

# The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2023/24

October 2024



# Contents

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## Accredited Official Statistics status

These official statistics were independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation and granted National Statistics (now Accredited Official Statistics) status on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2015. They comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) and should be labelled 'accredited official statistics'.

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# 1 | Key Findings

## 1.1 Average Daily Prison Population

- The overall average daily prison population increased by 11.4% during 2023/24 to 1,877. The male population increased from 1,607 to 1,787 while the female population increased from 78 to 90 (Figure 1 and Table 1e).
- During 2023/24, the average daily immediate custody population increased by 10.1% to 1,176. This is the highest the immediate custody population has been since 2015/16 (Figure 2 and Table 1a).
- The remand population increased by 13.0% to 686 during 2023/24 from 607 the previous year and is at the highest level it has been over the last nine years (Figure 2 and Table 1b).
- Prisoners aged between 30 and 39 years made up the largest proportion (37.7%) of the average daily immediate custody prison population and the remand population (37.6%) (Tables 2c and 3c).
- In terms of custodial sentence length, 27.7% of the average daily population during 2023/24 had custodial sentences of less than or equal to one year, a slight decrease from 28.0% during 2022/23 (Table 8c).
- Violence Against the Person offences continued to account for the largest proportion (34.6%) of all principal offence categories for the daily immediate custody prison population and for the remand population (36.9%) (Figure 6 and Tables 11c and 13c).
- During 2023/24, those identifying as Catholic represented the largest proportion of the average daily prison population at 51.5% (967), while Protestant denominations and Other Christians accounted for 31.8% (596) (Figure 7 and Table 14e).

# 1 | Key Findings

## 1.2 Receptions and Discharges

- At 4,163, the number of receptions during 2023/24 was higher than 4,096 the previous year, an increase of 1.6%. This is the highest the number of receptions has been over the nine year reporting period. (Figure 8 and Table 15d).
- Receptions into immediate custody decreased slightly by 0.2% during 2023/24, to 814 which was similar when compared to 816 in 2022/23. There were large increases in receptions in 2022/23 (up 21.8% to 816) and 2021/22 (up 47.3% to 670) following the first full financial year of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Remand receptions increased by 3.0% over the last year, up from 3,171 in 2022/23 to 3,267 during 2023/24 (Figure 9 and Table 15b).
- The number of receptions for fine default and non-criminal decreased by 24.8% from 109 during 2022/23 to 82 during 2023/24. This is the first decrease in the number of receptions for fine default and non-criminal since 2020/21. (Figure 9 and Table 15c).
- 30 to 39 year olds accounted for the largest number of immediate custody receptions (321; 39.4%) (Figure 11 and Table 17c). They also accounted for the largest number of remand receptions (1,238; 37.9%) (Figure 11 and Table 18c).
- The majority of immediate custody receptions had a custodial sentence length of less than one year (76.5%) a small decrease from 77.0% during 2022/23 (Figure 12b and Table 19b).
- Public Order and Violence Against the Person offences accounted for the largest proportion of immediate custody receptions, at 25.4% (207) and 20.4% (166) respectively, while Violence Against the Person offences accounted for 34.0% of remand receptions (1,110) (Figure 13 and Tables 20c and 21c).
- The number of discharges increased by 7.4%, from 3,823 during 2022/23 to 4,104 during 2023/24 (Figure 14 and Table 22).

# 2 | Introduction

## 2.1 About this report

This is an annual Accredited Official Statistics publication. It is produced in accordance with the pillars and principles set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics and presents key data relating to the average daily prison population, receptions and discharges for Northern Ireland during 2023/24. Information is broken down by establishment, prisoner custody type, gender, age, sentence length, principal offence categories and religion. Trend information and international comparators are also provided.

The data used in this report are taken from the Northern Ireland Prison Service Management Information System (PRISM). Details of data coverage, quality and methodology along with definitions of terms used in the report are detailed in Appendix 1.

While focusing on 2023/24 data, the reporting period for data referred to within the report begins in 2015/16. For presentational reasons, no more than the last seven years are presented in charts within this report (with the exception of Figure 1).

Data in all charts in the report, along with supplementary data, are available in the accompanying spreadsheet found on the [DoJ website \(opens in a new window\)](#).

The next update, covering the 12 months to 31 March 2025, is expected to be published in Autumn 2025. A full [publication schedule \(opens in a new window\)](#) is available on the DoJ website.

# 3 Average Daily Prison Population

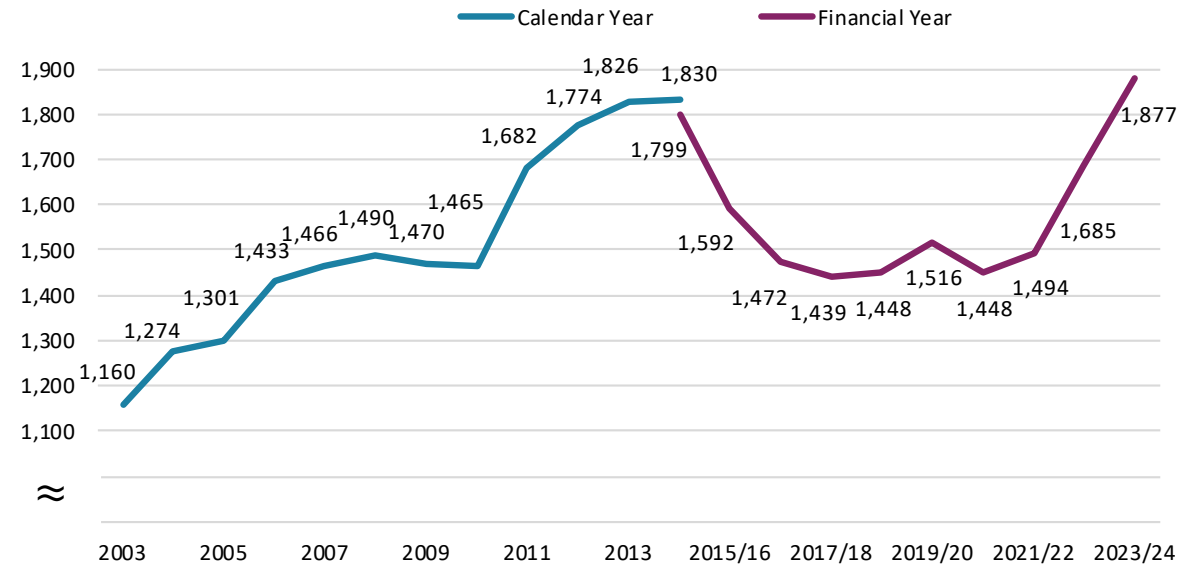
## 3.1 Overview

The average daily prison population for 2023/24 was 1,877, an increase of 11.4% compared to the 1,685 reported in 2022/23 (Figure 1).

The increase in the average daily prison population during 2023/24 was found in three of the four prison establishments (Maghaberry, 1,238 from 1,070; Magilligan, 493 from 479; Hydebank Wood Females, 90 from 78). The average daily prison population in Hydebank Wood Males decreased to 56 from 58. Hydebank Wood Females is at the highest level it has been over the past nine years. (Table 1e).

The following sections look at average daily prison population by prisoner custody type, gender, age, sentence length, principal offence and religion.

Figure 1: Average Daily Prison Population 2003 to 2023/24



# 3 | Average Daily Prison Population

## 3.2 Prisoner Custody Type

### 3.2.1 Immediate Custody

During 2023/24 the average daily immediate custody population was 1,176, an increase of 10.1% from the previous year (1,068) and the highest since 2015/16, (1,192) (Figure 2a and Table 1a).

The immediate custody population made up 62.7% of the overall average daily prison population in 2023/24, the second lowest proportion in the nine year reporting period, with the lowest being 62.0% in 2020/21.

The Department of Justice has published statistics on prosecutions and convictions for 2023. They can be found at [Court Prosecutions Convictions and Out of Court Disposals 2023 \(opens in a new window\)](#) on the DoJ website. They showed that overall custodial convictions during the 2023 calendar year increased by 14.9% from 3,270 during 2022 to 3,756 during 2023.

### 3.2.2 Remand

The average daily remand population for 2023/24 was 686, an increase of 13.0% from 2022/23 (607). This is the sixth consecutive year in which the remand population has increased and also the highest since the beginning of the reporting period in 2015/16.

However, the remand population in 2023/24 accounted for just over one third (36.5%; 686 out of 1,877) of the overall population. This was similar to the comparative proportions for the previous two years (36.0% in 2022/23 and 36.5% in 2021/2022) (Figure 2a and Table 1b).

# 3 Average Daily Prison Population

## 3.2.3 Fine Default and Non Criminal Prisoners

The average daily fine default and non-criminal prisoner (immigration detainee) populations account for a small proportion of the overall average daily prison population (0.3% for fine default and 0.5% for non-criminal).

In terms of the overall average daily prison population, figures for the fine default population have remained low since the beginning of the reporting period in 2015/16 with fine defaults never exceeding a daily average of seven, whereas the non-criminal population while also low, was at its highest since the beginning of the reporting period with a daily average of nine, up from four in 2022/23 (Tables 1c and 1d).

Additional Detail – in Figure 2a the ‘Fine default & Non-Criminal’ average daily population data is too small in comparison to the immediate custody and remand data to view trends on the same chart.

Figure 2b separates brings out the ‘Fine Default & Non-Criminal’ data from Figure 2a and separates it into the two prisoner custody types using a smaller axis.

Figure 2a: Average Daily Prison Population by Prisoner Custody Type, 2017/18 to 2023/24

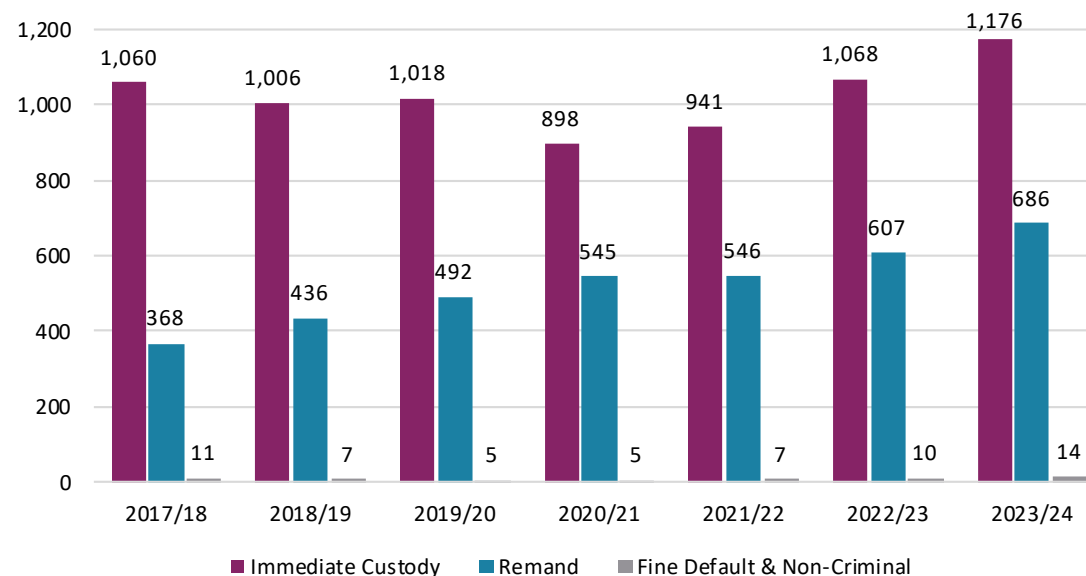
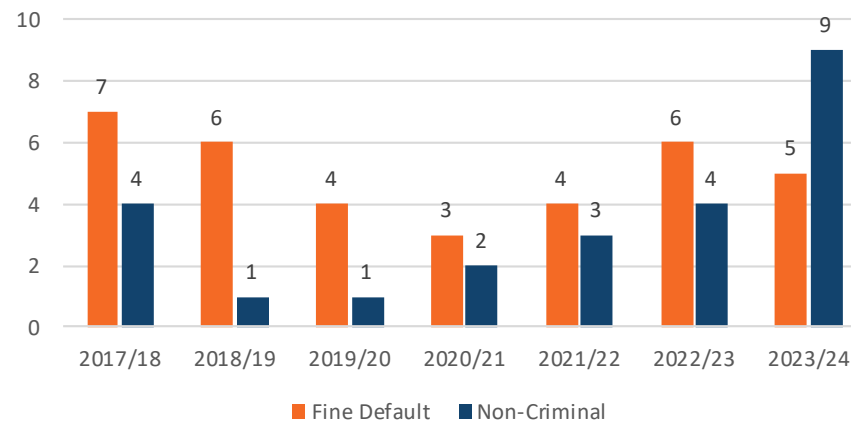


Figure 2b: Average Daily Prison Fine Default and Non-Criminal Populations, 2017/18 to 2023/24





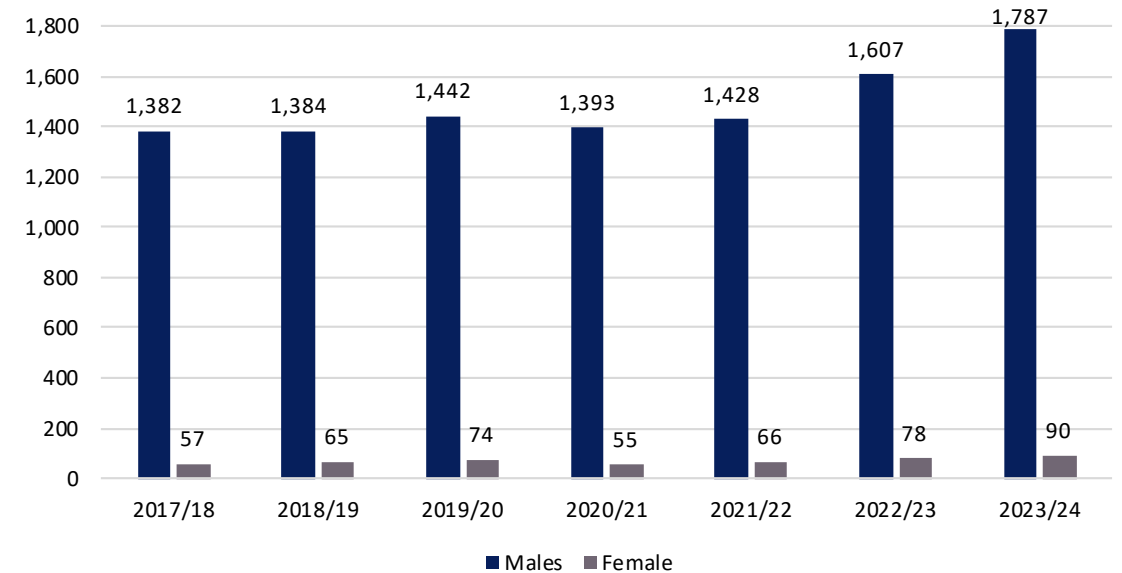
# 3 | Average Daily Prison Population

## 3.3 Gender

As with previous years, males, accounted for the vast majority of the average daily overall (95.2%), immediate custody (95.9%) and remand (94.0%) populations during 2023/24. The comparative figures for females were 4.8%, 4.0% and 6.0% respectively (Figure 3 and Tables 1a, 1b and 1e).

When compared with the previous year, the daily overall (males by 11.2%, 1,787 from 1,607; females by 15.4%, 90 from 78) and immediate custody (males by 9.2%, 1,128 from 1,033; females by 34.3%, 47 from 35) populations increased for both males and females. While the daily remand population increased for males (14.4%, 645 from 564), there was a slight decrease for females (41 from 42).

**Figure 3: Average Daily Prison Population by Gender, 2017/18 to 2023/24**



# 3 Average Daily Prison Population

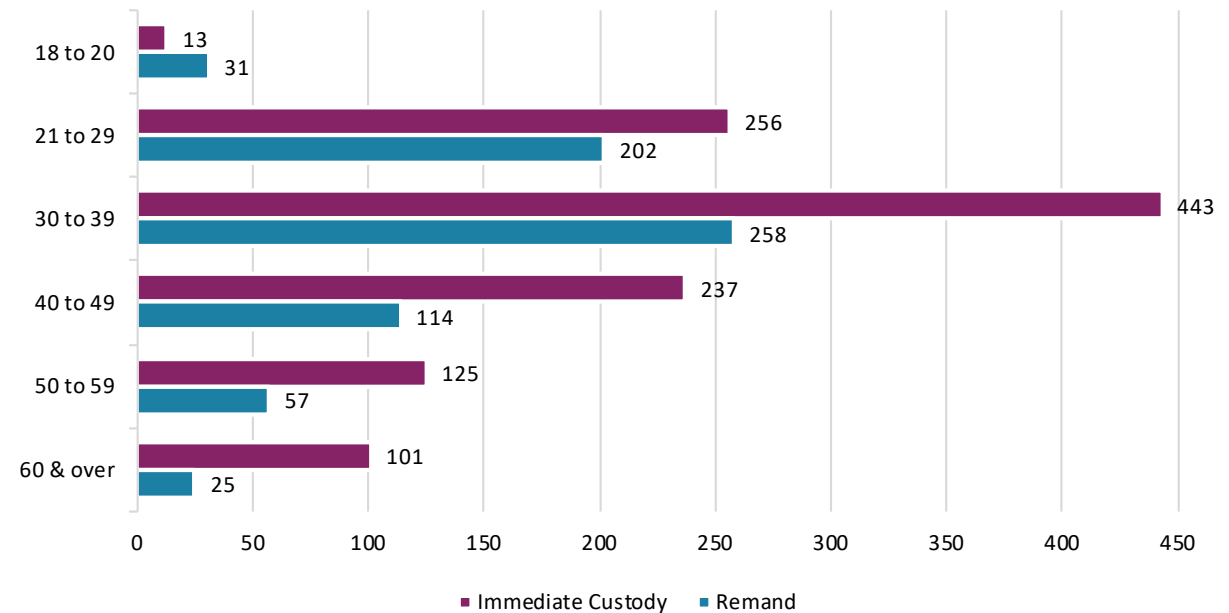
## 3.4 Current Age

Prisoners aged between 30 and 39 years accounted for the largest proportion of the immediate custody population during 2023/24 (37.7%), the sixth successive year that this has been the case. In the three years prior to 2018/19, prisoners aged 21 to 29 years accounted for the largest proportion. During 2023/24, the 30 to 39 years age group was followed by those aged 21 to 29 (21.8%), 40 to 49 (20.2%), 50 to 59 (10.6%), 60 and over (8.6%) and 18 to 20 (1.1%) (Figure 4 and Table 2c).

The age breakdown for the average daily remand population largely followed the same trend during 2023/24; the largest group was 30 to 39 years (37.6%), followed by 21 to 29 years (29.4%), 40 to 49 years (16.6%), 50 to 59 years (8.3%), 18 to 20 years (4.5%) and 60 and over years (3.6%) (Figure 4 and Table 3c).

Comparing the average daily remand and immediate custody populations shows that a larger proportion of the remand (34.0%) than immediate custody population (22.9%) is accounted for in the younger age groups (18 to 20 years and 21 to 29 years).

**Figure 4: Average Daily Prison Population under Sentence of Immediate Custody and Remand by Current Age, 2023/24**



# 3 Average Daily Prison Population

## 3.5 Sentence Length

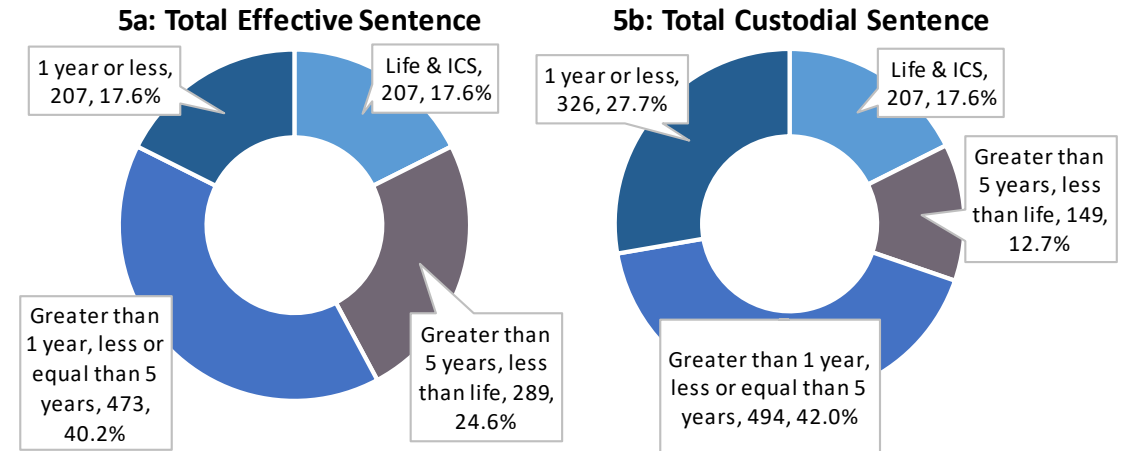
Figures 5a and 5b show the breakdown of total sentence length and total custody length for prisoners under sentence of immediate custody during 2023/24. Primarily, in terms of the prison population, the custodial length imposed is of greater significance than the total effective sentence length (which includes the licence element), as it is the custodial length which determines how long a person must initially spend in prison.

The average daily population numbers for all custodial sentence length categories shown in Chart 5b increased in 2023/24 when compared with the previous year. The proportion of the population within in each category was similar to last year, with decreases for “Life & ICS” (from 19.2% to 17.6%) and “1 year or less” (from 28.0% to 27.7%).

There were increases in the proportions for “Greater than 5 years to less than Life” (from 12.5% to 12.7%) and “Greater than 1 year to less than or equal to 5 years” which accounted for the largest proportion of custodial sentences (from 40.4% to 42.0%) (Tables 5c and 8c).

Looking at gender during 2023/24, 42.6% of the average daily female population were sentenced to one year or less in custody; 19.1% were serving life and indeterminate custodial sentences (Table 8b). By comparison, 27.1% of males were sentenced to one year or less in custody and 17.6% were serving life and indeterminate custodial sentences (Table 8a).

**Figure 5: Average Daily Prison Population under Sentence of Immediate Custody by Sentence Length, 2023/24**



More detailed sentence length information can be found in Tables 4 to 9 in the accompanying spreadsheet, link below.

# 3 Average Daily Prison Population

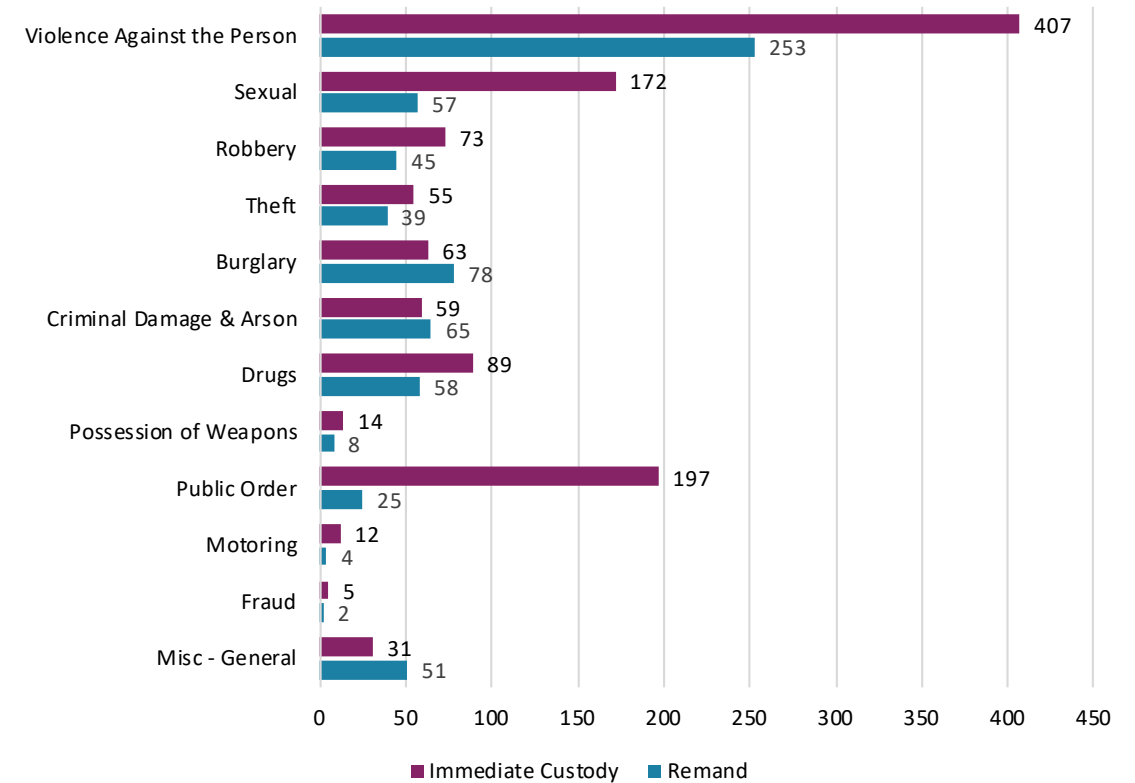
## 3.6 Principal Offence

For the average daily immediate custody population, 34.6% (407) of principal offences during 2023/24 were categorised as Violence Against the Person, 16.8% (197) as Public Order and 14.6% (172) as Sexual (Figure 6). These categories have consistently represented the three largest proportions since offence classification was revised in 2015/16, with the overall breakdown remaining similar each year.

All offence categories have shown an increase in daily average population during 2023/24, compared to 2022/23, with the exceptions of Drugs, Motoring and Other Offences, which have decreased (Tables 10c and 11c).

For the average daily remand population, 36.9% (253) of principal offences during 2023/24 were categorised as Violence Against the Person, 11.4% (78) as Burglary, 9.5% (65) as Criminal Damage and Arson, 8.5% (58) as Drugs and 8.3% (57) as Sexual (Figure 6). These categories have consistently accounted for approximately three-quarters of principal offences in the remand population since 2015/16 (Tables 12c and 13c).

**Figure 6: Average Daily Prison Population under Sentence of Immediate Custody and Remand by Principal Offence Category, 2023/24**



# 3 Average Daily Prison Population

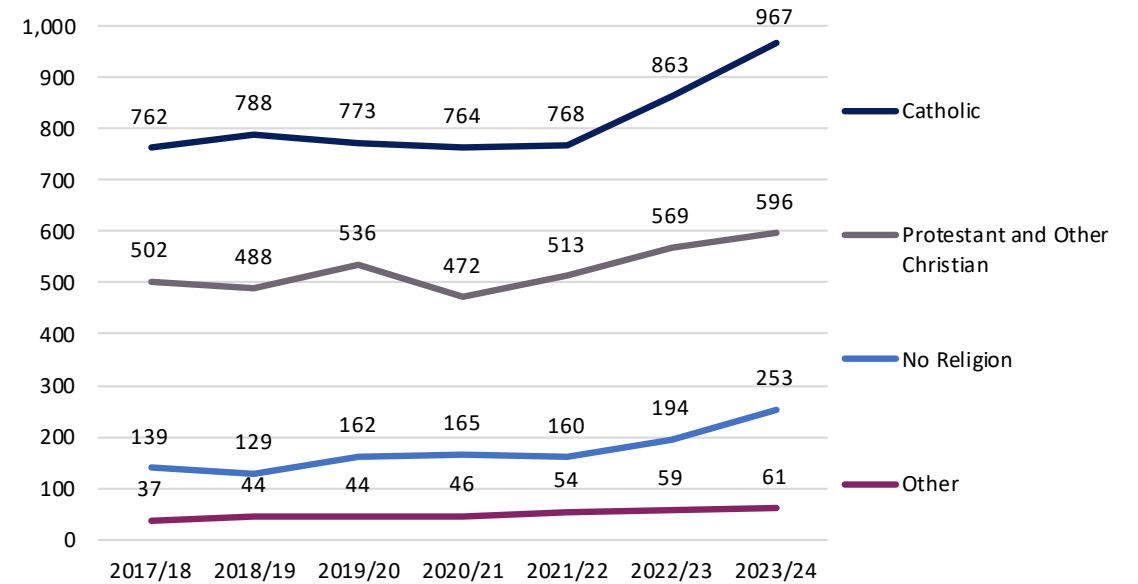
## 3.7 Religion

During 2023/24, those identifying as Catholic represented the largest proportion of the average daily prison population at 51.5% (967), while Protestant and Other Christians accounted for 31.8% (596). Presbyterian accounted for the largest Protestant denomination at 14.4% (271).

No religion was reported for 13.5% (253) of the average daily population (Figure 7 and Table 14e).

The proportions for the average daily breakdown of religion have remained relatively similar since 2015/16.

Figure 7: Average Daily Prison Population by Religion, 2017/18 to 2023/24



# 4 | Receptions into Prison

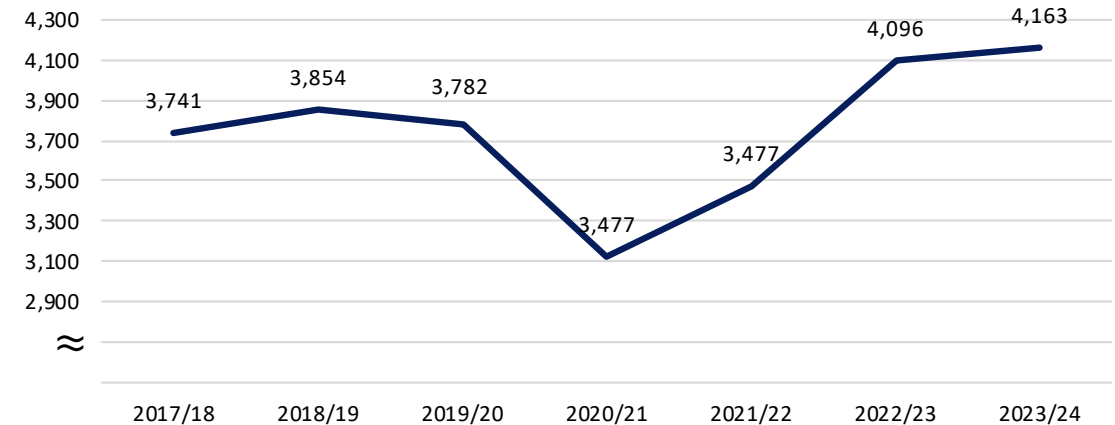
## 4.1 Overview

The number of receptions into prison increased by 1.6%, from 4,096 during 2022/23 to 4,163 in 2023/24 (Figure 8 and Table 15e). The 4,163 receptions were accounted for by 3,137 prisoners, giving a reception rate of 1.3, with 702 prisoners being committed into custody on more than one occasion during 2023/24. Comparative figures for 2022/23, were 4,096 receptions for 2,995 prisoners, giving a reception rate of 1.4.

During 2023/2024, remand accounted for 78.5% (3,267) of new receptions; immediate custody and fine default and non-criminal accounted for 19.6% and 2.0% respectively (Table 15a-c). A further breakdown of these three categories is provided on the following pages.

After reception into custody, a prisoner's custody type may change. During 2023/24, the overall number of custody type changes has shown a 16.8% increase compared to 2022/23 (from 1,889 to 2,206) (Table 16d).

**Figure 8: Prison Receptions, 2017/18 to 2023/24**



The subsequent sections of this report examine receptions by prisoner custody type, gender, age, sentence length and principal offence.

Please note, that there was a revision to how receptions are presented in the 2021/22 report. This has been backdated to 2015/16, the findings of the 2023/24 year, however may not be directly comparable to previous reports prior to 2021/22. Further detail can be found in Appendix 1.

# 4 | Receptions into Prison

## 4.2 Prisoner Custody Type

### 4.2.1 Immediate Custody

Receptions into immediate custody decreased slightly by 0.2% during 2023/24, to 814 compared to 816 the previous year. Male immediate custody receptions into Maghaberry and Magilligan accounted for 89.4% (728), Hydebank Wood Males accounted for 2.3% (19) and Hydebank Wood Females accounted for 8.2% (67) (Figure 9 and Table 15a).

The number of custody type changes to immediate custody has increased, by 20.8% to 1,303 during 2023/24 compared to 1,079 during 2022/23, however the proportion of custody type changes which were to immediate custody has seen little change over the last three years. (Table 16a).

### 4.2.2 Remand

Remand receptions increased by 3.0% over the last year, up from 3,171 in 2022/23 to 3,267 during 2023/24.

During 2023/2024, remand accounted for 78.5% (3,267) of all new receptions; higher than the proportions in the previous two years (2022/23, 77.4%; 2021/22, 78.2%) but lower than 2020/21 (83.5%) which was the highest proportion since the beginning of the reporting period in 2015/16 (Figure 9 and Table 15b).

The number of custody type changes to remand after reception increased by 7.1%, from 535 during to 2022/23 to 573 during 2023/24 (Table 16b).

# 4 | Receptions into Prison

## 4.2.3 Fine Default and Non Criminal Prisoners

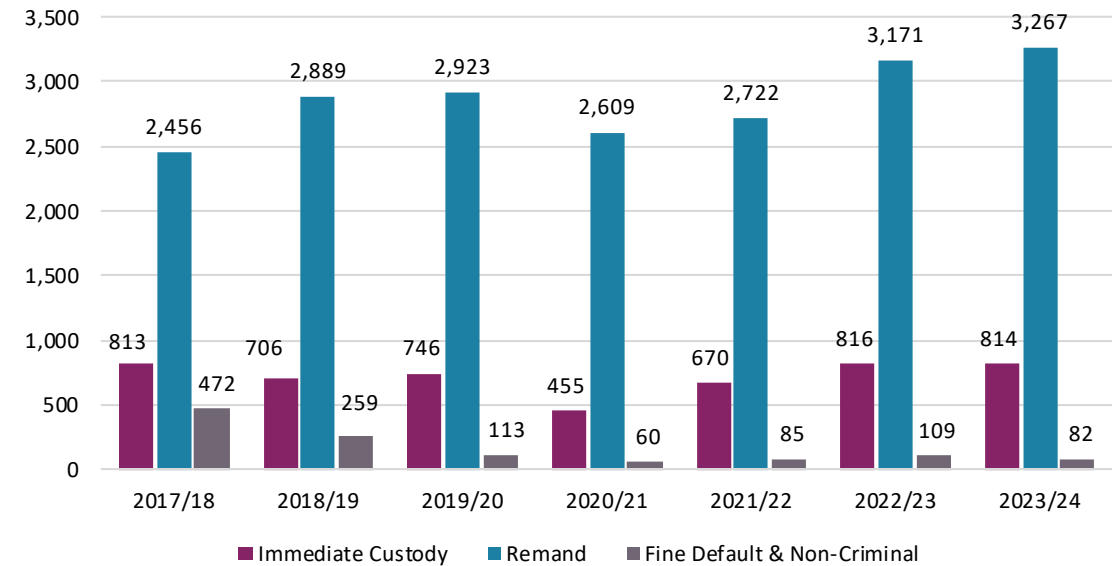
The number of fine defaults (where the individual was received into custody solely for fine default offences) and non-criminal receptions decreased by 24.8%, from 109 in 2022/23 to 82 in 2023/24. (Figure 9 and Table 15c).

Compared to the previous year, there was a 20.0% increase in the number of custody type changes to fine default or non-criminal during 2023/24 (Table 16c).

Due to the way in which the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) case management system (PRISM) inputs individual information, the methodology used in this report to compute receptions may under count the total number of fine default receptions, with further detail on this contained in Appendix 1.

Nevertheless, this methodology is consistent with the approach taken in previous years.

**Figure 9: Prison Receptions by Prisoner Custody Type, 2017/18 to 2023/24**





# 4 | Receptions into Prison

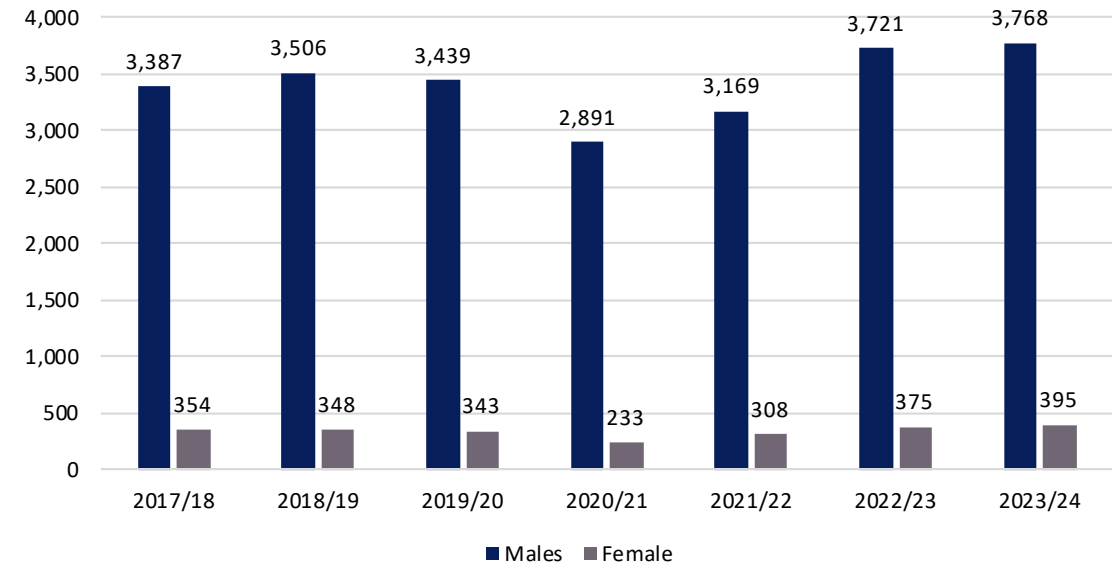
## 4.3 Gender

As with previous years, males accounted for the vast majority of all new receptions during 2023/24 (90.5%).

When compared with the previous year, the number of new receptions and receptions for remand increased for both males (new receptions – 1.3%, 3,721 to 3,768; remand – 2.8%, 2,868 to 2,948) and females (new receptions - 5.3%, 375 to 395; remand - 5.3%, 303 to 319) (Figure 10 and Table 15a).

In terms of custody type changes after reception, when compared with the previous year, there were increases for immediate custody and remands for both males (immediate custody - 19.5%, 1,014 to 1,212; remand - 7.0%, 514 to 550) and females (immediate custody - 40.0%, 65 to 91; remand - 9.5%, 21 to 23) (Tables 16a and 16b).

**Figure 10: Receptions by Gender, 2017/18 to 2023/24**



# 4 | Receptions into Prison

## 4.4 Age at Reception

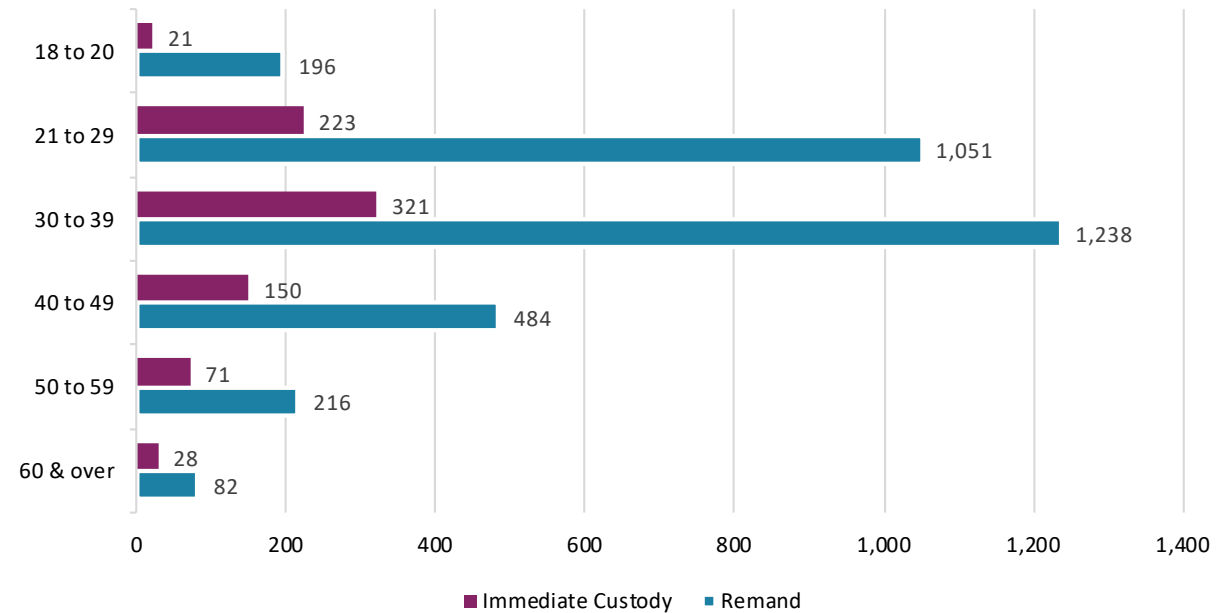
The largest number of immediate custody receptions were recorded within the 30 to 39 year age group (39.4%; 321), followed by those aged 21 to 29 (27.4%; 223) and 40 to 49 years (18.4%; 150) (Figure 11 and Table 17c).

These three age groups accounted for the majority of immediate custody receptions for both males and females, and have very similar breakdowns (85.5% and 82.1% respectively) (Tables 17a and 17b).

The largest number of remand receptions were recorded within the 30 to 39 year age group (37.9%; 1,238), followed by the 21 to 29 (32.2%; 1,051) and 40 to 49 (14.8%; 484) year age groups (Figure 11 and Table 18c).

These three age groups accounted for 85.5% of remand receptions for males and 79.0% for females (Tables 18a and 18b).

**Figure 11: Immediate Custody and Remand Receptions by Prisoner Age, 2023/24**



# 4 | Receptions into Prison

## 4.5 Sentence Length

Figures 12a and 12b show the breakdown of sentences for immediate custody receptions for both the total sentence length and the custody sentence length.

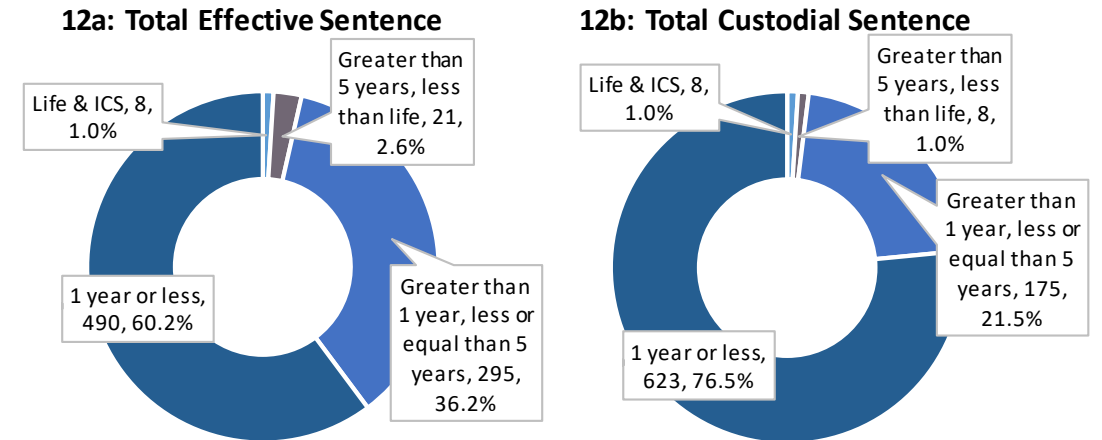
As mentioned previously in section 3, in terms of the prison population, the custodial sentence imposed is of greater significance than the total effective sentence length (which includes the licence element), as it is the custodial length which determines how long a person must initially spend in prison.

Figure 12b shows that custodial sentences of less than one year accounted for the largest proportion of sentenced receptions (76.5%), a small decrease from 77.0% during 2022/23.

The proportion of custodial sentences greater than one year and less than or equal to five years increased slightly at 21.5% (175 receptions) during 2023/24 compared to 19.4% (158 receptions) the previous year.

More detailed sentence length information can be found in Table 19 of the linked accompanying data tables spreadsheet.

**Figure 12: Immediate Custody Receptions by Sentence Length, 2023/24**



# 4 | Receptions into Prison

## 4.6 Principal Offence

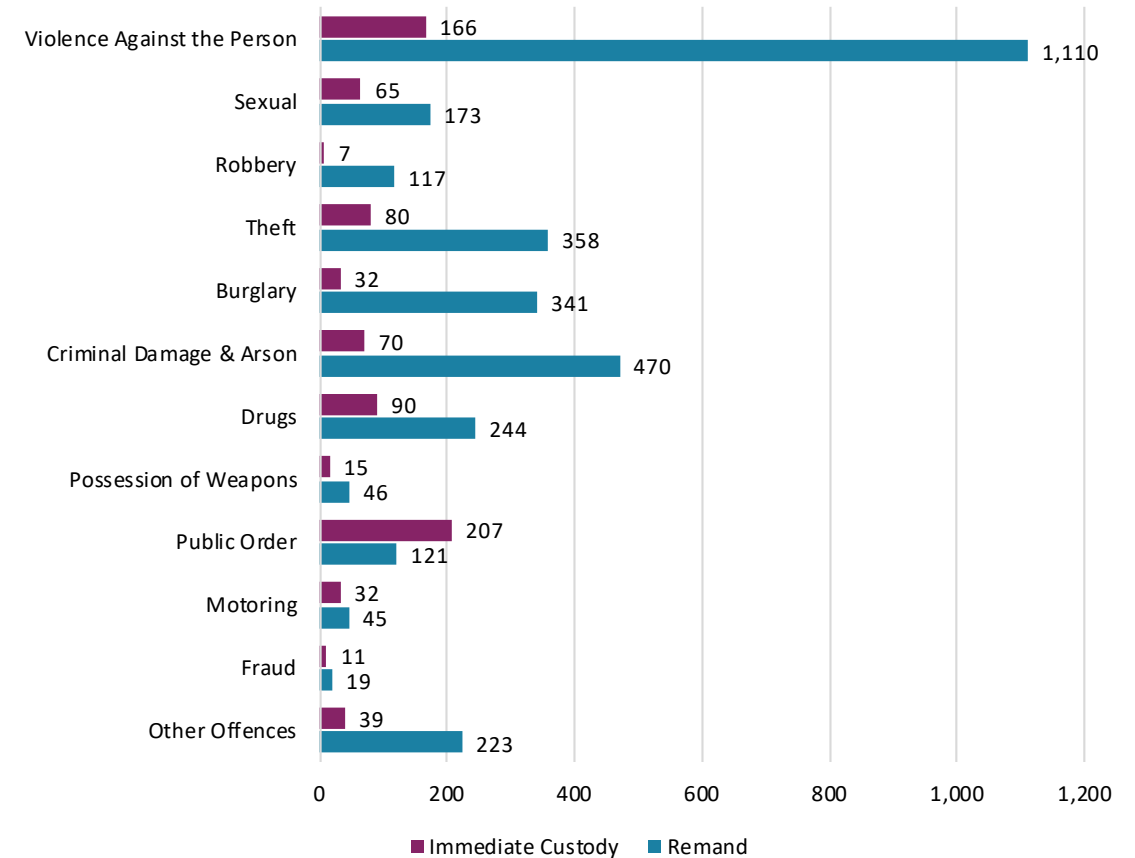
Public Order and Violence Against the Person offences accounted for the largest proportions of immediate custody receptions, at 25.4% (207) and 20.4% (166) respectively (Figure 13 and Table 20c). For remand receptions, Violence Against the Person and Criminal Damage and Arson accounted for the largest proportions, at 34.0% (1,110) and 14.4% (470) respectively.

In terms of gender, Violence Against the Person accounted for 29.9% (20) of female and 19.5% (146) of male immediate custody receptions. Public Order offences accounted for 16.4% (11) of female and 26.2% (196) of male immediate custody receptions, though for females Theft had the second largest proportion of receptions at 25.4% (17). (Tables 20a and 20b).

Violence Against the Person offences also accounted for the largest proportion of remand receptions at 31.7% (101) for females, and 34.2% (1,009) for males. Criminal Damage and Arson accounted for 20.1% (64) of female and 13.8% (406) of male remand receptions (Tables 21a and 21b).

The proportionate breakdown of offence categories during 2023/24 remained broadly similar to those in 2022/23 (Figure 13 and Table 21c).

**Figure 13: Immediate Custody and Remand Receptions by Principal Offence Category, 2023/24**



# 5 Discharges from Prison

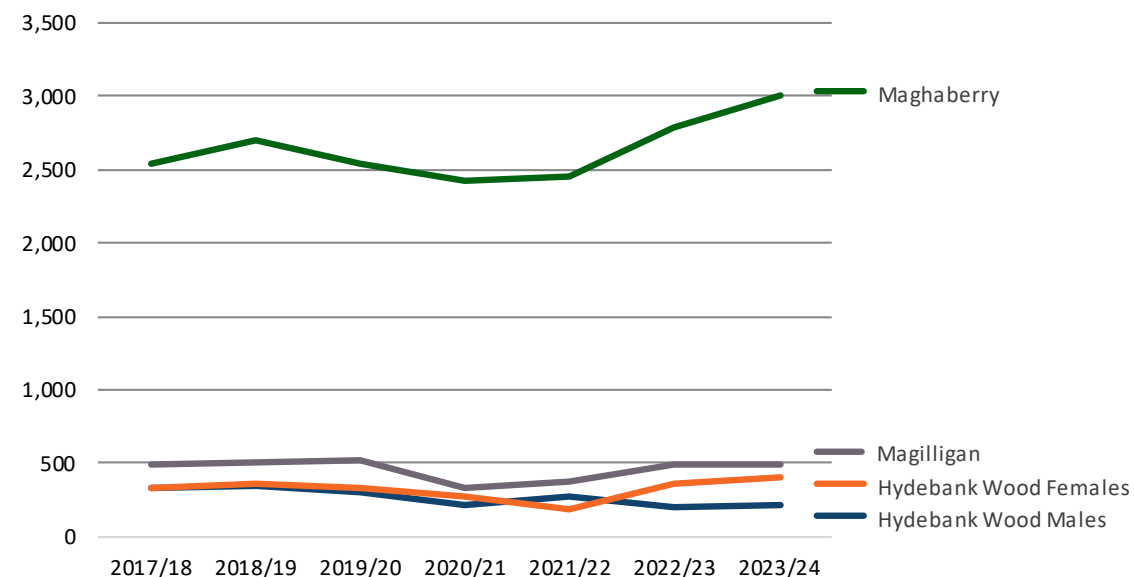
## 5.1 Discharges from Prison by Establishment

During 2023/24, there was a 7.4% increase in discharges from prisons compared to the previous year (from 3,823 during 2022/23 to 4,104 during 2023/24). This increase was across all establishments with the exception of Magilligan, which decreased slightly by 0.6% from 487 discharges during 2022/23 to 484 during 2023/24.

The 4,104 discharges were comprised of 3,163 individuals giving a discharge rate of 1.3, with 664 prisoners being discharged from custody on more than one occasion during 2023/24.

The vast majority of discharges from custody were males, accounting for 90.3% of all discharges during 2023/24 (Figure 14 and Table 22).

Figure 14: Discharges from Prisons, 2017/18 to 2023/24



# 6 | International Comparisons

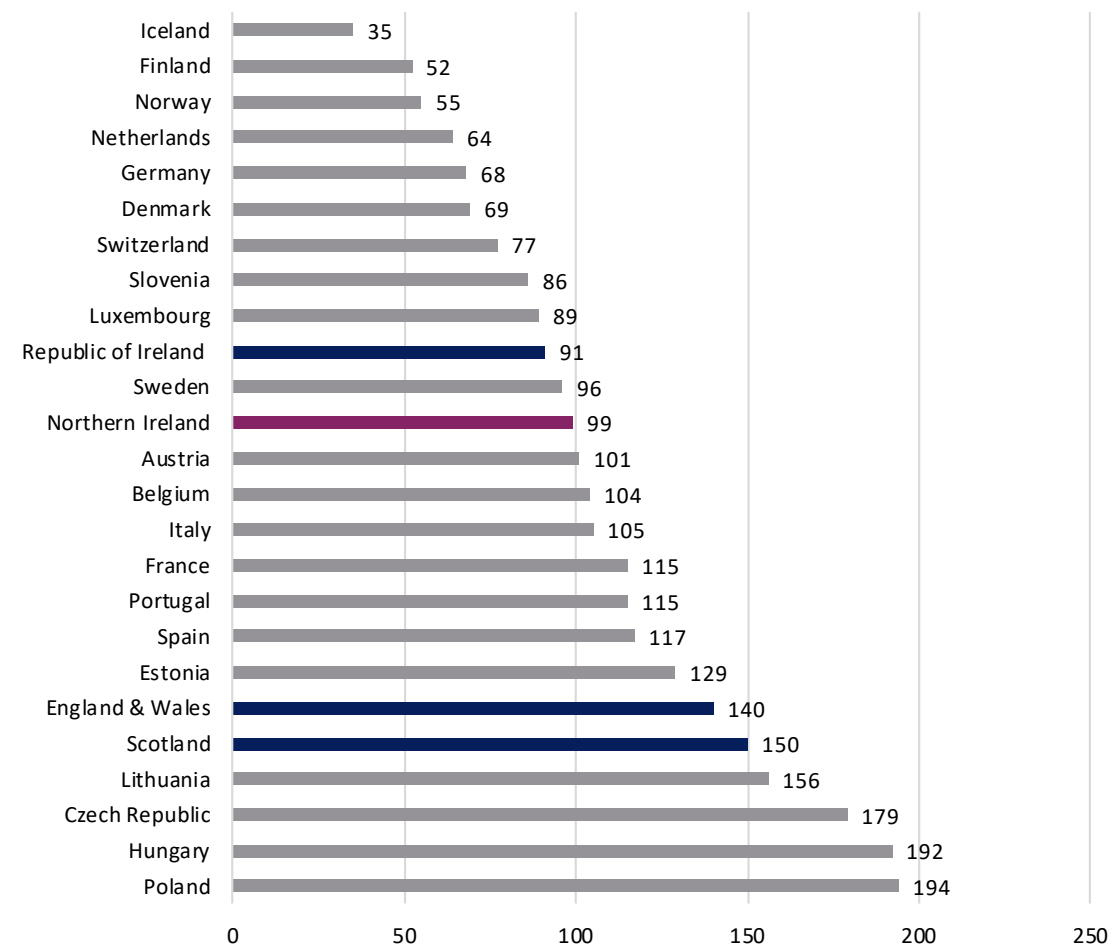
## 6.1 Comparison of Selected European Jurisdictions

A range of international prison comparisons are published on the [World Prison Brief website \(opens in a new window\)](#). One such comparison relates to the prison population as a rate of every 100,000 of the overall population within each jurisdiction. Figure 15 shows the prison population per 100,000 people in the population for a selection of European countries, with the information based on published data accessed on 22nd October 2024. Please note that the sources for data varies and may include a snapshot of a single day during the year.

As illustrated in this figure, Northern Ireland has a rate of 99 prisoners for every 100,000 people in the population (this is based on a population snapshot at the end of September 2024 and not from data within this report). The equivalent figure for Scotland was 150 and England and Wales was 140. With a rate of 91, the Republic of Ireland's rate was the lowest of the British Isles.

Source: [World Prison Brief website \(opens in a new window\)](#), accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2024

**Figure 15: Prison Population per 100,000 Population, Selected European Jurisdictions**



# 7 | Appendix 1 - Methodology and Counting Rules

## 7.1 Accredited Official Statistics

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

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

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

The Accredited Official Statistics badge has replaced the National Statistics badge for releases issued from 7<sup>th</sup> June 2024 onwards. Accredited Official Statistics are called National Statistics in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007.

## 7.2 Users

The statistics included in this report are used extensively and meet a broad spectrum of user needs as shown below:

User	Summary of main statistical needs
DoJ Minister/Director General of the Northern Ireland Prison Service	Use the statistics to monitor the prison population and capacity of the prison estate
NI Assembly	Statistics are used to answer assembly questions
Policy teams in DoJ	Statistics are used to inform policy development and to monitor impact of changes over time and the impact they have on the system
Agencies responsible for offender management	Current and historical robust administrative data are used to support performance management information at national and local levels within each agency to complement their understanding of the current picture and trends over time
Academia, students and businesses	Used as a source of statistics for research purposes and to support lectures, presentations and conferences
Journalists	Used as a compendium of robust data on prison population
General public	Data are used to respond to ad-hoc requests and requests made under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act

# 7 | Appendix 1 - Methodology and Counting Rules

## 7.3 Data Source

The data used in this report are derived from analysing the daily prison population for a given year, taken from the Northern Ireland Prison Service Management Information System (PRISM).

As this is mainly an administrative database, rigorous validation procedures are followed to ensure the data presented is as accurate as possible. More details on the validation procedures followed are included in the Data Quality and Validation Section of this report and in the [Quality Assurance of Administrative Data \(opens in a new window\)](#) report.

Whilst these procedures were carried out by the Analytical Services Group of the Department of Justice, the data is subject to the limitations inherent in any large scale recording system and to variation in recording practice over time.

Unlawfully at large prisoners are excluded from these numbers.

## 7.4 Consultations

This report was subject to a consultation exercise, during April/May 2018, regarding proposed changes to the reporting period.

The consultation invited responses to the proposal of using financial year data as the main reporting period for future publications. The responses were favourable, with no objections to the proposed changes. As a result, this publication focuses mainly on data by financial year.

Another user consultation exercise was conducted in May/June 2022 focusing on the inclusion of additional detail for remand data, committal number, discharge numbers and religious group information. The majority of responses were favourable and as a result the changes have been implemented for this publication.

Details of the consultations can be found at [Northern Ireland Prison Service Statistics and Research \(opens in a new window\)](#) on the DoJ website.



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## 7.5 Average Prisoner Population

Daily prison population snapshots are downloaded from the PRISM system as at midnight; the average daily prisoner population for a given year is derived from the average of these.

## 7.6 Receptions Data

Receptions are counted whenever there is an entry into prison (committal). If a prisoner is released and is subsequently committed on the same or different custody status this is counted as a new reception. The receptions data are based on the premise that when a person is received more than once during a year he/she will be counted separately on each occasion.

If a prisoner is committed and released on the same day then they will not be included in this analysis as the daily population snapshot is taken at midnight.

For the 2021/22 report, the presentation of receptions data was changed to distinguish between new receptions (committals) into custody during the year, and changes in custody type. Receptions data was backdated to 2015/16 to reflect this change.

## 7.7 Custody Type Data

Custody Type changes are counted whenever there is a change in a prisoner's custody type from one day to the next during the same reception (committal). For example, if during the time period in question a prisoner is custody type remand, then without being released is sentenced, this would count as one remand custody type and one sentenced custody type. However, if a sentenced prisoner receives another sentence whilst currently serving a sentence, this will not be counted as a new sentenced custody type, as the custody type has not changed.

Custody type does not include reception type, so if a prisoner is committed as remand and is then sentenced, this is counted a one sentenced custody type, with the remand being counted as a reception.

The custody type data are based on the premise that when a person's custody type changes during the same year, they will be counted separately on each occasion, including each occasion of change of status between remand, sentenced, fine default or non-criminal during the same period of custody.

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## 7.8 Age

For the daily averages the age of a prisoner is calculated at the time of the snapshot.

For receptions data, the age of a prisoner is calculated at age of the reception.

Some of the tables in this report refer to 'adult' and 'young' prisoners. An 'adult' is aged 21 years and over and a 'young' prisoner is aged under 21 years.

## 7.9 Offence Grouping

An extensive exercise was carried out in late 2013 by statisticians across Criminal Justice in Northern Ireland, to reclassify all offences into main offence groupings, as far as possible, that are more in line with England and Wales. Due to this exercise receptions data published prior to 2009 on offence groupings will not be directly comparable with those from 2009 onwards. Data relating to averages pre 2013 on offence groupings will also not be directly comparable, as data published on averages pre 2013 used the old classification system.

A review was also carried out in 2017 which resulted in two offence categories being re-classified. The two groupings which are affected are Public Order and

Other Offences. Recalls and revocation of licence offences are no longer classified as Other Offences; they are now classified as Public Order Offences. As a result of these changes, it is not possible to compare any data relating to these two categories contained in this report with any data relating to these two categories from previous reports. However, all data contained in this report for previous years have been revised to take this new methodology into account.

During 2019/20 a further review of these categories was undertaken with the aim of achieving more standardised reporting of offence classifications across the justice system in Northern Ireland. As a consequence of these changes, there may also be slight variances in the category within which some cases are counted across the period of this report.

Misc. Sexual and Liquor Licence offence have been counted within the Other Offences category.

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## 7.10 Principal Offence

Where a person is received under sentence for two or more offences, only the principal offence is used. Following a review during 2013 by statisticians in the Department of Justice, Northern Ireland, an updated algorithm for calculating principal offence was adopted. Details on this can be found in a paper discussing [principal offence methodology \(opens in a new window\)](#) on the DoJ website.

Due to the way data is stored and extracted in PRISM, sentence lengths for each individual offence cannot be extracted; as such calculating principal offence using actual sentence length is not possible. Instead principal offence using the principal at trial algorithm is used as the basis for calculating principal offence for prison statistics. This calculates principal offence based on the offence that has the statutory highest maximum sentence.

For offences with the same highest maximum sentence then further flags are used to calculate the principal offence. More detail on this can be found in the linked paper. Due to slight differences in data, the methodology is adapted for Prison purposes. PRISM holds a flag which determines if the offence is a main offence or not; this flag is used in the Prison methodology. The actual offence date is held in PRISM but due to difficulties extracting this, it cannot be used as a method for calculating principal offence. As such this step in the process is replaced by ordering based on the numerical offence code for each offence.

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## 7.11 Sentence Length

If a person is received under sentence for two or more offences at the same time, sentence length is taken as the longest of any concurrent sentences, with consecutive sentences being treated as one sentence equal in length to the sentences added together.

However, if a sentenced prisoner receives another sentence whilst currently serving a sentence, the sentence details of the first sentence are used to work out sentence lengths.

## 7.12 Type of Prisoner

Currently there are three prison establishments in Northern Ireland - HMP Magilligan, HMP Maghaberry and Hydebank Wood. Female prisoners are held in a separate unit within Hydebank Wood. For this report, gender is based on the establishment in which a prisoner is held with Hydebank Wood Males and Females being differentiated by male/female inmate numbers. To avoid disclosure, any prisoners identifying as transgender have been included within the male/female establishment in which they are held.

Whilst the prison population consists mainly of offenders sentenced by the courts to immediate custody for criminal offences, it also includes fine defaulters, remand prisoners and a small number of non-criminal prisoners.

Fine defaulters are those who have been given a fine by the courts and have not paid the fine within a stipulated time, and have then been the subject of a warrant issued by the court. The duration of sentence is dependent upon the amount of the unpaid fine and ranges from one week where the default is £200 or less, to ten years where the default exceeds £1 million.

Remand prisoners include those charged with an offence and whom the courts have ruled should be detained in custody pending trial; those whom the courts have permitted to be released on bail pending trial but have not as yet met the conditions (usually financial) of the bail; those who had been released on bail but have subsequently been re-admitted to prison because they breached a condition of bail; and those who have been found guilty by the court but have been ordered to be detained in custody pending sentence.

Non-criminal prisoners are mainly made up of those being held under the terms of the Immigration Act.

The term “sentenced” is often used with prison data, this typically refers to immediate custody prisoners and may also include fine defaulters depending on usage. “Unsentenced” can also be used to describe remand prisoners and may also encompass non-criminal prisoners.

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## 7.13 Data Quality and Validation

The following steps are taken to quality assure this information for statistical purposes.

The data used to derive the information originates from the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) case management system (PRISM). This is a live recording system which is used extensively by NIPS for day to day case management purposes. As such the information extracted, while subject to human data entry error, needs to be highly accurate as it is the main information tool used to manage prisoners on a day-to-day basis, to list their status/privileges and, for that matter to regulate discharge dates/record sentence lengths. It is used not only by Prison Service Staff but also Probation Staff. The data from which the average population and receptions information are derived are therefore core fields, the accuracy of which is a requirement for the effective handling of day-to-day prison operations.

It is perhaps important to emphasise that Prison Service Staff themselves have a vested interest in the complete reliability of the data populated into the fields used for this analysis.

Information is not derived from subsidiary screens which do not contribute to the officer's own capacity to discharge his/her duties or which can be bypassed without impacting immediately on the officer's own work.

The procedure undertaken to derive the statistics now has the following stages. A data download is extracted from PRISM which includes details on individual prisoners. This is imported into the statistical package SPSS and this data is used as the primary source of information to calculate the prison population. Rigorous validation exercises are then conducted to ensure that the information produced is as accurate as possible.

These Data Quality and Validation procedures can be split into two parts, firstly ensuring the data from PRISM is accurate and up to date. For this purpose, manual checks are carried out and data corrected to ensure:

- that all sentenced prisoners have a sentence length;
- that there are no sentence lengths that are discrepant (e.g. murder offences attracting a sentence of 7 days);

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- that the total effective sentence adds up to the custodial sentence plus the licence sentence;
- that the stated age of prisoners is appropriate and realistic (e.g. no-one aged 8,108, etc.);
- that the gender of prisoners is appropriate for the prison establishment (e.g. no male prisoners in a female prison); and
- that a general check of the data as a whole suggests no other anomalies.

Any such discrepancies identified at this stage (for which there may on, albeit rare, occasion be a valid reason) are checked out against the Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS), the Criminal Records Viewer and additional screens on PRISM itself. Any issues are resolved on an individual basis.

Secondly, an extensive manual cross checking exercise is conducted using PRISM to ensure that after manipulating the data, the information produced is correct. A list of all receptions for each prisoner is listed and details are then cross checked manually against the records held on PRISM.

After validating and updating the database using the above method, 5.9% of cases were changed. Whilst these checking procedures are extensive and robust, it is not possible to validate every case so it is worth noting that the statistics contained in the report are inevitably subject to the limitations inherent in any large-scale recording system and to variations in recording practice over time. However, as PRISM is used extensively for the operation of the core business and the fields used are fields in the accuracy of which officers themselves have a strong vested interest, one can now be confident in the accuracy and robustness of the source administrative data to a degree much greater than would normally be the case with administrative systems requiring lower degrees of operational precision.

Following guidance provided by the Office for National Statistics on the Quality Assessment of Administrative Data, information pertaining to data quality and validation is continually being assessed.

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## 7.14 Presentation

For ease of use daily average figures are rounded to the nearest whole number whereas percentages throughout the text are to one decimal point.

Tables referred to in this report and other supplementary tables are also published alongside this report in OpenDocument Spreadsheet format. The reporting period for data referred to within the report and presented in the spreadsheet tables begins in 2015/16. For presentational reasons, no more than the last seven years are presented in the charts (with the exception of Figure 1).

Components in tables and charts may not sum due to rounding.