

**Estimate of the number of prison places built and closed between 2010 and 2024**

**Ad hoc statistical release**

This ad hoc release provides an estimate of the net change in prison places between 2010 and 2024. Data is taken from HMPPS’s internal custodial capacity management database.

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1. **Background**

The Lord Chancellor announced an independent Sentencing Review on 22nd October 2024. This note explains the data used to determine the statement that 500 places had been added to prison capacity between 2010 and 2024.

1. **Data**

This data covers the entire prison estate (adult male, adult female, and youth) in England and Wales. All data is sourced from internal HMPPS management information.

Prison capacity in this note refers to the operational capacity of a prison, which is the total number of prisoners that an establishment can hold based on control, security and the proper operation of the planned regime. It is determined by HMPPS Prison Group Directors based on operational judgement and experience. This definition is consistent with the approach taken in the [published prison population statistics](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prison-population-statistics).

The following section of the note explains each headline figure and how it was calculated.

Figure A: 500 places added to prison capacity in 14 years

The 500 places net change in prison capacity in 14 years was calculated as the difference between total operational capacity in May 2010 (89,757) and April 2024 (90,239). This results in a net increase of 482 places which was rounded up to 500 for the Lord Chancellor’s statement to parliament. These headline prison operational capacity figures can be found in the [published prison population statistics](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prison-population-statistics).

A further breakdown of this net capacity change can be found in Table 1.

Capacity increases include: new prisons and new supply created on existing prison sites (such as additional houseblocks).

Capacity decreases include prisons that have closed entirely and cells lost through dilapidation (where they are in poor condition and not fit for use).

‘Other changes’ in capacity shows the net effect of temporary changes to supply between May 2010 and April 2024 that do not fall into the permanent increase or decrease descriptions above. For example, the net change of places in and out of use for maintenance and operational reductions.

**Table 1: Net change in prison operational capacity between May 2010 and April 2024**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Capacity change** | **Number of prison places** |
| New prisons  | 9,058 |
| New supply within existing prison sites | 5,084 |
| **Increase in prison places** | **14,142** |
|  |
| Closed prisons | - 7,519 |
| Cells lost through dilapidation | - 4,132 |
| **Decrease in prison places** | **–11,651** |
|  |  |
| Other changes in prison place capacity | - 2,009 |
|   |
| **Net increase in prison places** |  |

**Places built and closed**

The Lord Chancellor also referenced that between 2010 and 2024, 13,000 places had been built and 12,500 places had been closed.

Data for 13,000 places built [references unpublished data used in the House of Commons by Edward Argar MP on 18th July 2024](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2024-07-18/debates/FA393282-D6B3-4485-84C5-DAD88D0E9FB4/PrisonCapacity). It refers to 13,009 places built between May 2010 and August 2023. Places built includes ‘re-roles’ where other secure space, such as Immigration Removal Centres, has been repurposed to prison places.

Data for the 12,500 places closed refers to an unpublished estimate of 12,514 prison places closed over the same time period. In this instance, ‘places closed’ includes ‘re-roles’ where prison spaces have been taken out of use to be reconfigured in a different part of the estate. It includes places that were planned to close permanently due to dilapidation, but which subsequently were re-opened after investment to improve their condition.

The places built and closed data above should not be combined to produce an estimate of prison capacity created. This is because prison places that were expected to close due to dilapidations feature as closures in the places closed data, but not as places subsequently reopened in the places built data. This means net capacity change would be an underestimate if calculated in this way.

**Limitations**

* Operational capacity reflects temporary weekly adjustments in available prison spaces, such as reductions for maintenance or changes to crowding levels. In contrast, places opened and closed indicate permanent capacity changes, like new facilities being built or prisons permanently closing. As operational capacity varies week to week, it often includes more variance due to these frequent, short-term changes.
* Prison capacity fluctuates from one week to another, for example as prison places are taken out of use to do essential maintenance work and others are returned to use. The net change in prison places from one year to another therefore depends on the chosen dates within each year.
1. **Sources and notes**
* Internal HMPPS Custodial Management data.
* Further information on prison operating capacity is published each week here showing useable operational capacity: [Prison population: weekly estate figures 2024 - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prison-population-figures-2024)