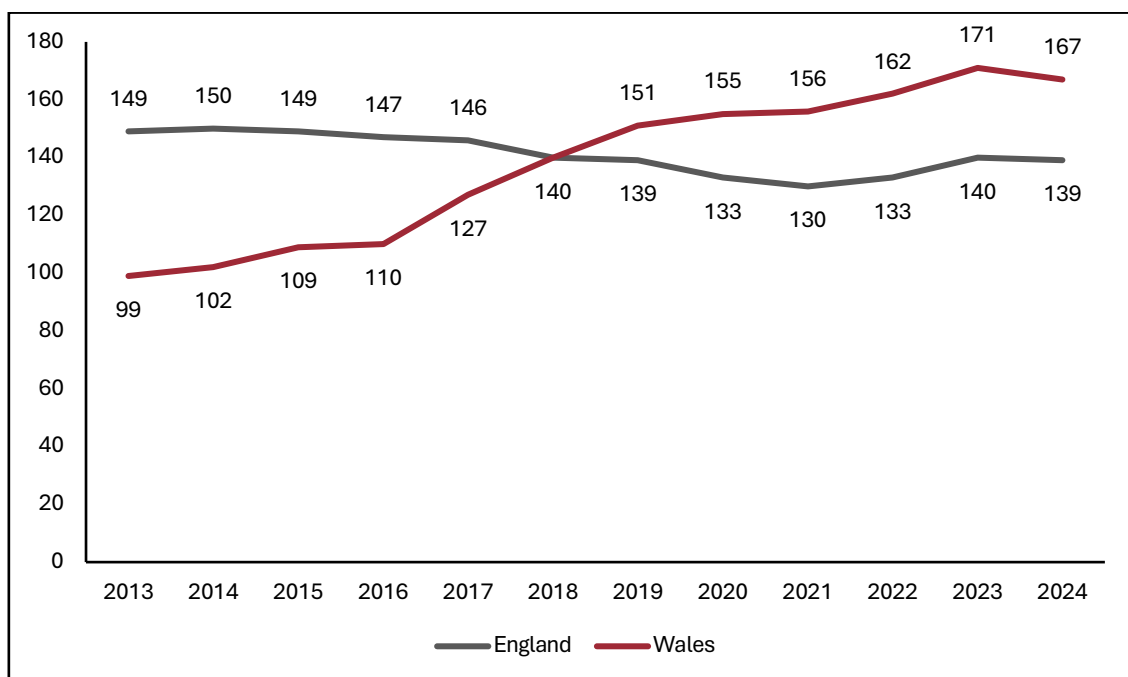
4.18 Taking all fourteen published *World Prison Population Lists* together, England and Wales has recorded the highest average prison population rate (140 per 100,000) in western Europe since 1999.

4.19 With a combined population of 61,806,682, the England and Wales imprisonment rate was 140 prisoners per 100,000 population in 2024 (Office for National Statistics, 2024).⁸²

4.20 There were 81,488 people held in 115 English prisons in 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2024/34). Based on the ‘in-country’ method used in the *World Prison Population List*, England’s rate of imprisonment was 139 per 100,000 in 2024.

Figure 4.2

Prison population rates per 100,000 in England and Wales using ‘in-country’ method, 2013 to 2024



⁸² England: 58,620,101; Wales: 3,186,581.

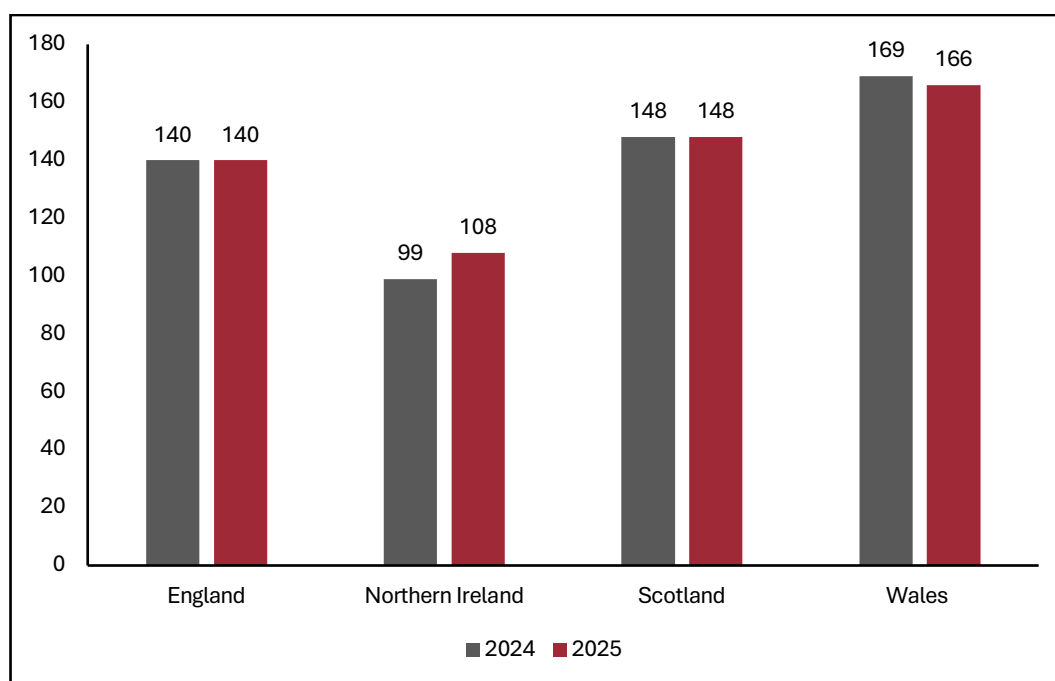
- 4.21** On average, 5,314 people were held in Welsh prisons in 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/32). Based upon the number of prisoners held in the Welsh prison estate, Wales had an ‘in-country’ imprisonment rate of 167 prisoners per 100,000 in 2024.
- 4.22** Wales has now recorded a higher ‘in-country’ imprisonment rate than England every year since 2019 (see Figure 4.2).
- 4.23** 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 (2022: 2) planned to create ‘at least’ 6,240 additional prison places across four sites in England (Jones et al. 2022). The newly elected UK Labour government’s *10-Year Prison Capacity Strategy* has reiterated the Westminster government’s commitment to prison expansion, including the construction of 14,000 prison places by 2031 (Ministry of Justice, 2024/08).
- 4.24** A snapshot of 2025 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 2025, the ‘in-country’ rate of imprisonment in Wales was 166 per 100,000, compared to a rate of 140 per 100,000 in England (Ministry of Justice, 2025/31).⁸³
- 4.25** 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 exceeds the level recorded in any other country in western Europe.
- 4.26** Although prisoner numbers are rising across all parts of the United Kingdom (UK), data from June 2025 show that Wales comfortably boasts the highest UK imprisonment rate (166 per 100,000), followed by Scotland (148), England (140), and Northern Ireland (108) (National Records of Scotland, 2024; Northern Ireland Department of Justice,

⁸³ England: Population – 58,620,101; Prisoner population – 82,916.
Wales: Population – 3,186,581; Prisoner population – 5,434.

2025; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2024; Scottish Prison Service, 2025).⁸⁴

Figure 4.3

Prison population rates per 100,000 in the United Kingdom using ‘in-country’ method, June 2024⁸⁵ and June 2025



4.27 The Wales Governance Centre’s *Sentencing and Immediate Custody in Wales* (2019) report used disaggregated data to provide an alternative calculation of prison rates in England and Wales using home address. According to the Ministry of Justice, there were a total of 86,338 people in prison with a home address in either England or Wales in 2024 (Ministry of Justice, 2025/05; 2025/06).

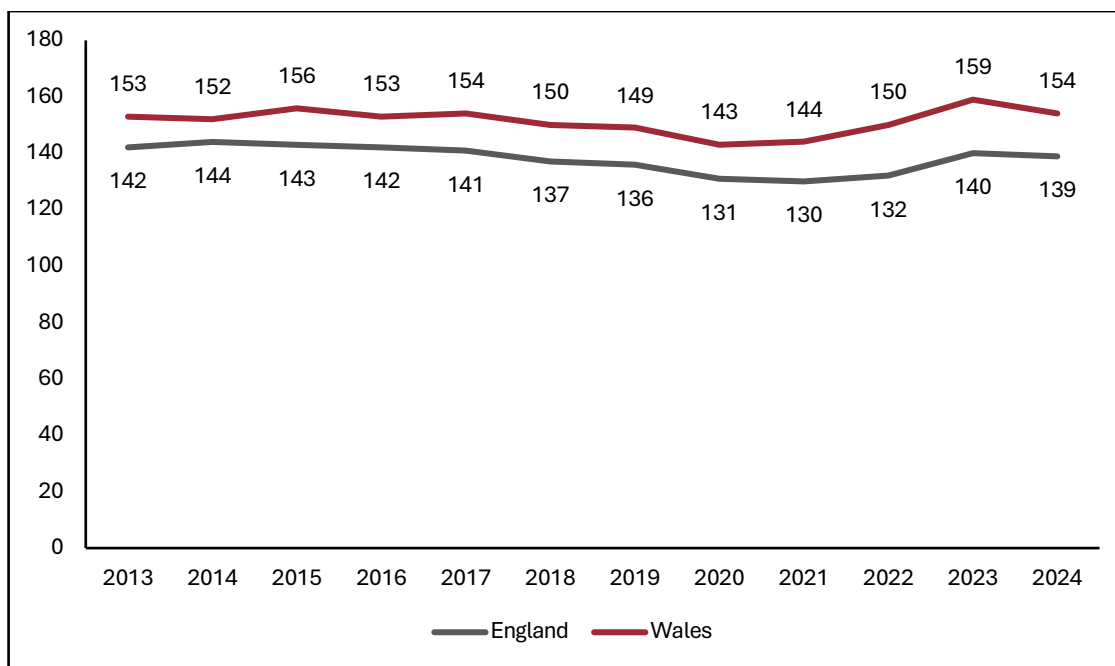
⁸⁴ Scotland: Population – 5,490,100; Prisoner population – 8,145.

Northern Ireland: Population – 1,920,400; Prisoner population – 2,065.

⁸⁵ Prison population (June 2024): England: 81,967; Northern Ireland: 1,905; Scotland: 8,140; Wales: 5,393.

Figure 4.4

Prison population rates per 100,000 in England and Wales using ‘home address’, 2013 to 2024⁸⁶



4.28 ‘Home address’ data show that Wales has recorded a higher rate of imprisonment than England in every year since 2013 (see Figure 4.4).

4.29 In 2024, there were 154 Welsh prisoners per 100,000 of the Welsh population. This compared to a rate of 139 English prisoners per 100,000 of the population of England.⁸⁷

4.30 The general Welsh population would need to increase by 380,000 to bring the Welsh imprisonment rate in line with England’s in 2024. Alternatively, the English prisoner total

⁸⁶ The population data used here are from multiple years (Office for National Statistics, 2024). The spike in the Welsh imprisonment rate recorded between 2021 and 2022 can be explained by the combined effects of an increase in the prisoner population and the use of 2021 Census data which saw the general population decrease in Wales. Revised mid-year population estimates for 2022 were published by the ONS in November 2023. The 2022 figures have been updated here to reflect these data.

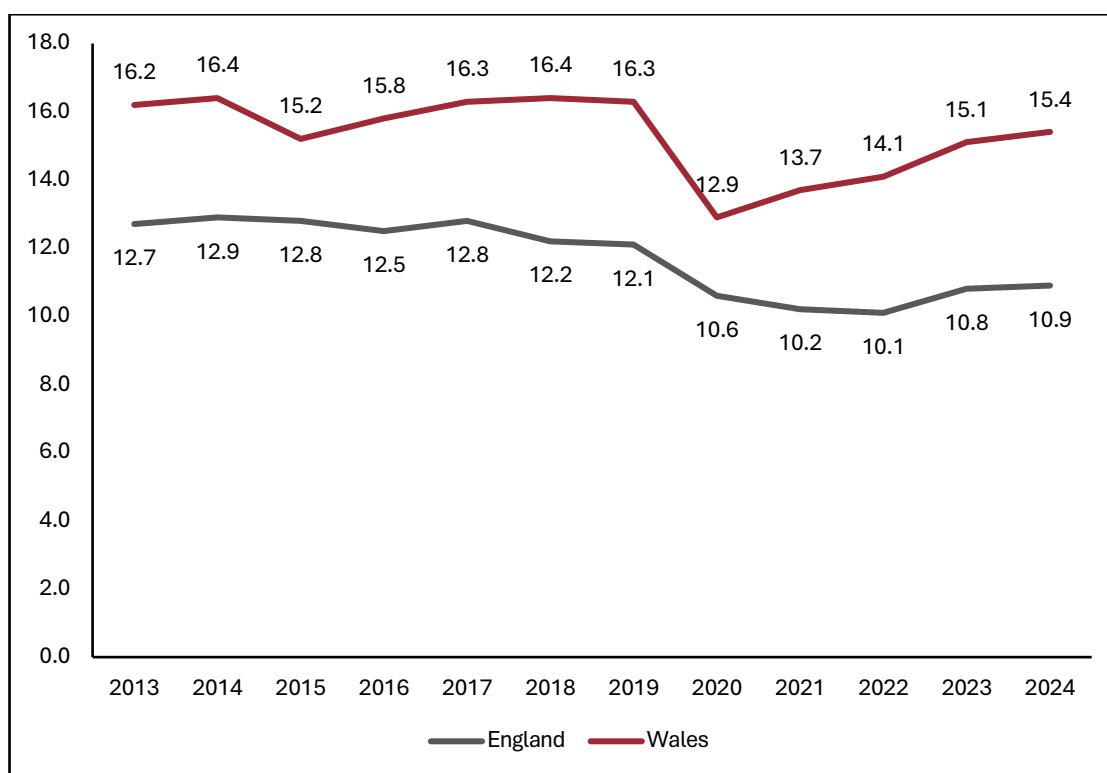
⁸⁷ England: Population – 58,620,101; English prisoners (based on home address): 81,420.
Wales: Population – 3,186,581; Welsh prisoners (based on home address): 4,918.

recorded in 2024 would need to rise by 9,000 (11 per cent) to achieve an imprisonment rate equal to Wales.

4.31 1 in every 648 people from Wales were in prison in 2024. This figure compares to 1 in every 720 people from England.

Figure 4.5

The female imprisonment rate (per 100,000 women) in England and Wales, 2013 to 2024⁸⁸



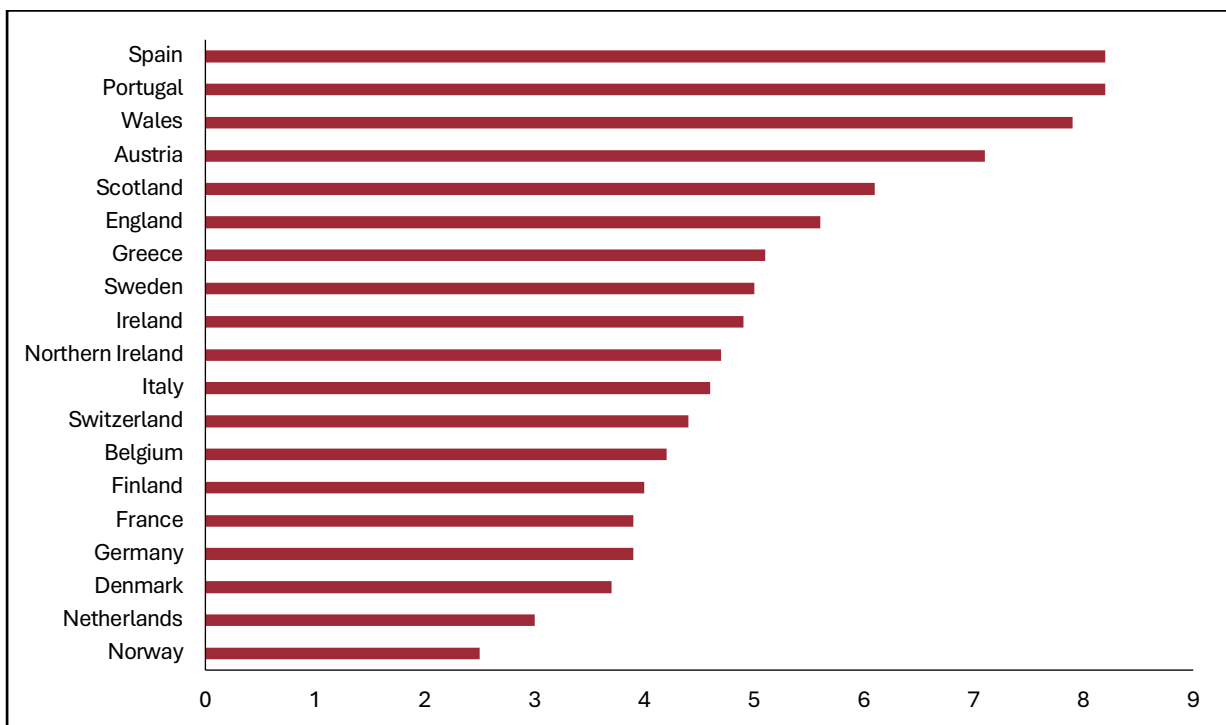
⁸⁸ The population data used here are from multiple years (Office for National Statistics, 2024).

4.32 *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 (Jones and Wyn Jones, 2022).

4.33 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 rate recorded in Spain (8.2 per 100,000) and Portugal (8.2 per 100,000) exceeded the female imprisonment rate in Wales (7.6 per 100,000) in 2024.

Figure 4.6

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



4.34 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.

4.35 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 2024, there has been a 62 per cent decrease in the number of community sentences handed out at courts in Wales (Ministry of Justice, 2025/23).⁸⁹

4.36 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.

⁸⁹ From 11,518 in 2010 to 4,362 in 2024.

CONCLUSION

The last 12 months have been another difficult year for prisons in Wales. Despite the UK Government's resolve that it will eventually deliver improvements to prisons through a 'sweep of flagship' reforms (Lord Timpson, 2025:1), many of the challenges facing Welsh prisons and prisoners persist. In some areas, the data presented in this latest *Factfile* reveal that the problems are getting worse. Prisoner safety levels, for example, continue to deteriorate, with the number of prisoner deaths and incidents of self-harm reaching record levels in Wales in 2024. Those leaving prison as 'rough sleepers' rose further, as did the number of those held in prison having been remanded and recalled. Despite a small reduction in the total number of Welsh people in prison last year, Wales' imprisonment rate once again exceeded the level reached anywhere else in western Europe.

But it is not only the UK Government who are accountable for the problems identified in this latest *Factfile*. Indeed, despite the introduction of Welsh Government policies and initiatives to help tackle racial discrimination in the criminal justice system and reduce the number of women in the criminal justice system, these areas continue to be marred by poor outcomes. Those from minority ethnic backgrounds in Wales, for example, are once again over-represented among the Welsh prisoner and probation population. Individuals belonging to an ethnic minority in Wales are more likely to be remanded in custody, sentenced to longer prison terms, and required to serve a higher proportion of their sentence in prison. While the UK Justice Secretary raised concerns about the possibility of creating a 'two-tier' system for ethnic minorities and non-ethnic minorities in response to the Sentencing Council's proposals in March 2025, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that such a 'two-tier' system already exists in Wales when confronted with the data presented here.

The Welsh Government's *Women's Justice Blueprint* also continues to flatter to deceive. Despite its many promises and pledges to help divert women from the criminal justice system and promote the use of alternatives to custody, the number of Welsh women in prison increased for the fourth consecutive year in 2024. More women sentenced at courts in Wales received custodial sentences of a month or less last year, and the use of remand increased

further. Six years on since the *Women's Justice Blueprint* was first introduced in May 2019, the data presented in this latest *Factfile* raise urgent and important questions over the effectiveness of the Blueprint and the need for a renewed or radically different approach in Wales. Ahead of the 2026 Senedd election, this is something that all political parties in Wales should be paying serious attention to.

Beyond these continuing problems, however, there have been *some* positive developments over the last year. Thirteen years on since the Wales Governance Centre first began collecting Wales-only prison data through the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Ministry of Justice's decision to begin routinely publishing these data represents a significant milestone. These releases will undoubtedly improve transparency and scrutiny over the Welsh criminal justice system and can support the development of (much needed) high-quality, rigorous, and critical academic work on the criminal justice system in Wales. However, despite agreeing to provide most of the data included in the Wales Governance Centre's list of priority areas, there remain many important sources of data excluded from the *Welsh Justice Data: Annual Release*. It is hoped that further data sources will be added to these important and much needed releases in the years to come.

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