



Official Statistics

Ex-service personnel in the prison population, England and Wales

Prison population as at 30 June 2024

Since January 2015, as part of the Basic Custody Screening (BCS) interview, individuals entering custody have been asked whether they had previously served in the armed services¹, and these responses have been recorded.

These data have been matched to the prison population data to produce an estimate of the number (and percentage) of ex-service personnel in the England & Wales prison population.

Estimate of ex-service personnel in the prison population

**An estimated 3.6% were
ex-service personnel**

Of the 50,700 (57.8%) 'coverage'² in the prison population as at 30 June 2024, 1,810 (3.6%) had indicated they were ex-service personnel.

Demographics

Sex

There is a higher proportion of males (97%) in the ex-service personnel cohort, than the non ex-service personnel cohort (95%).

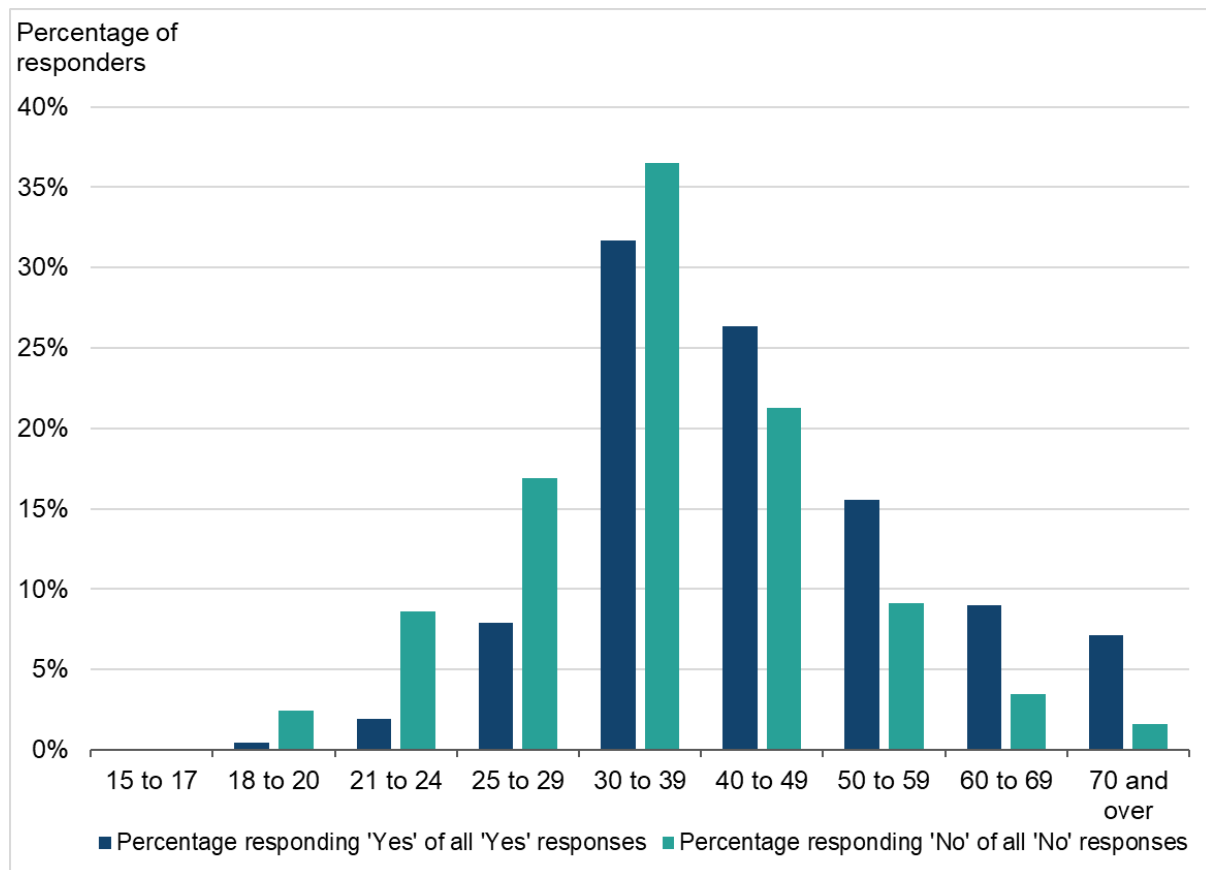
Age

Those in the ex-service personnel cohort (mean age 45 years) are on average eight years older than those in the non ex-service personnel cohort (mean age 37 years). The chart below shows the age distribution for both groups.

¹ **“Have [you] been a member of the armed services?”** – the wording of the question captures those who reported serving in any armed service organisation around the world, not just those serving in the UK Armed Forces. It also captures those who had served as either a regular or reserve member. As such the estimates presented here are expected to be higher than previous estimation exercises that have just focused on those having served in the UK regular Armed Forces.

² In addition to the 'coverage' (proportion of the prison population with a matched response), we have previously reported the matched proportion of those received from 2015 onwards as the 'match rate'. This has been removed for this publication because data exploration has identified that, although collection began in 2015, a proportion of matched responses relate to individuals whose first reception precedes 2015 but who have a 2015 or later prison entry following recall.

Figure 1: Matched prison population, by ex-service personnel status and age group



National Service

The observed age difference is likely due in part to National Service. Those born before 01 October 1939 would have been in the eligible cohort for National Service in the UK (this equates to those aged 84 or over as at 30 June 2024).

- 1.6% of the ex-service personnel prison population group as at 30 June 2024 were born before 01 October 1939.
- This compares to less than 0.1% of the non ex-service personnel group.

Nationality

The wording of the interview question (see *Footnote 1; Page 1*) does not tell us whether an individual served in the UK Armed Forces, however we are able to use self-declared prisoner nationality as a potential proxy for this.

Figure 2: Matched ex-service personnel in the prison population, by nationality group

Total matched ex-service personnel in prison population	1,810
<i>Of which:</i>	
Nationality Group	
British National	1,699
Foreign National	109
Nationality Not Recorded	2

A clear limitation to this approach is that foreign nationals can serve in the UK Armed Forces, and British nationals may serve in a non-UK armed organisation.

Just considering British Nationals, 1,699 out of the 50,700 total matched prison population as at 30 June 2024 were British national ex-service personnel, which represents **3.4%** of the matched prison population.

This is similar to the estimate of **3.5%** from the joint Ministry of Defence & Ministry of Justice study, conducted in 2010³, which included those who had served in the UK regular Armed Forces.

Prison

The ex-service personnel prison population is distributed across prisons in England and Wales. With the exceptions of Young Offenders Institutions, and Drake Hall, a female prison, the prisons across England and Wales each hold between 0.1% and 3.7% of the prisoners who have identified themselves as ex-service personnel.

While across the whole prison estate, 3.6% of prisoners with a valid response declared themselves to be ex-service personnel, a handful of prisons have larger percentages. The prisons with greatest proportion of ex-service personnel among those with a valid response were: The Verne (10.8%), Dartmoor (10.3%), Bure (9.0%), Winchester (8.3%), and Stafford (7.8%). This may reflect the specific functions of these prisons. More information can be found on their prison information pages⁴. It should also be kept in mind that the percentage of valid responses per prison varies considerably.

Offence Group

In general, the ex-service prison population has a comparable distribution of associated offence groups to the non ex-service prison population. However, 26% of matched ex-service personnel in prison are associated with a sexual main offence compared to 15% of non-ex service personnel. Conversely, a smaller proportion of matched ex-service personnel are associated with a drug related main offence than non ex-service personnel (9% vs 15% respectively as at 30 June 2024). The higher percentage of 'sexual offences' amongst the ex-service personnel cohort correlates with other characteristics (for example, that there is a higher proportion of 'males' amongst the ex-service personnel cohort, and that this cohort is older, compared to the non ex-service personnel group).

Contact

Press enquiries should be directed to the Ministry of Justice press office:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-justice/about/media-enquiries>

Non-Press enquiries should be sent to: OMSQ-SiC-publications@justice.gov.uk

³ 'Ex-armed forces prisoners in England and Wales: 15 September 2010';

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ex-armed-forces-prisoners-in-england-and-wales-statistics-2010>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/prisons-in-england-and-wales>