

Who's in prison? A snapshot of Scotland's prison population



How many people are in prison in Scotland?

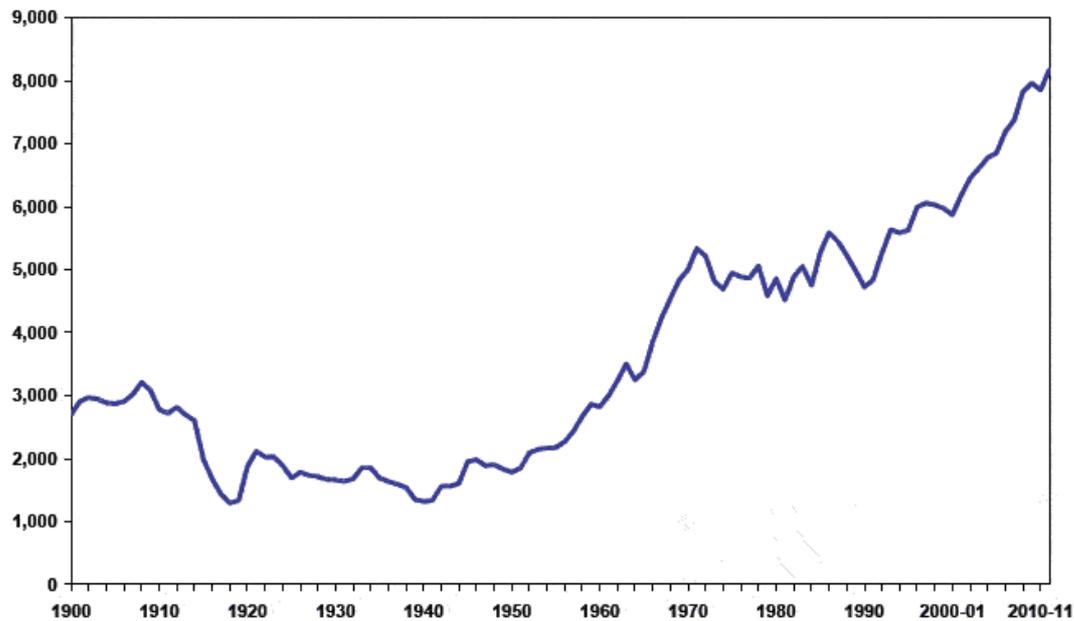
[Figures for July 2015](#) showed there were **8,062 prisoners** held in prisons across Scotland. Due to releases and court outcomes, exact numbers change from day to day, and even within each day. At any given time, around 300 prisoners are on Home Detention Curfew (HDC), which means they are living at home adhering to a curfew and wearing an electronic monitor.

[Scotland has 15 prisons](#). 13 prisons are public and are run by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), and two are privately run for profit under contract to the SPS. The majority of prisons are located across the Central Belt of Scotland (this is also the most densely populated section of the country), though there are prisons across the country. If you want to more about this, the [Scottish Prison Service \(SPS\) website](#) has detailed information about each prison.

What is Scotland's imprisonment rate?

Scotland today imprisons more people than it ever has since imprisonment records began.

As is outlined in the [2008 Scottish Prisons Commission Report](#), Scotland has one of the highest rates of imprisonment in western Europe.



Average daily prison population (Scotland) from 1900 to 2011-2012, Justice Analytical Services, Scottish Government

International comparison

The [International Centre for Prison Studies](#) provides a comparison of a sample of European countries, using the most recent figures (2014) (numbers per 100,000 population):

Scotland	147
England and Wales	149
France	102
Germany	81
Finland	57
Hungary	182
Italy	87
Norway	72

To see how Scotland compares to the rest of the world, look at [the International Prisons Research Centre website, 'Highest to Lowest' Prison Population Rate, across the globe.](#)

You can see rates across different continents, and also for specific populations of prisoner such as foreign prisoners, women and those who are remanded, as well as occupancy levels. You can also look at the total numbers of prisoners for each country, but given differences in population size, countries cannot be properly compared using this measure.

Understanding rising imprisonment rates

In recent years, many countries in the world have seen increasing rates of imprisonment, which cannot be explained by changes in levels of crime (crime has been falling in Scotland for many years). The suggested reasons for increases in Scotland's prison population are presented below.

However, it is important to consider that changes in imprisonment rates in any country do not *just happen*. **Penal policy** (policy on punishment) shapes these rates, and the political and social climate of any society at a given time shapes the penal policy.

As the [International Prisons Research Centre](#) website shows, there is considerable variation between different countries and parts of the world.

Examples:

The USA

Over the past 30 years there has been a rapid and vast expansion of the imprisonment rate in the USA, which has been called "*mass incarceration*" by criminologist **David Garland**. The USA is home to 5% of the world's total population, yet 25% of its prison population. In July 2015, President Barack Obama gave a speech calling for an end to *mass incarceration*, commenting on, among other things, the scale of the problem, the disproportionate impact of imprisonment on 'communities of colour', and sub-standard prison conditions. To see a transcript of his speech, [click here](#).

Scandinavia

Scandinavian countries have some of the lowest imprisonment rates in the world. This phenomenon (see [SCCJR 'What is prison for?'](#)) has been referred to by some academics as '*Nordic exceptionalism*'.

[This academic paper](#) offers a comprehensive insight into the nature and roots of 'Nordic exceptionalism'.

What is particularly interesting is that Finland was previously an exception to this '*Nordic exceptionalism*'. Until the 1970s, Finland had one of the highest rates of imprisonment in Western Europe, which was out of kilter with its Nordic counterparts. However, there was a concerted effort to reduce the prison population which involved: a move away from prison sentences as a primary strategy of crime control, and a move towards wider social welfare investment as a focus of attention. This is reflected in a slogan that was part of the reform: "good social development policy is the best criminal policy" (Lappi-Seppälä, 2008). Finland's imprisonment rate is now comparable to the rest of Scandinavia.

In the 2008 [Scottish Prisons Commission Report](#), Finland was referred to as a case study in "improving and reducing the use of imprisonment".

Why have we seen such increases in Scotland's prison population in recent years?

These are due to an:

- Increase in the number of convictions and increased sentence length, which has increased the **long-term** prison population
- Increase in the number of custodial sentences for those convicted of less serious offences
- Increase in the number of remand prisoners (see below)
- Increase in recalls from supervision or licence

Long-term prisoners: those serving sentences of four years or more.

*all information from [Scottish Government Prison Statistics and Population Projections for Scotland, 2011-2012](#)

Are there areas of Scotland with higher rates of imprisonment than others?

[Scottish Government Prison Statistics and Population Projections for Scotland, 2011-2012](#) (see page 8) show that:

- The imprisonment rate (the number imprisoned per 100,000 of the Scottish 16 years+ population) is the highest for Dundee (377), followed by Glasgow (332) and West Dunbartonshire (275)
- Inverclyde (238), North Ayrshire (220), East Ayrshire (227) and North Lanarkshire (199) also have relatively high imprisonment rates
- Orkney has the lowest imprisonment rate in Scotland (54), followed by Aberdeenshire (58), the Scottish Borders (61) and East Dunbartonshire (64)

What are the characteristics of prisoners?

Some key facts about prisoners in the UK, from the [Prison Reform Trust](#):

- 63% of prisoners have children (see [SCCJR 'Impact of crime: prisoners' families'](#))
- Nearly half (45%) were intoxicated at the time of the offence. For women, this figure is 50% and for young offenders (under 21), this figure is 68%
- 62% reported using drugs in the 12 months prior to imprisonment. This figure is nearly 80% for young offenders
- 25% reported having a disability. For older prisoners, this figure is 36%
- 25% of young offenders have no qualifications
- 27% reported that during their upbringing they had been in care

In Scotland, many prisoners are from the most deprived communities:

In 2005, Robert Houchin and researchers from Glasgow Caledonian University produced a [report on social exclusion and imprisonment in Scotland](#).

The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) identifies five types of deprivation:

- Income Deprivation
- Employment Deprivation
- Health Deprivation and Disability
- Education, Skills and Training Deprivation
- Geographical Access to Services

[For more information on SIMD](#)

Houchin and his colleagues found that the imprisoned population of Scotland comes disproportionately from the most deprived communities in Scotland (those which score highly on SIMD). In addition, they found that the probability of imprisonment increases with increasing deprivation.

>> However, deprivation itself does not cause people to end up in prison. There are people in prison who have not experienced multiple deprivation, and there are lots of people who have experienced multiple deprivation who have not been to prison.

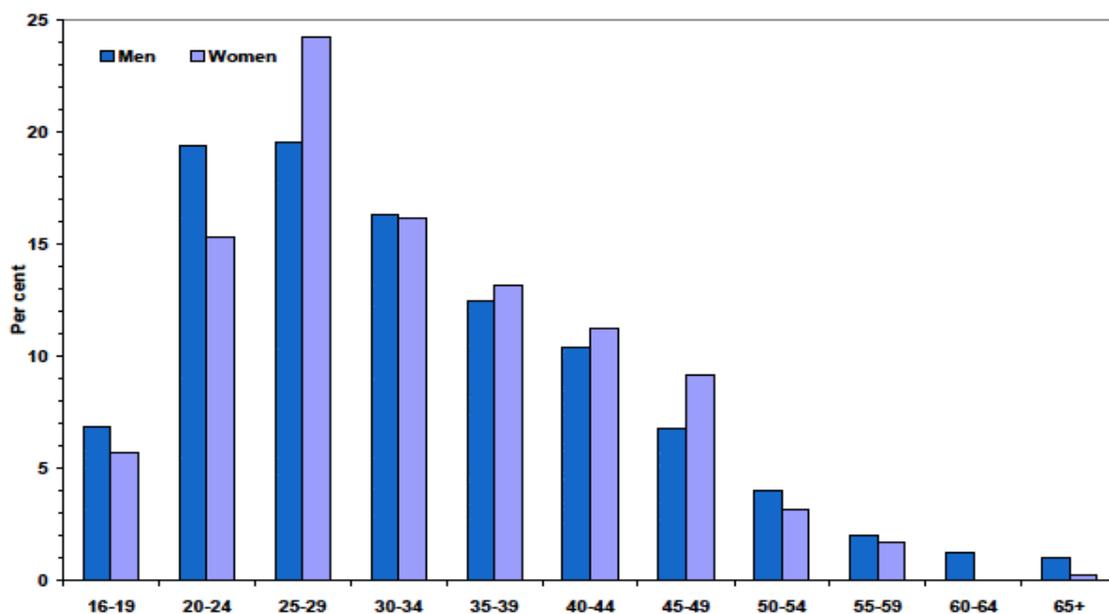
- **About 95% of prisoners in Scotland are male.**

There are on average about 400 women in prison in Scotland on any given day, meaning women account for just 5% of the prison population (see [SCCJR 'Women in prison'](#)). However, many women are serving short prison sentences and about 3,000 women go through prison every year (compared to around 34,000 men)

- **Most prisoners are young.**

For example, in the Houchin study, 42% of the sample was under 30, and 72% under 36

The graph below shows the age distribution of prisoners by sex (see [SCCJR 'Women in prison'](#) for more information on women in prison)



Age distribution of prisoner by sex, Justice Analytical Services, Scottish Government (figures June 2011)

- **Most prisoners in Scotland are white (around 98%).**

The proportion of black and minority ethnic (BME) individuals in prison is numerically proportionate to the general population. Unlike in other jurisdictions, including England and the USA, BME individuals are not over-represented in the prison population in Scotland (information from [Prison Health in Scotland](#))

- **The health of many people in prison is worse than that of the general population.**

In 2007, a study was conducted on prison health in Scotland. It identified 13 key domains in health: alcohol, drug use, blood-borne viruses, asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, coronary heart disease, dyspepsia, mental health, sexual health and dental health. Across all of the domains examined, the health of Scottish prisoners was worse than that of the general population ([Prison Health in Scotland](#)). The same research found that people who have been in prison have higher rates of mortality than those without prison experience, even when social deprivation was factored into the analysis.

What about remand prisoners?

The prison population includes individuals who have been **remanded in custody**.

According to a 2009 report by the [Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research \(SCCJR\)](#), “Scotland has a remand problem” given that the number of people entering prison on remand each year is higher than the number entering to serve a sentence.

This continues to be a problem in 2015. [Scottish Prison Service \(SPS\)](#) figures from July 2015 show there were:

- 1100 ‘untried’ male adults and 64 ‘untried’ female adults being held in prisons across Scotland.
- There were 124 untried male young offenders (under 21), and three untried female young offenders. In addition there were 197 individuals who had been convicted in court and were being held in prison awaiting sentencing.

The total prison population is approximately: 8,062. This means that in July, approximately 18.3% of prisoners in Scotland were not yet convicted or were awaiting sentencing.

Remand: the imprisonment of individuals prior to trial or after they have been convicted but are waiting to be sentenced.

Why is this a problem?

All information from a [2009 SCCJR report](#):

- Many of those remanded will either be found 'not guilty' or will receive a non-custodial sentence. This raises the question of why they were remanded in custody in the first place.
- Overcrowding is an issue in the accommodation of remand prisoners, and overcrowding poses a number of problems.
- Remanding an individual in custody is one of the most expensive ways of monitoring them prior to trial.

Further Reading

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Available from:

<http://www.ohrn.nhs.uk/resource/policy/ScottishPrisonHealthNeeds.pdf>

Houchin R (2005) *Social Exclusion and Imprisonment in Scotland A Report*. Available

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International Prisons Research Centre Website, especially the 'World Prison Brief'

section. Available from: <http://www.prisonstudies.org/>

Lappi-Seppälä, T. (2008) *Controlling Prisoner Rates: Experiences from Finland*, 13th International Senior Seminar, Visiting Experts' Papers, Resource Materials Series 74.

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Prison Reform Trust *Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile*, especially the 'Scotland' section. Available from:

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<http://www.sps.gov.uk/Corporate/Prisons/Prisons.aspx>

White House (2015) *Remarks by the President at the NAACP Conference*. Available from: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/07/14/remarks-president-naacp-conference>