

Adults convicted and sentenced

Data highlights for 2017/2018

This summary highlights key data trends in the adult conviction and sentencing statistics published by Stats NZ.¹ These statistics include information on adults (aged 17 years or older) with charges finalised in court from the year ending June 1981 (1980/1981) to the year ending June 2018 (2017/2018).²

Number of charges and number of adults charged in 2017/2018 has fallen slightly

In 2017/2018 there were 212,875 charges against adults (counting each charge individually). This is a 2% decrease compared to the previous year, and a 36% decrease compared to the peak in 2009/2010 when there were 331,074 charges against adults.

The number of adults³ charged in 2017/2018 has also fallen slightly compared with the previous year, following a period of relative stability over the past two years (Figure 1). In 2017/2018, 75,493 adults were charged with at least one offence, which is 2,424 (3%) fewer than the number charged in the previous year.

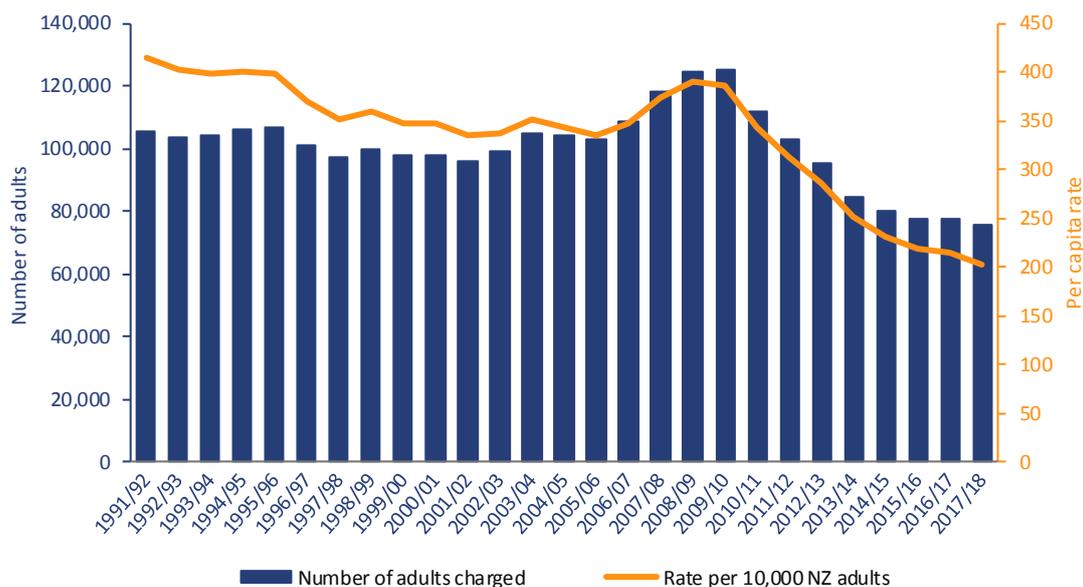
The number of adults charged has fallen by 40% since the peak in 2009/2010, mostly due to steady decreases between 2009/2010 and 2015/2016.

Most adults charged receive a conviction

In 2017/2018, 62,313 adults (83% of all adults charged) were convicted of at least one offence. This decreased by 3% since 2016/2017, closely following the trend in the number of adults charged. The percentage of adults charged who received a conviction has been relatively stable over the last five years.

For adults that did not receive a conviction, 8% of adults charged received an 'other proved' outcome (discharge without conviction or diversion) as their most serious charge outcome. A further 10% of adults received a 'not proved' outcome (including acquittal, withdrawal and dismissal of the charge) as their most serious outcome.

Figure 1: The number of adults charged in court each year has continued to fall



Most convicted adults are male and half were aged under 30

Three-quarters (78%) of adults convicted in 2017/2018 were male. The proportion of males to females with a convicted charge has changed little over the past three decades.

Half of the adults convicted in 2017/2018 were aged less than 30 years (31% 17 - 24 years, 20% 25 - 29 years, 24% 30 - 39 years and 25% 40 years or older).⁴ Over the past five years, the proportion of adults convicted who are under 25 years old has been steadily decreasing.

Number of convicted adults has fallen across all ethnicities

Over the last 10 years, the number of convicted adults has fallen across all ethnicities.

In 2017/2018, there were 25,823 Māori adults who were convicted of at least one offence. This fell by 884 (-3%) compared with 2016/2017 (Figure 2).⁵ In comparison, there were 22,499 European adults convicted of an offence in 2017/2018, which was a 5% reduction (1,307 fewer convicted adults) compared to 2016/2017.

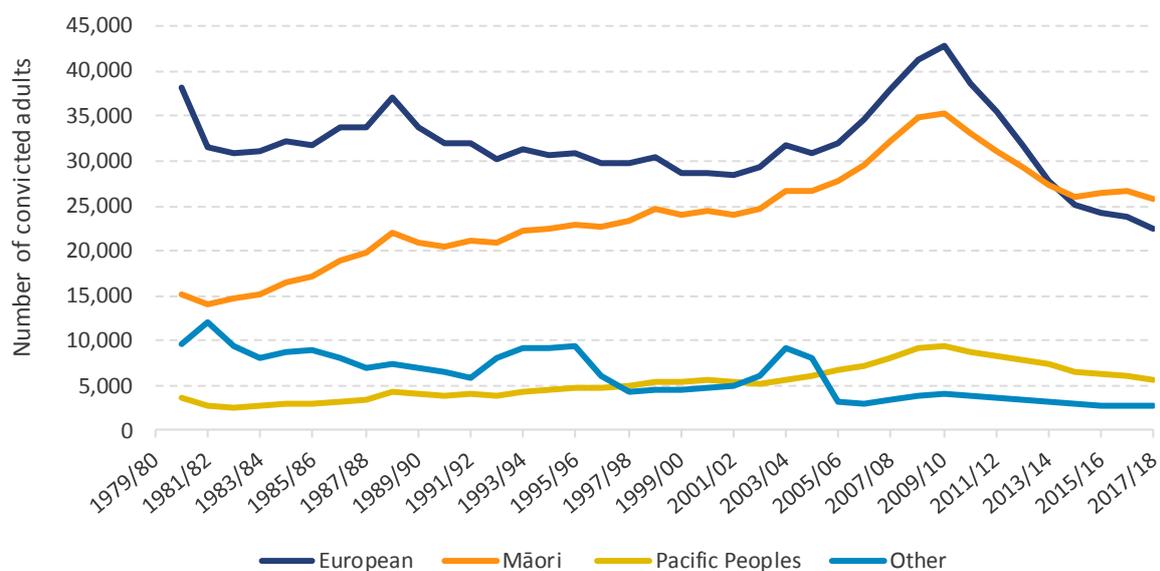
Community and monetary sentences were the most common sentence types

A person may receive more than one sentence when convicted of a charge.⁶ These statistics count the most serious sentence received by each adult in a year.

In 2017/2018, convicted adults were most likely to receive a monetary (33%; 20,783 adults) or community work sentence (21%; 13,011 adults) as their most serious sentence. 13% of convicted adults received an imprisonment sentence, 16% received home detention, community detention or intensive supervision,⁷ 6% received supervision,⁸ 6% received 'other' sentence types, and 5% had no sentence imposed.

In 2017/2018, there was a 7% decrease in the number of adults receiving an imprisonment sentence compared to the previous year. This follows a steady increase in the number of adults receiving an imprisonment sentence between 2013/2014 and 2016/2017. The decrease over the past year brings the number of adults receiving imprisonment sentences back to 2012/2013 levels.

Figure 2: The number of adults with convicted charges has fallen across all ethnicities⁹



On the other hand, over the past year there was an increase in the number of adults receiving the following community-based sentences as their most serious sentence:

- intensive supervision (+15%; 2,006 to 2,297)
- community detention (+7%; 4,267 to 4,548)
- supervision (+5%; 3,689 to 3,856)
- home detention (+0.4%; 2,919 to 2,932).

In contrast, the number of adults receiving community work or monetary penalties as their most serious sentence fell over the past year:

- community work (-9%; 14,363 to 13,011)
- monetary penalties (-4%; 21,573 to 20,783).

Overall, fewer adults were charged and convicted in 2017/2018, resulting in fewer community work and monetary sentences being imposed (as the most serious sentence). At the same time, the decreased number of imprisonment sentences has been mirrored by an increased number of more serious community sentences (such as community detention), suggesting a shift in the use of different sentence types.

Traffic offences are the most common convicted charges

When counting convicted charges individually, the most common offence types¹⁰ in 2017/2018 were:

- traffic offences, such as excess breath alcohol (37,101 convicted charges)
- theft (17,858 convicted charges)
- offences against justice, such as breaching a community work order (17,112 convicted charges)

¹ <http://nzdotstat.stats.govt.nz> under 'Justice'.

² Stats NZ publishes separate tables for children and young people (aged 10 - 16 years).

³ People may have multiple charges in court each year as they may be brought to court more than once in the year for repeat offending, or be charged with multiple offences at one time. When counting the number of adults per year, each adult is counted once for each year where they were

- assault (15,116 convicted charges)
- drug offences (10,806 convicted charges).

The total number of convicted charges against adults is larger than the number of adults convicted in the same year. This is because adults may be convicted of multiple offences in a year.

The distribution of offence types in 2017/2018 is different when only an adult's most serious convicted charge in the year is counted: ¹¹

- traffic offences (23,302 adults)
- offences against justice (8,839 adults)
- assault (7,470 adults)
- dangerous or negligent acts (mostly dangerous driving) (4,717 adults)
- theft (4,360 adults).

As shown above, drug offences which are the fifth most frequent convicted charge, are often not a person's most serious offence in a year (i.e. adults convicted of drug offences are likely to also be convicted of other more serious offences).

Only looking at an adult's most serious convicted offence in a year hides other offending also occurring in that year, and is therefore not a good indication of the overall types of offending. The best source of information on the total number of people charged and convicted of individual offence types (such as drug offences, family violence offences or driving under the influence offences) is the Justice Statistics data tables published on the [Ministry of Justice website](#).¹²

For more, go to
justice.govt.nz/justice-sector-policy/research-data/justice-statistics

charged with at least one offence, regardless of the number of charges against them in that year.

⁴ Age percentages were calculated excluding organisations and people of unknown age from the total.

⁵ 'Unknown' ethnicities are not shown. In 2004 the Ministry changed to the CMS electronic case management system. This resulted in an increase in the number of children and young people with ethnicities classified as 'Other' around this time.

⁶ Sentences include (in order of seriousness): imprisonment (life imprisonment, preventive detention and imprisonment), home detention, community detention, intensive supervision, community work, supervision, monetary, other (including deferment, and orders related to driving (eg Disqualification from driving, Alcohol interlock order, Zero alcohol order), orders related to forfeiture and confiscation (eg Order for forfeiture and Order for confiscation of motor vehicle), Final Protection Order (Sentencing Act), and order to be Committed to a facility on conviction) and no sentence recorded (where a person is convicted and discharged and where a person is ordered to pay court costs).

⁷ These sentence types were introduced by the Sentencing Amendment Act 2007. Home detention requires a person to remain at an approved residence (except for approved reasons such as attending rehabilitation programmes or employment) and includes electronic monitoring. Community detention restricts a person's movements during their curfew. Intensive supervision is a longer sentence requiring a person to report to a probation officer more regularly and attend programmes to address the issues that led to offending.

⁸ Supervision requires a person to report to a probation officer and attend programmes to address the issues that led to offending.

⁹ 'Unknown' ethnicities are not shown. In 2004 the Ministry changed to the CMS electronic case management system. This resulted in an increase in the number of children and young people with ethnicities classified as 'Other' around this time.

¹⁰ The Australian and New Zealand Standard Offence Classification (ANZSOC) is used to categorise offences into 16 divisions (which are further categorised into subdivisions and groups). More information can be obtained from:
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/1234.0>.

¹¹ A range of information is used to determine which charge is a person's most serious in a year. This includes information such as charge outcome, sentence type, sentence length/amount, remands in custody and bail and maximum offence penalties.

¹² <https://www.justice.govt.nz/justice-sector-policy/research-data/justice-statistics/data-tables/>.