

**Introduction** While offenders under the age of 20 account for a small proportion of offenders serving sentences administered by Corrections, they are an important target group. Effective intervention with young offenders has the potential to have a substantial impact on re-offending, shortening what might otherwise be lengthy criminal trajectories.

In recent years there has been a substantial reduction in the numbers of youth serving prison and community-based sentences. The total number of Corrections-administered sentences has fallen from a high of 5,974 in 2009 to 2,798 in 2014, a reduction of 53%. The reduction is commensurate with falls in the number of young offenders generally being prosecuted by Police and convicted through the courts.

Corrections is at the end of the justice sector pipeline. Changes in volumes of Corrections-administered sentences involving young offenders is affected by population-level variations in young persons, changes in offending patterns, Police apprehension practices, as well as variations in prosecution, conviction and the mix of sentences imposed. Movement in these factors can shed light on the substantial decrease in Corrections-administered sentences where the offender is aged under 20 years.

Though information is not readily available for all such measures, or available in a consistent form, some significant observations can be made. Ministry of Justice statistics show that numbers of apprehensions, prosecutions and convictions have fallen from a peak in 2009. From 2009 to 2013 apprehensions of 17 to 20 year olds fell by 40%, prosecutions by 54% and convictions (of 17 to 19 year olds) by 51%. Prosecutions and convictions have fallen further than apprehensions because there has been a 53% increase in cautions and warnings issued by the Police. Little of this change can be attributed to trends in the population of 17 to 19 year olds, which Statistics NZ estimates fell only by 1.7% from 2009 to 2013.

**Sentence types** Figure 1 shows the number of young offenders in prison at the end of each month. The graph presents the overall number, and number by offender status as remand or sentenced.

The number of young offenders in prison has been reducing since 2007, but appears to have increased slightly in the most recent year. The small increase in sentenced youth in the past few months is consistent with normal fluctuations.

**Figure 1** Number of prison sentences by offenders under 20 years old

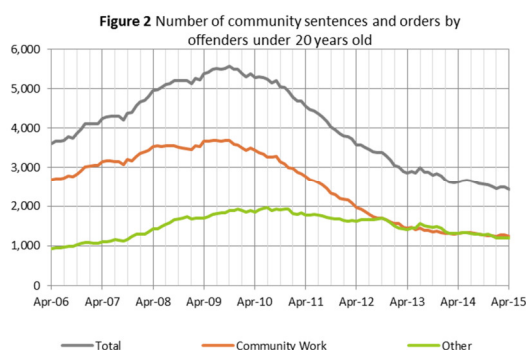
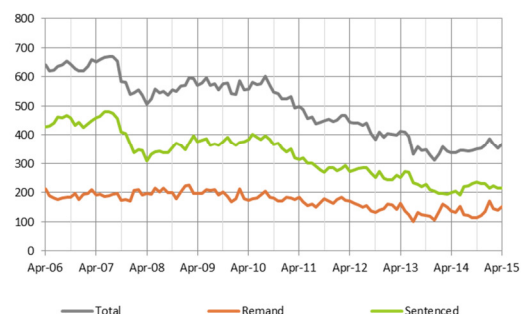
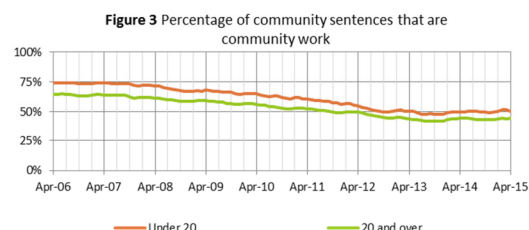


Figure 2 shows the number of community sentences or orders being served by young offenders. This is broken down by community work sentences, and other sentence/order types. Each offender can be serving only one sentence of each type on any day, but can be serving more than one type.

Community work is the most commonly imposed community sentence. Figure 3 shows the percentage of community sentences or orders that are community work, broken down by under 20, and 20 years and over. Offenders who are under the age of 20 have a higher occurrence of community work being imposed than those aged 20 and over, although this disparity is slowly decreasing.



## Community sentence or order type

**Figure 4** Percentage of community offenders serving sentences by cohort

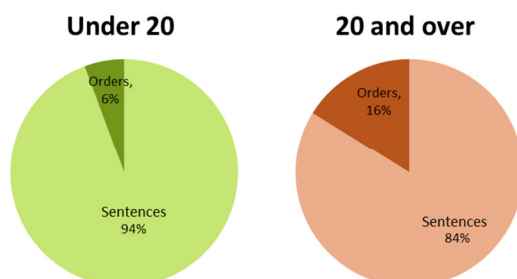
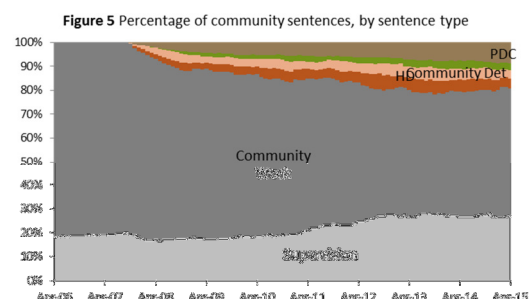


Figure 4 compares offenders managed in the community who are under 20 with community offenders aged 20 and above, in relation to the ratio of sentences (e.g., Home Detention, Community Work) to orders (Released on Conditions, Parole).

Only 6 percent of young offenders in the community are serving a release order, compared with 16 percent of offenders aged 20 or over

Figure 5 shows that the majority of youth offenders serving a community sentence are sentenced to Community Work. Although this has dropped from 81 percent to 54 percent, it is still the most utilised community sentence with young offenders.



**Figure 6** Percentage of community orders, by order type

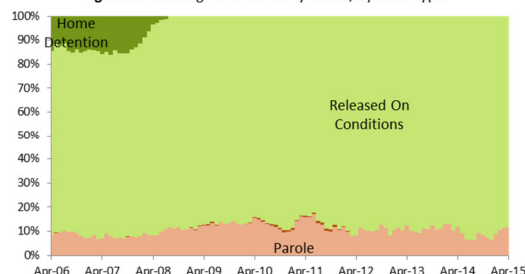


Figure 6 shows that the overwhelming majority of orders being served by youth at any time are Release on Conditions orders. Parole is only served by 11 percent of young offenders serving release orders. Home detention features until 2007 when it was replaced with alternative community sentencing options with the introduction of the 2007 Sentencing Amendment Act.

## Gender

Figure 7 shows the number of offenders in prison who are under 20, broken down by gender. The number of prison offenders under 20 has consistently dropped since 2006. Although the number of men drops much more noticeably than women, the percentage of under 20 offenders who are women has remained consistent. Only 4 percent of all prisoners under 20 are women. This is very similar to the general prison population (less than 1 percentage point difference).

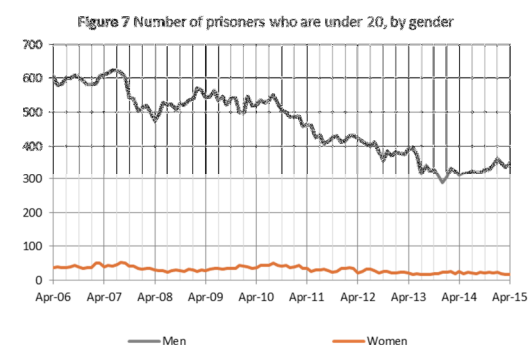
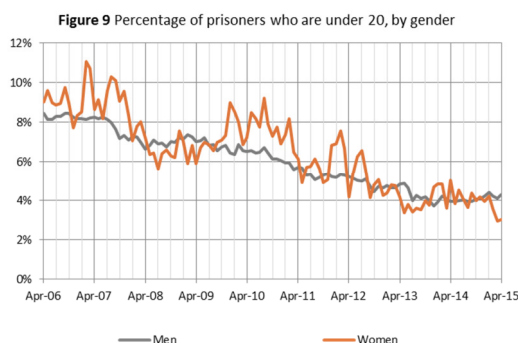


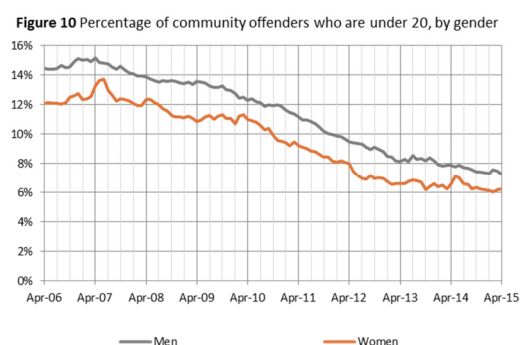
Figure 8 shows the number of community offenders who are under 20, broken down by gender. In the community, 18 percent of offenders under 20 are women.



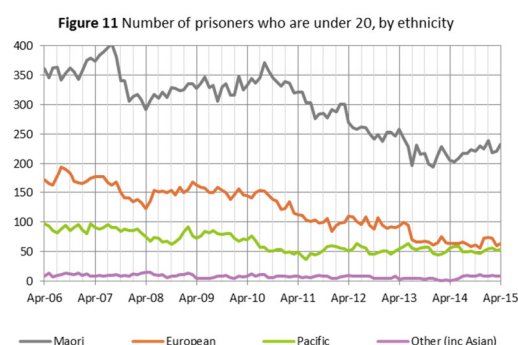
The percentage of women prisoners who are under 20, and of men prisoners under 20 is very similar (see figure 9). The data line for women is more volatile because numbers are much lower.



The percentage of community offenders who are under 20 is slightly higher for males than for females, although this variance has reduced from 3 percentage points in 2006 to only 1 percentage point in 2015 (see figure 10).



## Ethnicity



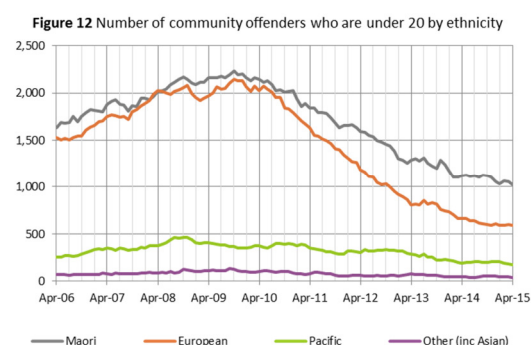
Until September 2010 European and Maori offenders on community sentences made up similar proportions of the community youth offender population. Since September 2010 the number of European youth has dropped significantly faster than the number of Maori youth.

The percentage of European youth is only 32 percent, compared with Maori who comprise 56 percent of all youth on community sentences.

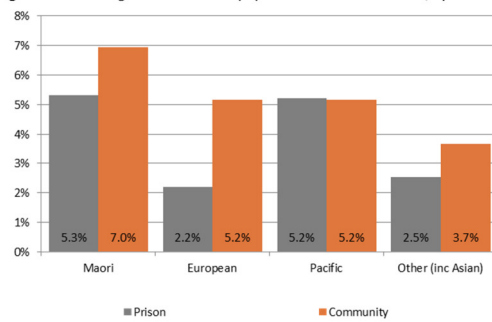
Maori make up almost 2/3 of all youth in prison (65 percent), an increase from 2006 when they comprised just over 56 percent.

European youth have reduced in number, and now constitute 17 percent of all youth in prison, down from 26 percent of all youth in prison in 2006.

Proportions of Pacific peoples and other ethnicities have dropped also, but not as significantly.



**Figure 13** Percentage of the offender population who are under 20, by ethnicity

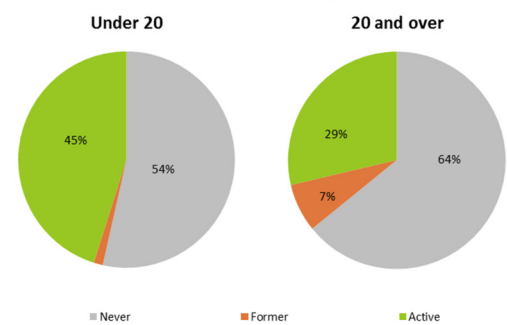


Young offenders tend to make up around 5 percent of all offenders under management. Some small differences occur when looked at by ethnicity however; young Maori offenders in the community make up 7.0 percent of all Maori offenders under community management.

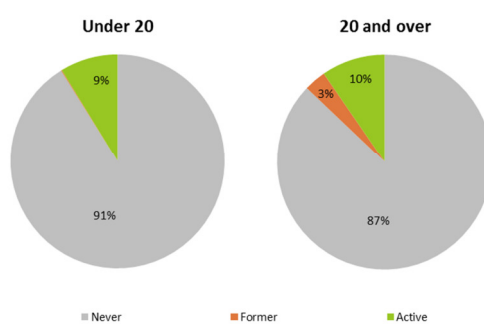
## Gang association

Almost half of all young prisoners are gang members. This is significantly higher than the 20 years and over prison population, amongst whom 29 percent of prisoners are gang members, with a further 7 percent recorded as “former” gang members.

**Figure 14** Percentage of prisoners by gang association



**Figure 15** Percentage of community offenders by gang association



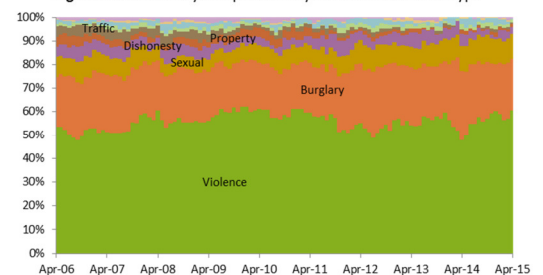
Gang rates in the community are significantly lower than those in prison. Only 9 percent of all young offenders in the community are gang members. This is almost identical to the 20 and over prison population, where 10 percent of prisoners are gang members.

## Offence type

Figure 16 shows the proportion of youth prisoners by most serious offence type for the current sentence.

Violent offenders make up the majority of youth prisoners, with over half of all prisoners under 20 having a violent offence as their most serious offence (60 percent, vs 38 percent for the entire prison population) in April 2015.

**Figure 16** Number of youth prisoners by most serious offence type



**Figure 17** Number of youth offenders in the community by most serious offence type

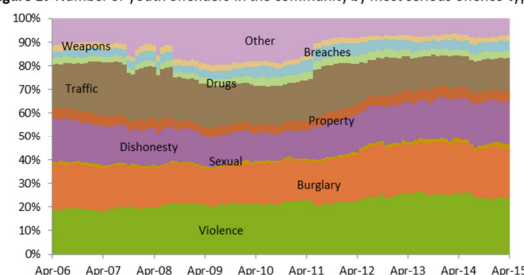


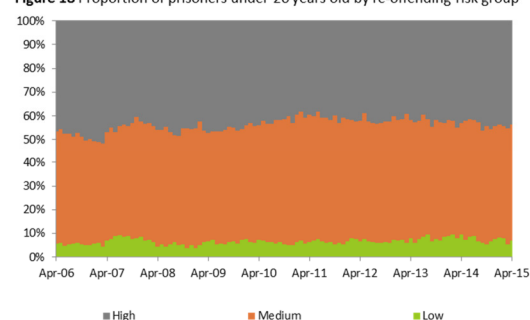
Figure 17 shows the proportion of community offenders broken down by the most serious offence type. Violence is still the largest single offence type, but traffic, burglary and other dishonesty-type offences also feature heavily.

## Risk of re-offending

Figure 18 shows the proportion of prisoners under 20 years old broken down by risk group (as measured by RocRoi). High and medium risk offenders dominate the youth prisoner population, with low risk offenders accounting for a very low proportion.

The average risk score of prisoners under 20 is 0.63. This is considerably higher than prisoners who are 20 and over, where the average risk score is 0.49.

**Figure 18** Proportion of prisoners under 20 years old by re-offending risk group



**Figure 19** Percentage of community offenders under 20, by re-offending risk group

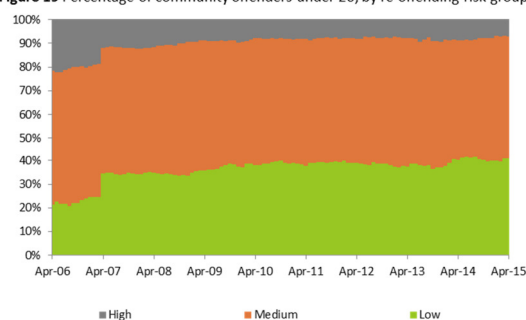


Figure 19 shows that the proportions of both high risk and medium risk young community offenders have dropped moderately since 2006, with progressively more low-risk offenders.

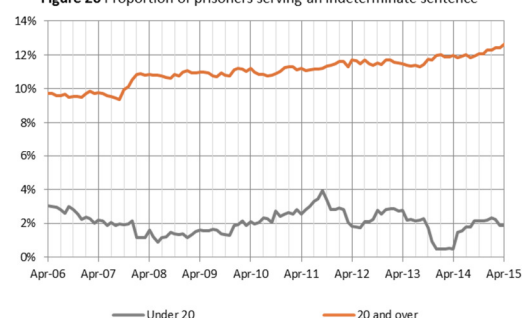
The average risk score for community offenders who are under 20 is significantly lower than those in prison at 0.37. The average risk score for community offenders who are aged 20 and over is even lower than community youth at 0.32.

## Indeterminate Sentences

Figure 20 shows the proportion of prisoners under 20 years who are sentenced to an indeterminate prison sentence compared to prisoners 20 years and over.

Only 13 percent of offenders aged 20 years and over in prison in April 2015 have been sentenced to an indeterminate term. This is much higher than the rate of youth, where just under 2 percent of prisoners in April 2015 have been sentenced to an indeterminate term.

**Figure 20** Proportion of prisoners serving an indeterminate sentence



## Prison security classification

**Figure 21** Number of youth prisoners by security classification

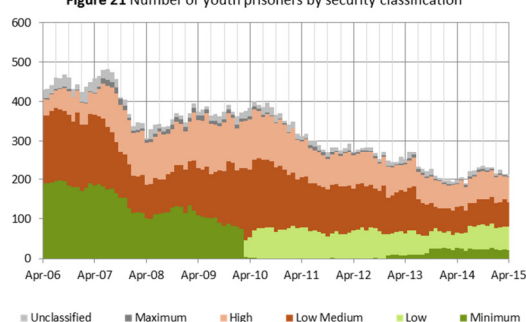


Figure 21 shows the number of young prisoners broken down by security classification. The youth population in April 2015 divides into 3 approximately equal classification groups: Low, Low Medium and High. This is not dissimilar to the general prison sentenced population.

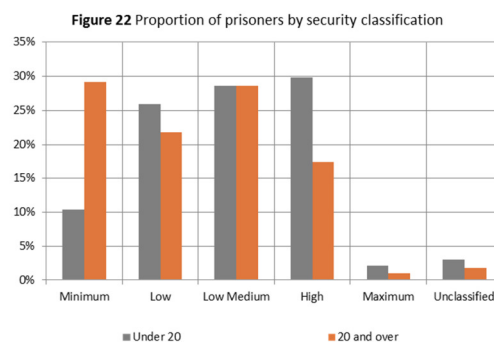
Whilst the overall number of youth in prison has dropped since 2006, there is a particularly noticeable drop in the number of minimum security youth between September 2006 and the start of 2010.

A review of the security classification system in 2010 resulted in changes to the system. The new classification added a new classification, Low, shown clearly in figure 21.

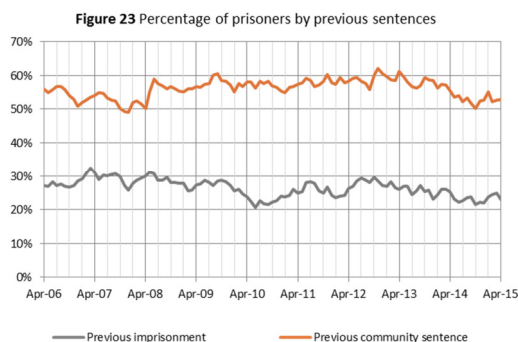
Figure 22 compares the distribution of security classification ratings between prisoners under 20 and prisoners aged 20 and above.

Prisoners under the age of 20 have much higher security classification ratings than prisoners aged 20 and over.

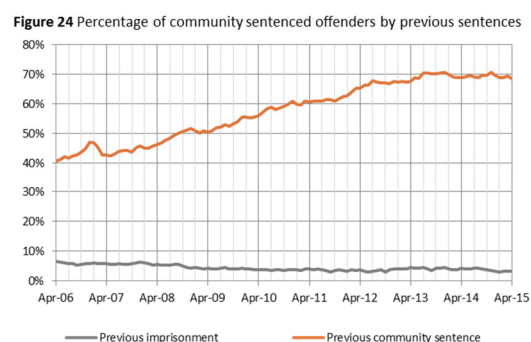
Approximately half of all prisoners aged 20 and over have a security classification of Low or Minimum. Only 37 percent of prisoners under 20 have the same ratings.



## Offending History



Only 3 percent of offenders serving community sentences in April 2015 have previously served time in prison (see figure 24). Approximately 68 percent of community sentenced offenders have served a previous community sentence. This proportion has been increasing significantly since 2007.



## Sex Offending

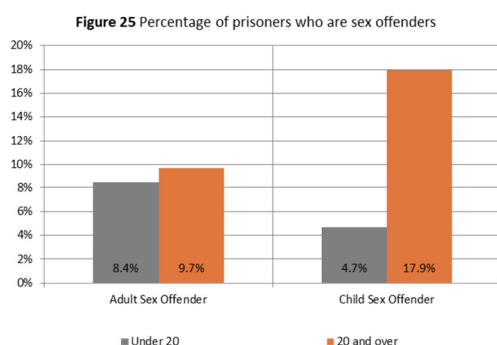


Figure 25 shows the percentage of prisoners who are adult sex offenders or child sex offenders, compared by age group<sup>1</sup>.

Prisoners under 20 have significantly lower rates of child sex offenders than prisoners aged 20 and over.

The rate of adult sex offenders is very similar between prisoners aged under 20 and those aged 20 and over.

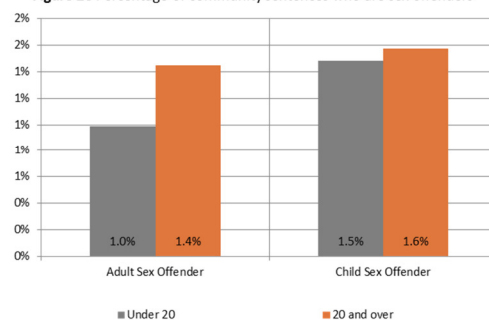
<sup>1</sup> A child sex offender is an offender who is currently serving a sentence for a child sex offence. An adult sex offender is an offender who is currently serving a sentence for a sex offence that is not a child sex offence.



Offenders in prison have 9 times the child sex offender rate than community offenders.

The rate of child and adult sex offenders is very similar between community offenders aged under 20 and those aged 20 and over.

**Figure 26** Percentage of community sentences who are sex offenders



## Sentence length

**Figure 27** Percentage of prison sentences by imposed length

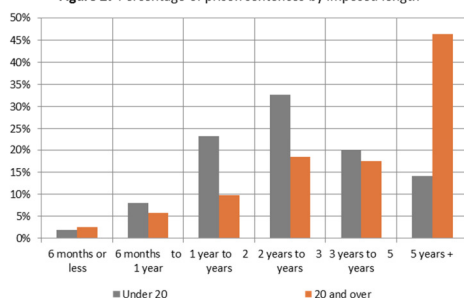
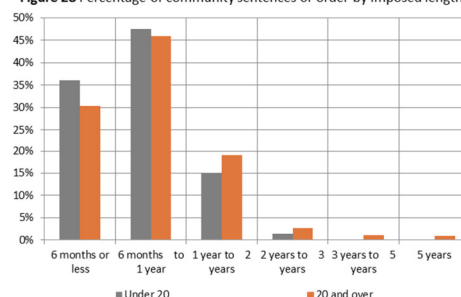


Figure 28 shows that youth offenders in the community tend to receive shorter sentences than those aged 20 and over, although this is less pronounced than with prisoners.

The average imposed community sentence length for under 20 year olds is 8 months, compared with 12 months for those 20 years and over.

**Figure 28** Percentage of community sentences or order by imposed length



## Recidivism

**Figure 29** Recidivism rates by age group

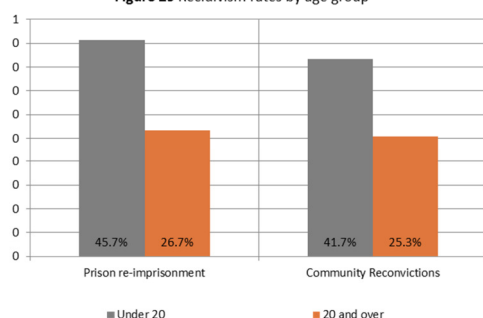


Figure 29 further confirms what is known as the “most widely replicated finding in all of criminological research” – that young offenders have significantly higher rates of recidivism than offenders in all other age bands. Both in the released prisoner population, and amongst those in the community, rates of re-offending are approximately 1½ times as high as is recorded for offenders generally.

Results are for April 2015.

## Conclusion

While the decrease in the number of young community offenders of the last 10 years appears to be levelling out, a downward trend is still apparent. Although, the number of young prison offenders has also shown a steady decrease, this trend has slightly reversed over the last year. Decreases have occurred unevenly across demographic groups however: with respect to gender the decrease is confined to the much larger male population, with the number of young women, though small, remaining relatively constant. The effects have also been less pronounced amongst Maori youth than among those of other ethnicities.

The substantial decrease in the number of young offenders serving Corrections-administered sentences is a positive and hopeful indicator of future reductions in offender numbers generally, and on-going decreases in overall re-offending rates.