



Ministry
of Justice

A Guide to Offending Histories and First-Time Entrants (FTE) Statistics

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Introduction

This document provides more detail on offending histories and first-time entrant (FTE) statistics and is intended to be used as a guide to concepts and definitions.

Up until 19 May 2022 the content within this document was included within the guide to Criminal Justice Statistics and the associated outputs were also presented within that release.

From 19 May 2022 the associated data tables, commentary, data tools and guide to offender histories and FTE will be highlighted separately. These outputs will continue to be published on the same day as Criminal Justice Statistics.

The latest edition of Criminal Justice Statistics presented in parallel to the files on offender histories and FTE can be found below and should be used in compliment:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/criminal-justice-statistics-quarterly-december-2025>

Overview of offending histories and first-time entrant (FTE) statistics

This section describes the timing and frequency of the publication and the revisions policy relating to the statistics published.

Timeframe and publication frequency

Following a user consultation, it was agreed that FTE statistics would be published on an annual basis from May 2023 onwards, alongside offending histories data. As a result, the latest forward look for publication is as follows:

Date	Offending history and FTE material published
21 May 2026	Offending histories and FTE, year ending December 2025
May 2027	Offending histories and FTE, year ending December 2026

We will keep users updated of any further changes via our published release calendar. The full consultation response can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/first-time-entrants-fte-into-the-criminal-justice-system-and-offender-histories-year-ending-december-2022>

Revisions policy

In accordance with Principle 2 of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, the Ministry of Justice is required to publish transparent guidance on its policy for revisions. A copy of this statement can be found at:

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/218490/statistics-revisions-policy.pdf

The three reasons specified for statistics needing to be revised are changes in sources of administrative systems or methodology, receipt of subsequent information, and errors in statistical systems and processes. Each of these points, and its specific relevance to the offender history and FTE outputs, are addressed below:

1. Changes in sources of administrative systems/methodology

The data comes from an administrative system (the Police National Computer (PNC)). This technical document will clearly present where there have been revisions to data accountable to switches in methodology or administrative systems. In addition, statistics affected within the publication will be appropriately footnoted.

2. Receipt of subsequent information

All data is routinely revised for each publication as the PNC is a live data system where case outcomes can be updated at any time.

3. Errors in statistical systems and processes

Occasionally errors can occur in statistical processes; procedures are constantly reviewed to minimise this risk. Should a significant error be found the publication on the website will be updated and an errata slip published documenting the revision.

Data revisions

All data is routinely revised for each publication as the PNC is a live data system where case outcomes can be updated at any time. Checks are made to ensure that there are no big changes in figures for previous years from the previous year's publication.

Offending histories and First Time Entrants

The figures on first time entrants and previous offending histories have been taken from the Ministry of Justice's extract from the Police National Computer (PNC). This is an administrative data system used by police to monitor recordable offences, the offenders convicted or cautioned for them, and the outcomes received by these offenders. Recordable offences are defined as offences that can attract a custodial sentence plus some additional offences defined in legislation. Some non-recordable offences are also included on the PNC, particularly when they accompany recordable offences in the same case.

The main difference between PNC data and the information from other sources, such as court data, is that the PNC does not include a range of less serious summary offences (such as TV licence evasion and a range of motoring offences) and so the figures on offending histories are not comparable to figures reported in sections of the wider criminal justice statistics publication.

Despite carrying out validation on entry, prior to submission and within the statistical processes following extraction the data are subject to some inaccuracies inherent in any large-scale data recording system (e.g. mistyped data entries). However, the validation procedures detailed below are felt to be proportionate in reliably minimising the impact that any errors may have on the published figures.

There are three aspects to the quality assurance checks carried out. These include:

1. Checking that data provided by the police is loaded correctly to the MoJ copy of the PNC

- Checking for and correcting any special characters and extra lines which will cause the data to be read incorrectly (e.g. an arrow used instead of an accented s in the name of a foreign court)
 - Checking that records of each type (offender, case, offence, disposal etc) have the correct number of variables and making any necessary corrections
 - Checking the correct number of records has been loaded and processed
 - Confirming that variables loaded are in the correct format (e.g. there are no text values when a number is expected for a calculation)
 - Checking records rejected for any reason (e.g. a disposal record without any related offence information)
 - After the load has been run, deleting or merging records which have been deleted or merged on the police copy of the PNC and checking that the correct number of records have been deleted or merged
2. Data cleaning and checks carried out while the data is being extracted and processed.
- Classifying cases where the 'courtcautionage', which is a derived. If this is calculated as less than 10 years, then it is labelled as 'unknown age' and excluding them from age breakdowns
 - Classifying cases where gender is not either Male or Female as unknown and excluding them for gender breakdowns
 - Classifying suspended sentences apparently given to 10 to 17-year-old offenders as community penalties because suspended sentences are not applicable for juveniles
 - Checking the consistency of tables. For example, that the quarterly figures add up to the annual totals, that the local authority figures add up to the government office regions, and that percentages add up to 100.
 - Having a second person check the extraction code and draft tables, filling in a log to confirm they are happy or give comments on issues. Checks will include things like confirming dataset names and conditions have been updated correctly in the code and that calculations are correct.
3. Sense checking against previous publications and other relevant figures
- Checking there are no big change in figures for identical time periods since the last publication based on the same reference period (e.g. year to March), and if there are investigating these further.
 - Checking that the figures make sense compared to other related figures (e.g. courts prosecution data). While the figures won't match in this case, any difference in trends should be explainable: or example, a lag in the cases coming through the system or a drop in the proportion of offences resulting in convictions and caution.

All data is routinely revised for each publication as the PNC is a live data system where case outcomes can be updated at any time. Checks are made to ensure that there are no big changes in figures for previous years from the previous year's publication.

In accordance with the Code of Practice for Office Statistics, the MoJ is required to publish transparent guidance on its policy for revisions. A copy of this statement can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ministry-of-justice-statistics-policy-and-procedures>

It is not possible to directly compare offending histories statistics from to other jurisdictions and other countries criminal court systems. The statistics sourced from other administrative data reflect the criminal justice system processes and procedures that underpin it, as such any attempts to make comparison will not be on the same basis.

It is not possible to directly compare offending histories statistics to crime survey statistics. The recorded crime statistics are higher as they include offences that do not result in a charge. However, the trends are expected to be the same unless there is some explanation. For example, a higher number of cases recorded may not have fed through yet to charges

and cases dealt with by the court or the proportion of cases resulting in a charge may have changed.

Similarly, it is not possible to compare FTE statistics against published Youth Justice Board statistics provided from the Youth Offending Team (YOT). Although the systems are related, it is not possible to directly compare aggregate statistics across the agencies involved – each is using different definitions to count different things at different points in time.

A variety of time series are used in the publication, largely related to the availability of reliable source data – where possible the longest time series is supplied. These changes in source data are flagged and caveated in 'Data sources' as well as in the associated tables, charts and text where practicable, this includes notes of any variation in sources and key events (e.g. policy changes) that may have affected a period.

All outputs in the bulletin are created from the same dataset and use the same data extraction process and variable definitions. All offending histories outputs are based on sentence occasion counts where each sentencing occasion is counted once even if the offender is convicted of or cautioned for multiple offences.

For all missing values, such as the invalid date of birth, not stated gender and not stated ethnicity, the outcome is assumed to be unknown. These cases are included in overall totals but excluded from the relevant breakdowns and the fact that the figures won't add up is footnoted in the relevant tables.

First time entrants (FTE) into the Criminal Justice System

An FTE to the criminal justice system is an offender residing in England and Wales at the time of the offence, who has been recorded on the Police National Computer (PNC) by an English or Welsh police force as having received their first conviction, caution or youth caution.

The FTE data is published with a 'time gap' of around three months after the reference period.

This 'time gap' is felt to be sufficiently timely and allows us to strike a balance between the need to minimise the delay in releasing statistics and ensuring a robust and high-quality product. For example, the three-month gap allows for any late data returns from courts being merged and uploaded into the Police National Computer (PNC), provides time for any amendments to initial monthly source data following validation and time for the analysis to be carried out, and a short period for the bulletin to be produced.

The FTE measure excludes any offenders who at the time of their first conviction or caution, according to their PNC record, were resident outside England or Wales. Offences resulting in penalty notices for disorder, other types of penalty notice, cannabis/khat warnings and other sanctions given by the police are not counted.

The rates of FTEs per 100,000 people in the population are based on Office for National Statistics mid-year population estimates. Where an offender was cautioned or convicted of more than one offence on their first occasion the offence type figures relate to the principal offence on that occasion, this generally being the most serious offence or the offence that attracted the heaviest penalty.

The Local Authority figures have been calculated by mapping individuals to Local Authorities using the home address or postcode recorded by police on the Police National Computer (PNC). For those with no address recorded the postcode of where the offence was committed has been used. For those with no home address information or offence postcode,

a model, based on the patterns of offenders dealt with by police stations, has been used to allocate offenders to Local Authorities. The breakdown of FTEs by police force area has been calculated using details of the police force that processed the case rather than the area in which the offender lived.

First offences and further offences

The figures shown for first offences follow the same definition as for first time entrants and therefore agree with the FTE figures. A further offence is any other primary offence recorded on the PNC that resulted in a reprimand, warning, caution or conviction and where the offender had received at least one of these sanctions on a previous occasion.

Offending histories

Following a user consultation, it was agreed that offending histories (excluding FTE data) would be published on an annual basis from 2020. This change was made as the series does not change very much in the short term and there is a lack of user demand for this information on a quarterly basis. Following an additional user consultation in 2023, it was agreed that FTE statistics would be published on an annual basis from May 2023 onwards, alongside offending histories data.

An offender's offending history counts the number of occasions on which an offender has previously received a conviction, caution or youth caution for any offence which has been recorded on the PNC at the time of sentencing, including some offences committed outside of England and Wales. This count differs from First Time Entrants (FTEs) because all offenders prosecuted by an English or Welsh police force, irrespective of country of residence, are included.

The tables of offending histories primarily relate to cautioning or sentencing occasions recorded on the PNC for indictable offences, although some figures are for summary offences that are recorded by the police. Where an offender has been cautioned or sentenced on more than one occasion the offender's offending history on each occasion has been included. Where an offender has been cautioned or sentenced on the same occasion for several offences it is the primary offence that has been presented. The ethnic breakdown presented for offending histories data is based on the 6+1 classification – White – North European, White – South European, Black, Asian, Chinese, Japanese or other South Asian, Arab or North African and Unknown – derived from officer identification.

The figures relate to cautioning or sentencing occasions for offences prosecuted by police forces in England and Wales, including British Transport Police; they exclude sentences resulting from prosecutions brought by other authorities such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) and the Ministry of Defence (MoD). Although some of these cases are recorded on the PNC, they may not always be linked to the offender's previous offending history and have therefore been excluded.

Glossary

Absolute discharge: When the court decides someone is guilty but decides not to punish them further at this time, they will be given a 'discharge'. Discharges are given for minor offences. An 'absolute discharge' means that no more action will be taken.

Broadly unchanged: Indicates that a figure has changed by less than 1% between comparison periods and is therefore considered to have remained effectively stable.

Community sentence: When a court imposes a community sentence, the offender doesn't go to prison, but the court says there are specific things the offender can, can't and must do while serving their sentence. The magistrate or judge will decide which combination of these 'requirements' will most effectively punish the offender for their crime, while also reducing the risk of them offending again.

Conditional discharge: When the court decides someone is guilty but decides not to punish them further at this time, they will be given a 'discharge'. Discharges are given for minor offences. A 'conditional discharge' means that the offender won't be punished unless they commit another offence within a set period (no longer than three years).

Crime: is an action or an instance of negligence that is deemed injurious to the public welfare, morals or to the interests of the state and that is legally prohibited. An incident is counted as a crime if reported to the authorities and following investigation is confirmed as a "crime" and recorded as such.

Criminal history: An offender's criminal history counts the number of occasions on which an offender has previously received a conviction, caution or youth caution for any offence and has been recorded on the Police National Computer (PNC) at the time of sentencing, including some offences committed outside of England and Wales. Where there were multiple offences on the same occasion, only the primary offence as recorded on the PNC would be counted. This count differs from First Time Entrants because all offenders prosecuted by an English or Welsh police force, irrespective of country of residence, are included.

Disposal: The result of a trial at court. In this publication the disposals of interest are sentences, but other disposals are possible, for example where there is no finding of guilt and the defendant is acquitted.

Fine: Fines are the most common criminal sentence, given to punish an offender financially. They are usually given for less serious crimes that don't merit a community or prison sentence. They limit the amount of money offenders must spend, with how much someone is fined depending on how serious the crime is and the offender's ability to pay.

First time entrants: A first time entrant (FTE) to the criminal justice system is an offender residing in England and Wales at the time of the offence, who has been recorded on the Police National Computer (PNC) by an English or Welsh police force as having received their first conviction, caution or youth caution. Offences resulting in a Penalty Notices for Disorder are not counted as first offences.

Home Office offence codes represent single offences or a small number of closely related offences. They underpin the offence groupings presented in this publication and are used consistently between the Home Office and Ministry of Justice

Immediate custody: Prison sentences are given when an offence is so serious that it is the only suitable punishment. A prison sentence will also be given when the court believes the public must be protected from the offender. A custodial sentence can be suspended when given (see below), but otherwise is termed 'immediate'. There are two different categories of

immediate custodial sentence: determinate sentences (those having a fixed term) and indeterminate sentences (which have only a minimum term and include life sentences).

Indictable offences: These refer to either triable-either-way or indictable only offences.

Indictable only: These offences are the most serious breaches of the criminal law and must be tried at the Crown Court before a judge and jury. These 'indictable-only' offences include murder, manslaughter, rape and robbery.

Notifiable offence: The term 'notifiable' covers offences that are notified to the Home Office, and they are collectively known as 'recorded crime'. Notifiable offences include all indictable and triable-either-way offences (excluding section 6 of the Bail Act 1976), together with certain closely associated summary offences. Police recorded crime statistics cover notifiable offences.

Otherwise dealt with: includes several orders that do not fall within any of the major sentencing categories, for example hospital orders, confiscation orders and compensation orders. Different tables in this publication show more or fewer major sentencing categories; for this reason, the set of offences counted as otherwise dealt with varies between tables.

Primary offence/disposal: Where more than one offence is considered in a court case or cautioning occasion, the offence that would/did attract the most severe sentencing outcome is deemed to be the principal offence and other offences also dealt with in that case would not be counted in our tables (unless specified). If two offences in the same case attract the same sentence the offence with the higher statutory maximum sentence is deemed the principal offence. An equivalent approach is applied to determining the 'principal disposal', which is the sentence we report on where more than one sentence is received for the principal offence – only the most severe sentence for that offence is reported on (unless specified).

Recordable offence: Recordable offences are those that the police are required to record on the Police National Computer. They include all offences for which a custodial sentence can be given plus a range of other offences defined as recordable in legislation. They exclude a range of less serious summary offences, for example television licence evasion, driving without insurance, speeding and vehicle tax offences.

Sentencing occasion: Any occasion when an offender received a conviction or caution. Where there were multiple offences on the same occasion, the primary offence as recorded on the Police National Computer would be counted.

Summary offences: These offences are usually heard only by a magistrates' court. This group is dominated by motoring offences, for some of which fixed penalties can be issued, but also includes typically less serious offences such as common assault and criminal damage of up to £5,000.

Suspended sentence: A court may give an offender a 'suspended' prison sentence if the time they would otherwise spend in prison is under 24 months. With a suspended sentence, the offender doesn't go directly to prison, but they do have to comply with conditions set out in the order made by the court. These conditions can last for up to two years. If the offender breaks these conditions, or commits another offence, they will usually have to serve the original sentence in prison.

Triable either-way: These offences may be tried either at the Crown Court or at a magistrates' court. These offences include criminal damage where the value is £5,000 or greater, theft, burglary and drink driving. Triable only on indictment and triable either way are frequently amalgamated to form indictable offences.

Directory of related websites

The following list of websites contains information on organisations, publications and/or statistics relating to the criminal justice system that may be of interest.

Ministry of Justice www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-justice

This site provides information on the organisations within the justice system, reports and data, and guidance:

- Details of Ministry of Justice statistical publications, which can be viewed on-line, can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-justice/about/statistics For historic publications, see the links to 'earlier volumes in the series' (on National Archives website) on individual publication pages.
- Information on the bodies within the justice system, such as HM Prison and Probation Service, the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales and HM Courts & Tribunals Service can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/organisations#ministry-of-justice

The Crown Prosecution Service www.cps.gov.uk Gives information on the department and provides particulars in relation to legal guidance, victims and witnesses, in addition to details of publications.

The Attorney General's Office www.gov.uk/government/organisations/attorney-generals-office Provides information on the role of the department including new releases; updates; reports; reviews and links to other law officers' departments and organisations.

The Welsh Government www.gov.wales Gives information on all aspects of the Welsh Government together with details of publications and statistics.

The Scottish Government www.gov.scot Gives information on all aspects of the Scottish Government together with details of publications and statistics.

Criminal Justice System Northern Ireland www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/introduction-justice-system Provides information about the justice system in Northern Ireland, including what court does what and the different agencies involved in the justice system.

The Sentencing Council, www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk The Sentencing Council is an independent, non-departmental public body of the Ministry of Justice which replaced the Sentencing Guidelines Council and the Sentencing Advisory Panel. The site contains information on sentencing guidelines; general information on sentencing; and research and analysis undertaken by the Sentencing Council.

Official Statistics publications www.gov.uk/government/statistics Lists links to published and upcoming Official Statistics products. Official Statistics are produced impartially and free from political influence by ministerial departments, other departments and public bodies.

Office for National Statistics, statistical publications on crime in England and Wales <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice>. Contains latest Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) and police recorded crime (PRC) data. Covers crime against households and adults, and includes data on crime experienced by children, and crimes against businesses and society.

Home Office, statistical publications on crime outcomes assigned by the police www.gov.uk/government/collections/crime-outcomes-in-england-and-wales-statistics

Home Office, police recorded crime and outcomes open data tables

Commented [SK1]: Link was updated for 2025 release as previous one no longer existed - check this works

www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-recorded-crime-open-data-tables

Contains detailed figures on police recorded crime and outcomes assigned by the police alongside supplementary material, including a user guide.