

Does electronic monitoring (tagging) work for women?

A Women in Prison briefing

March 2026

"Being on tag affects your family as though they are prisoners as well. They are worried and on the phone getting near 5pm just in case the phone rang or the police turned up. They were constantly worrying where I was... There's a panic every time the door goes or you're checking your phone in case it's them come for you."

Sarah, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

Summary

Women's experiences of electronic monitoring are different to men's, and require a different, gender and trauma-informed approach in the criminal justice system.

Women in Prison collated a selection of women's stories about their experiences of tag. This briefing brings together those stories and demonstrates that women who enter the criminal justice system have gender-specific needs. These relate to their responsibilities as carers, their experiences of abuse and the impact of tag on their safety. Moreover the use of devices not designed for their bodies compound other technical and administrative shortfalls in electronic monitoring systems.

The benefits of tag Tags were welcomed by some women as an alternative to being in prison and as particularly useful to enable them to see their children, care for older relatives and to see medical professionals.

Impact on family life Women explained that tags disrupted family life, whether that was family giving them lifts and helping them manage curfews, or being disturbed by the phone ringing at night and late night visits from the tagging company.

Discomfort, shame and stigma All women described feelings of shame and embarrassment about tags, with some stopping exercise, covering up in hot weather despite being overheated and not wanting to be seen with the tag. Several women described it as uncomfortable, one having to see a doctor because the tag was rubbing her skin so badly. Many described the tags not being fitted well and not working on a woman's body. Many described how it didn't work with women's clothes and again impacted their access to exercise.

"You are constantly a prisoner in your own life...It had a huge effect on lots of the family. I had to get people to help me out all the time. e.g. picking me up from appointments..."

Everyone else had to change their plans to accommodate me and that makes me feel like a burden."

Sarah, woman with lived experience,
Women in Prison

Impact on mental health Several women described the constant tension they felt they were under being on tag and feeling they were one step away from breach and prison. They described how this had a serious and detrimental effect on their mental health, with one describing how it had significantly increased her anxiety. One woman's offence was linked to a violent assault she had experienced, the tag acted as a constant reminder of the trauma and left her distressed. Some women also described how isolated the tag could make them if they were away from family.

Equipment that does not fit women's bodies We found some cases where the tagging company did not have tags that fitted women's bodies, leading to discomfort for some and recall for other. Recalling women because the tags are not designed for their bodies is gender based discrimination.

Electronic monitoring and violence against women and girls Nearly 70% of women in prison have experienced domestic abuse and so a large proportion of women on tag will be survivors of abuse. We noted some disturbing cases where women were tagged in a house known to an abusive partner, and where they were in breach of conditions for leaving the place where violence and sexual assault happened.

We also noted a very concerning case where a woman's health was deteriorating rapidly and the tag itself had become a . Due to very poor accountability and communication the woman was recalled, having committed no offence other than medically needing the tag removed.

Health, pregnancy and tagging Several women were anxious about going to hospital for emergency healthcare in case they were registered as having been in breach of conditions.

We are concerned about the use of tag on pregnant women and for any women for whom swollen ankles is a part of their reproductive health.

Faulty equipment and concerning practice A very strong theme across the women we worked with was that there were extensive flaws made by the tagging company. These included a phone that rang all night, not responding to Probation, not registering changes to curfew times or court appearances. In the most serious of cases, women lost their liberty due to a fault in the tagging administration.

Women also described rude and bullying behaviour by some staff, very late night visits from tagging company staff (after midnight) and staff not showing ID.

Accountability for electronic monitoring In addition to this there was a significant theme from women criticising the tagging company's accountability. When women lost their liberty, or were threatened with the loss of liberty, there were limited means for them, or their Probation Officers to challenge the situation.

"A woman we were working with was very unwell... When she was released on tag, her feet and ankles swelled up, making wearing a tag far too tight and very uncomfortable.... Probation then decided that she should be recalled to prison as she was 'not safe to wear a tag.' It was awful, she was caught in an impossible situation...she has been suicidal due to the recall."

Marie, Advocate, Women in Prison

Some of the problems with electronic monitoring are due to specific gender discrimination and a criminal justice system that doesn't account for women's specific needs and lived realities. Tags are not designed for women's bodies and women are suffering because of that. It is unacceptable that women lose liberty due to gender discrimination.

Summary of recommendations

In the evidence above, we have demonstrated that there are cases where electronic monitoring is not a suitable option for some women. This should not mean a return to prison or a delay in release. Instead, where electronic monitoring is not an option, other community approaches should be utilised, working with women's centres and community provision.

Violence Against Women

- No woman should be in breach or recalled for fleeing or suffering domestic abuse.
- All staff involved in tags and Home Detention Curfews (HDCs) need to be trained to identify the risks posed by domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women.
- As part of co-producing license conditions with women, all women should be asked if there is any risk to them from domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls. Licence conditions should then be designed accordingly.

Health

- No women should be forced to wear a tag that represents any form of risk to her health. The concerns of health professionals around tagging should be given priority in decision making processes. No one should be recalled due to tag removal for health reasons.

Technology designed for women

- No woman should be in breach or recalled due to the lack of gender aware designs or policy making with regards to tags and HDCs
- We recommend that all technological alternatives in the criminal justice system are thoroughly gender informed and ensure a flexible response to women's experiences.
- There should be a review of tagging equipment to explore what adaptations could be made to reduce pain and discomfort whilst being worn. Alternatives to ankle tags should be made more readily available so that it is easy for Probation to switch to alternative placements due to medical or wellbeing needs or impact on work or exercise.

Pregnancy and early motherhood

- There needs to be a new, non-custodial sentencing framework that avoids tagging pregnant women and mothers of dependent children unless strictly necessary to meet the seriousness of the offence.
- There needs to be new Probation guidance to end the use of recall for pregnant women and new mothers.

Accountability, recall and license conditions

- Steps should be taken to meaningfully involve women in the co-production of their license conditions. This work should account for gender-specific needs
- There needs to be a clear and transparent line of accountability for decisions around tags and HDCs. To do this, Ministry of Justice, HM Prison and Probation should take forward HM Inspector of Probation's recommendation to introduce a clear framework for decision-making for probation practitioners about whether to recall. This framework should include that no one should be recalled due to faults and administrative problems regarding their tags.
 - An independent decision-maker for non-emergency recall decisions is needed to further improve accountability.

Overview

The Sentencing Bill was laid before Parliament in September 2025 and became an Act in January 2026. The Bill sits alongside a government proposal for the expansion of the use of electronic monitoring with a presumption that all people released from prison under the new Earned Progression Model who are subject to 'intensive supervision' will be tagged on release from prison.ⁱ The proposal is described by government as "the biggest expansion of tagging since the adoption of curfew tags in 1999 with an extra £100 million being invested into Electronic Monitoring – an increase of 30%."ⁱⁱ Up to 22,000 more offenders and defendants will be tagged each year as part of the Government's Plan for Change.ⁱⁱⁱ The Ministry of Justice are developing an exemption to this presumption but, at the time of writing, it is yet unclear what this will include. This means that unless the guidance advises against certain circumstances, most women leaving prison will be tagged.

While we welcome the opportunity to use technology to improve women's experiences in the criminal justice system, technology is not a gender-sensitive tool and in many cases, it has not been designed for, or effectively tested on, women. While the intention is to reduce pressure on an over-stretched Probation Service, this overlooks applications where an electronic tag may be inappropriate, unnecessary, and even harmful. For example, why tag a woman whose offence is something like fraud, and whose presence in a particular area has no implications for her probation? Increased tagging is a particular concern for us at Women in Prison, as we regularly see the negative impact of administrative errors and inappropriate use of tags on the women we work with.

Currently, we are seeing tagging companies and Probation applying tagging to women in ways that put them at further risk. It's imperative these exceptions to the presumption take gender into account.

Without this, women are likely to come to further harm.

Introduction – What is electronic monitoring

Electronic monitoring uses four types of devices: curfew monitoring devices (also known as radio frequency or RF devices), location monitoring devices (also known as global positioning system or GPS devices), alcohol monitoring devices, and non-fitted devices. It is often referred to as 'tagging'. Electronic monitoring is designed as a way of remotely monitoring and recording information on an individual's whereabouts or alcohol consumption, using an electronic device that is typically fitted to an individual's ankle.^{iv} A common use of electronic monitoring is to apply a Home Detention Curfew (HDC), this is usually a requirement to follow a curfew and to be at home between certain hours, often 7pm to 7 am.^v

Electronic monitoring was first introduced in 1999 to monitor compliance with curfews using curfew (RF) devices. The service was expanded from November 2018 to introduce satellite enabled location monitoring devices. These devices use GPS technology which can record an individual's movements

24 hours a day. New contracts to deliver the Electronic Monitoring service were awarded in October 2023, with Serco taking over the delivery of the service from Capita in May 2024.^{vi}

Data on tagging women

26,647 people were monitored with an electronic monitoring device on 30 September 2025, an increase of 4% from the June 2025 figures.^{vii} In 2024, there were 15,628 people who had bail, court sentence, or post-release electronic monitoring device orders. Of these 92% were men and 7% were women.^{viii} 12% were aged under 21, 26% were between 21-29, 33% were between 30-39 and 29% were aged 40 or over.^{ix} Of those various cohorts of people, the post-release cohort had the lowest proportion of women, representing 5% of the case load. Court sentences had the highest proportion of women representing 11% of the case load.^x

Women's experiences of electronic monitoring

Women who enter the criminal justice system have gender-specific needs. For example, they are more likely to have caring responsibilities, and experiences of abuse. Such circumstances make women's experiences different to men's, and require a different, gender and trauma-informed approach in the criminal justice system. Women in Prison are committed to supporting women in the community and believe this way of working is significantly better for women's wellbeing than prison. The benefits of flexibility and an alternative to custody

"Being out of prison and the chance to rebuild your life, back with your family and support network, is no doubt a better alternative to prison."

Beatrice, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

In our wider work with women in the criminal justice system, we have identified that probation conditions can at times lack flexibility and an understanding of women's lives, for example, scheduling essential meetings at school pick up time. The discussions we had with women about tag echoed these findings.

Many of the women we spoke to were grateful to have an alternative to prison and to be able to be with their families, particularly children and aging parents. One woman also noted that she needed specialist medical care which she doubted she would have been able to access had she been in prison.

Holdsworth and Revolving Doors^{xi} have noted that a number of women welcomed the flexibility that tags could give them to adapt probation restrictions to their lives and many welcome it as an alternative to, or an option for early release from, custody.

Pam described her experience of being sentenced after she was unable to complete the unpaid work she had originally been sentenced to:

"...at first they put me on [unpaid work] and I rang them to say I'm bad at walking and standing you see, and couldn't make the appointments [at] the shop I had to go to, and I went back to court and explained to...the magistrate at the time... [He] couldn't understand why they'd put me on [unpaid work] instead of putting me on curfew to start with, but he were right nice, the magistrate, and he took me off [unpaid work] and put me on [a curfew]."^{xii}

In these examples, Holdsworth concludes that women felt "that their needs had been taken into account during sentencing and they had a voice in the process, rather than viewing the decision from the perspective that it was an easy sentence."^{xiii} However, recent evidence from NACRO has found that over half of the people they surveyed who had experience of electronic monitoring – who were subject to a curfew and had family or caring commitments – said their curfew impacted those commitments. The feedback they got included that people said they had been unable to care for children, take them to school or to care for elderly parents.^{xiv}

Impact on family life

Several women described how the tag negatively impacted their family life. Many had struggled with family activities and some spoke specifically about how the tag impacted other family members and made them feel like a burden. In particular, several women had had to move in with relatives when they left prison and this put a lot of pressure on the family members they lived with. Importantly, this created tensions in some households and put a burden onto their family members, which in turn risked disrupting the settled home environment necessary for a woman to move her life forward.

One woman did highlight how hard it was managing tag and a shared parenting role with an ex-partner. She explained that she couldn't take her children out in the evenings, and so time 'with mum' was very dull and limited to the home.

One woman noted that it was being used by her partner to keep her away from her youngest child, and that hurt her immensely. She also had a son in contact with the criminal justice system who needed support. However, her tag had area limitations so she could not attend the meetings needed to support him. In research by other organisations women have also noted that tags with inappropriate curfews can significantly impact childcare, for example one woman noted:

"It happened to me, that a tag meant I could not take my child to Cubs. It feels like it's punishing the kids. I can imagine a scenario where you need to decide whether to take your child to after school activities or comply, or maybe you suddenly need nappies and can't get them because of the tag."^{xv}

All of the factors discussed here that impact on women's families should also be read in the context of negative impacts on their mental health (as discussed in the section below), as women often linked the two elements.

"I was out once with a friend and by 4 pm I got nervous and asked the friend to get me home soon. On the way back we got stuck in traffic, I ended up getting out of the car and running. It was pure panic. My mind was thinking 'am I going to get back in time?' It's dangling over your head that you could go back [to prison]. If I had to if I go back, I can't cope. But it's also 'I'll lose the relationship with my family, the job', it's in the back of my mind – It will all be taken away from me for any reason, even the smallest thing.

... they wanted me to work until 5 pm in the city centre. It's only 10 miles home but it could take over 1.5 hours for example when there's an accident on the road. When I got stuck in traffic, the state I was in by the time I got back sometimes I was so stressed and asking how can I get back? I got to the point where my sister was on the phone as I was panicking and she was saying 'how can I get you back in time?'

You are constantly a prisoner in your own life...It had a huge effect on lots of the family. I had to get people to help me out all the time. e.g. picking me up from appointments...On Christmas Eve my whole family went out for a meal – It was booked for lunch time and family had to take holidays at work to accommodate me...Everyone else had to change their plans to accommodate me and that makes me feel like a burden."

Sarah, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

"I lived with my partner at the time I was first tagged and it affected him a lot. He was also sleep deprived [because the phone rang through the night], worried for me, and frustrated at the faulty device. Knowing we would have to say goodbye to one another in a couple of months when I was going to prison was upsetting for both of us. Our nights consisted of waking up and taking videos of the tag box ringing as proof that I had not breached my tag. He went through emotional hell too and I felt deep shame that I had put him through that.

It also affected my godmother when I was tagged to her address after release. She works as a carer and has to get up early. We both often waited up to see if the tagging officers would arrive and both anticipated being woken up after midnight. I felt awful for her that the whole process felt loud, clumsy, invasive and inconsiderate. I know it was my fault, but it did make me wonder why it all had to be done after midnight and in such a disruptive way."

Beatrice, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

"[Being on tag and] having to work around what you can and can't do, you're more trapped than you'd imagine. Like my children's birthdays, I couldn't go. It affects the children more... My daughter's father, he'd actually taken her away from me all because of this tag. I've...lost a child and for two years he didn't let me see her... It gets it into a position where I'm crying, I can't be there for my children, I can't do anything to support them and make them feel happy and comfortable."

Kisha, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

Discomfort, shame, stigma, and impacts on self esteem

"When you're on the tag and you walk down the street people point and comment it's, embarrassing the stigma around it."

Sarah, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

[The tag is] "heavy and tight. When it was so hot in the summer I had blisters on my wrist where it rubbed."

"I have it on my arm, it's embarrassing. There's a sense of shame. I take my grandchild to school, so I wear a big chunky cardigan to cover it up. I was wearing that cardi even when it was really hot last summer. I think on your leg you can hide it more, but not so much on your arm"

"I was released from prison then on tag for six months. You have two sentences - half of you feels like you're still in prison half the time"

Karen, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

"It's really uncomfortable, it's embarrassing. It's like they don't think when it comes to putting these things on, the size, how it fits on somebody and even within your clothing. It actually damaged my left leg, I got scarred from it. I've got a square block in my leg, really damaged, sores that I'd had to get cream for from the doctors... it scarred my leg in a square, as if you had the iron for instance and it burnt you, it had printed the shape of the actual block tag in my leg. It was red because of how much it was rubbing, whether I was indoors or outdoors walking around, it was rubbing into my leg and it was really irritating, it hurt."

Kisha, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

"Being on tag is like torture: you're almost free, but you're still locked up. Like a dog on a chain."

"It felt like the punishment was visible."

Women interviewed by Working Chance^{xvi}

One woman speaking to Working Chance, shared an anecdote about visiting the hospital for a cervical screening test and a nurse enquiring about the ankle monitor. She found the experience embarrassing and isolating. Another woman described having a tag put on her ankle:

"Wearing a tag you feel controlled and stigmatised. It makes you feel paranoid with them knowing your every move. I felt like my freedom had gone from that minute..."

I also feel that if you have completed your 90-day sentence, you should not be further punished by wearing an electronic tag. This causes further stigma for women and will also affect their children. A lot of women in custody have suffered domestic abuse... These women have been monitored and controlled by their partners or ex partners and being monitored by a tag can further traumatize you even though you're observing your sentence.

If tagging is used, it should be an alternative to placing women in custody on remand, and in many cases instead of custodial sentences for women. Electronic tagging should not be an additional punishment once your sentence is complete.

When a woman wears a tag there is a stigma. I think it is extremely visible and must be embarrassing at school gates for mum and her children. It identifies that you have committed, or have been accused of committing, a crime.

For so many women who have been controlled throughout their lives this feels like the worst control ever, where you know that the authorities know where you are at all times".

Lilly, One Small Thing^{xvii}

Several women described how the ankle tag hurt them, particularly when walking, and many described that it was impossible to wear boots, including knee high boots, ankle boots and walking boots. Importantly, the first two are gender specific and again illustrate where the tags have not been designed for women. In one case a woman had to wait for several weeks to be tagged as the right size, as a small one for a woman was not available.

Shame and stigma were a strong theme for women and came up in Women in Prison's interviews and those conducted by partner organisations. Many women described trying to hide the tag and how those feelings of shame damaged their self-esteem, having knock on effects on their family relationships, partners and confidence to take new steps in life, for example into education.

Some of the interviewees described how the tags stopped them exercising, mostly from the embarrassment of being seen, for example swimming in the tag; and in one case from hiking, as hiking boots would not fit.

In our conversations with women and research elsewhere, some women felt their tagging was unfair or unreasonable. For example, one woman was 54 years old and questioned why she had been tagged when *"there was no way I was going to go out at them times."* ^{xviii}

A woman we spoke to had been given geographical exclusion zones but she felt they did nothing to stop her offending and were meaningless. They also prevented her from seeing her parents and other family members for several months:

"[My offence] was protesting in London and then they were like, you can't come to London. Then they decided that if I left West Yorkshire, I would offend. So, there wasn't really any like logical justification to it, they just did it..."

I'd been like asking questions about my licence condition and challenging them. I was put on like really strict conditions not to go to any meetings or go to any gatherings, not to

directly or indirectly contribute to the internet, including social media, not to meet with anyone that had been involved in any protest ever in their life currently or formally.

Just things that were completely unworkable. So, I was asking clarifying questions like, what is a meeting? What is a gathering? If I bump into a friend, is that okay? Like if I go and get coffee with one person, then someone else shows up, does that become a gathering?

And then because of the questions I was asking, they escalated my risk from medium to high. And then the normal protocol is to recall you back to prison when your risk gets increased, but there's a piloted scheme in a few probation areas, one of them being [where I lived], where they can put you on a tag instead of sending you to prison. And I think they only increased my risk to put me on a tag, not the other way around. So then I got put on an 8 till 8 curfew and trail monitoring GPS."

Eden, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

Research into electronic monitoring of women also found that many women experienced stigma and shame regarding the tags,^{xix} others have described how wearing a tag can severely impact self-esteem and contribute to cycles of isolation. One woman from a group run by the charity Revolving Doors shared how the tag made her feel trapped and alienated, which hindered her rehabilitation:

"I was on tag for about eight weeks – it was really detrimental to how I felt about myself and the relationship I had with the police. It negatively affected my mental health because I was in hostels at the time, alone, and I was a teenager trapped. It's also detrimental to rehabilitation and fitting into the community. If I wanted to do a course, it would make it clear I was different from everyone else."^{xx}

Recent research has also called for caution regarding the use of tags, alongside other management measures. The Centre for Crime and Justice Studies noted that electronic monitoring "is primarily a denial of physical liberty and a form of detention; it is intrusive and applied to the body; and has the potential to stigmatise. Hence it qualifies at the higher end of sanctions, at a different level from measures like conventional community orders".^{xxi} Delap and Hogarth suggest that "Caution is needed... in face of the rhetoric that community orders need to be 'tough', 'robust' and 'punitive', with even more coercive requirements, such as curfews and tagging, in order for them to be seen as effective alternatives to custody. Surely this establishes a disproportionate response for the many women with low risk, repeat offending, and one that risks setting them up to fail."^{xxii}

Impact on mental health

A theme that emerged from speaking to women was that the tag had a negative impact on their mental health. For many, it created a feeling of anxiety all the time, whether that was when they were out of the house and scared they wouldn't get back in time for their curfew, or whether they were at home and waiting for a visit from the company, or a phone call. For some, the anxiety got so bad that they limited where they could go and did not take part in family and social activities. Later in the briefing we discuss the faults that happened with tags, which were many and frequent. It is important to note how detrimental the issue of faults was to women's mental health.

"I spent 2 months on tag awaiting sentencing and during that time I had a faulty tag device that would consistently ring throughout the early hours of the morning, often starting at 2am and going on until 8am. Having never been in trouble with the law before, having been outed in the media before conviction, having waited two and a half years for my trial, and living in constant fear of going to prison, I was already very distressed. The emotional toll of having constant ringing throughout the night, combined with the fear of police banging loudly on my door to arrest me for a breach I did not make, was mental torture..."

[Being on tag after prison] There was a huge toll on my mental health. I remember trying to get the bus back one day and there had been a car accident. I had left an hour to get back and the journey would usually take 25 minutes. It was getting closer to my curfew time and I was panicking. I had a mental breakdown on a busy high street and called my mum saying, 'I am going to get recalled, I do not know what to do.' I flagged down a taxi in the end and he kindly drove as fast as he could. I was in total despair and constant fear of being sent back to prison. I felt isolated in a world that did not understand..."

Being on tag is not easy. It can feel isolating and you live with the stigmatisation of wearing it, in many ways still in a mental prison and living in fear of being recalled despite doing your best to progress and move forward. It can feel very lonely and, even when you are trying your absolute best, it can feel like it is never good enough when things do not go smoothly."

Beatrice, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

Some women had got so depressed on tag they had contemplated suicide. However, what they did also say was that visiting supporting women's centres, for example Women in Prison's Beth Centre in Lambeth, significantly helped their mental health and helped them cope whilst on tag.

One woman described a different perspective, as the incident that led to her offence was a very violent and traumatic assault. She described the tag as acting as a reminder all the time of that trauma, and the way it is attached to her body adds to that feeling. She also noted that the tag reminded her every day that she felt justice had not been seen for her perpetrators and that thought was with her all the time. Some women also noted that if they lived alone, the tag led to them feeling isolated in the evenings.

"So it's like you're stuck...in the routine of your charging and you've just got so much time to focus on it. And...then it puts you in that negative mode where you're sitting there stuck, charging, seeing it flash as if it was the paramedics or the police car going down the road.

It's consistently flashing. And then, you just go back into that negative mode and you're stuck and it gives you more time to think about what the outcome [of the sentence] is going to be.

This is what goes through my head and gives me more time to think the negative of everything that's going on. Even though I am a positive person, I'm not trying to give up. But this actually made me nearly take my life. Just last year... I took an overdose of medication and [wanted to] kill myself. Because it gives me too much time and puts a hold on so much within my life...I have more time to see and observe everybody else. My sister going to work, my other sister is going on holiday. All this stuff I have more time to see...You have more time to sit at home alone, crying about what everyone else can do... Being alone is just giving me more time...

I'm trying to focus on the positive side of where this can take me. I don't want to die, I don't want to let this destroy me or damage me anymore. Just trying my hardest to do so much. Being with [a women's centre] is amazing. It's so uplifted me, the support I've received, everything that's going on is great."

Kisha, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

One woman with PTSD and anxiety said:

"tagging anyone with mental health issues leaves you panicking. My worst fear is going back to prison.... Your whole life is on hold.... It's really taxing, especially if you have anxiety. It took my anxiety through the roof! I'm happily up at 5am so one morning I took the bin out and they called. I forgot!

You're afraid to go out because of the mistakes the company make with your tag, you're afraid you'll get breached when you've done nothing wrong.

You are constantly checking the time. [My family] were planning a beach day but I was so worried in case we got stuck in traffic I couldn't go. Just generally I don't feel like I can go anywhere but local.

...There's nothing good about it, it's a horrendous experience. At least in prison you know your routine."

Karen, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

"I found that my mental health suffered quite majorly every time I've been on tag. In some ways in a bigger way than it was impacted in prison. It was kind of worse being on tag. Because in prison, it's bad, it's really bad, but you kind of have your support networks and there's people around you in a similar boat. But the combination of being on licence or on

bail, but not to speak to certain people maybe, plus being on tag, it's an isolating experience.

I know someone who asked when they were held to court and they were basically discussing whether or not she was going to get bail. And she said, 'if you're considering putting me on a tag, you can just send me to prison. I cannot do it again'. She was really, really impacted the first time she was on tag, so she was like, 'I cannot be on tag again. I don't think I'll actually be able to keep myself going if I'm put on tag again.' She has compounding health issues, which can make things difficult and mobility stuff, but that, on top of being on tag, just was over the edge for her."

Eden, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

Equipment that does not fit women's bodies

Across the wide spectrum of technology development, what we see again and again is the creation of tools that do not take gender into account, because in most cases, that technology has not been designed for women, or effectively tested on women. One issue that stands out is that women often struggled with tags that did not fit their bodies.

"After my custodial sentence, I was released on HDC. Due to the early release scheme at the time and many prisoners being released early, there was a shortage of tags and it took about 3 weeks for the tagging officers to arrive. Every night I anticipated a loud knock at the door. When the officers finally came, it was after midnight and they did not have the right size tag, so they used what they had and said they would have to make another trip to fit another tag at some point...to be told there was a shortage of tags and they did not have a size that fitted me felt frustrating, because I really did not want any more loud knocks at the door in the early hours. I have PTSD and am very sensitive to noise and banging."

Beatrice, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

Case Study: Gender discrimination in tagging

"On 9th November 2022 I took part in a peaceful and nonviolent Climate action. I was arrested and released on bail on an HDC. I was required to be tagged and at my home from 7pm to 7am. I could not have a leg tag owing to a previous Deep Vein Thrombosis, so needed a wrist tag.

The EMS, (Electronic Monitoring Service, or Serco), were unable to find a suitable wrist tag, despite this being their job. A Court in Maidstone ruled that the tag condition be dropped. My

HDC continued for 630 days, when I was given a prison sentence. Had I been tagged, my time in prison would have been shortened by 315 days.

I spent fifteen weeks in Peterborough HMP and was released on 18th November 2024. On my release, EMS again failed to find a suitable wrist tag for me. Through no fault of my own, I was deemed to be "unlawfully at large" and was recalled to Eastwood Park HMP on 21st December 2024. I spent 42 days and nights there. On my release, I was tagged for a few weeks, and then on license conditions, which finally ends on March 14th 2026.

No-one should be recalled because the technology has not been designed for women's bodies.

I was failed by the judiciary, the CPS, and the EMS/Serco."

Gaie Delap, woman with lived experience

During this process Gaie Delap, was in her late 70s. No tags were small enough to fit her wrists and this led to her being recalled.^{xxiii} Gaie herself looked into the matter and found that her wrists matched the size of the average women's watch in the UK. This is explicit gender discrimination where the system planned for a "typical prisoner" and therefore planned for a man's needs. Women – like so many times before – were overlooked. No one should be recalled to prison because the technology in use has not been designed for women's bodies.

Electronic Monitoring and violence against women

Latest data tells us that nearly 70% of women in prison have experienced domestic abuse,^{xxiv} making it inevitable that a significant number of women who are tagged will be survivors, or still at risk of domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women.

Very worryingly, Women in Prison have seen cases where women survivors of domestic abuse have been bound – through tagging – to areas where they are at risk from their abusers.

Perhaps the most shocking story from Women in Prison's work is a case where a woman was in breach because she left the permitted area while running from an attack by her abuser. As detailed in the overview, the government is set to expand the use of electronic monitoring. If resettlement and Probation Staff are not trained to conduct skilled and effective risk assessment for domestic abuse risk with any location or home detention curfew, women could be at risk of increased domestic abuse or other forms of violence against women.

Case Study HDC breach during a domestic abuse attack

"As part of our Domestic Abuse Services Pilot,^{xxv} we are aware of a woman who was identified as currently in an abusive relationship. She was released from prison on a tag that required her to remain in her home [at certain times]. During the time she was required to remain at home, her abusive partner kidnapped her and she went missing for several days.

This incident made her breach her tag conditions and she was recalled because of this. Then, when she became eligible for release she was told she wouldn't be granted the release for her own safety."

Nikola, Domestic Abuse Community Outreach, Women in Prison

Whilst we fully recognise that the decision not to release the woman was made with the best interests of her safety in mind – and that the team making the decision wanted a safe outcome for her – women should not lose their freedom because of the abuse they experience. Colleagues have told us that this is not the only case they have encountered of women being refused parole for their own safety.

Concerns raised by NAPO and the Domestic Abuse Commissioner

The role of tagging in increasing the risk of domestic abuse is not a new concern, as back in 2012 a report by NAPO, the Trade Union for Family Court and Probation staff, noted concern over domestic abuse cases, including:

"On a number of occasions individual men were tagged and curfewed to their home address when they had been convicted of domestic violence...A number of Probation Officers expressed concerns about women who were victims of domestic violence being tagged to the same address as where the perpetrator of the violence resided and therefore having to breach their curfew in order to find a place of refuge...

Staff report that in their area the breach rates for women on electronic curfew as higher than for men. The inference here is that a significant proportion of women subject to tagging in their homes were at risk of domestic violence and were prioritising their own safety over compliance with the curfew, that is leaving home in fear and facing the consequences in court for breach. G4S management said this was taken into account but this did not seem to be reflected in statistics. It is of concern to staff that a curfew order can be made without any assessment of or report on risk to the court by a Probation Officer. This therefore appears to discriminate against women offenders...

A curfew tag was imposed, in unsuitable circumstances, on an offender who was a convicted domestic violence perpetrator. This put his partner at greater risk. Staff believe this is a growing issue in a climate of punitive sentencing measures and the

growth of fast delivery reports which just deal with the index offence and miss out on previous domestic violence histories.”

In the 2025 Justice and Home Affairs letter to government on electronic monitoring, HMIP identified that there were “persistent problems with inadequate safeguarding and domestic abuse checks at the PSR [pre-sentence report] and resettlement planning stage”. Their survey said that in 63% of cases, no contact was made with any of the others at the home address before electronic monitoring was recommended. They also found a “lack of domestic abuse and safeguarding checks prior to many instances of curfew conditions or HDC requirements being made”.^{xxvi}

Importantly, the Domestic Abuse Commissioner welcomes provisions to strengthen community sentences, such as electronic monitoring and restriction zones, for those who perpetrate domestic abuse. However, she warns that provisions which aim to strengthen community sentences, such as electronic monitoring and restriction zones, are still not enough to prevent the perpetrator from continuing to abuse the victim in the community, and will make little difference without careful implementation that ensures breaches are properly addressed.^{xxvii} Such interventions must be part of a holistic joined up approach to prevent things like the ‘release from prison’ address being the victim’s home.^{xxviii} In 2023 HMIP recommended a domestic abuse strategy for Probation to address this.^{xxix}

Women in Prison is concerned about the capacity and current staff skill level within the Probation Service, to safely assess the risk of domestic abuse for someone who is going to be given electronic monitoring with location and time limitations. We are concerned both about assessing the risk if the person at risk is the survivor living in a home that a perpetrator of abuse is released to, or in cases where the person at risk is a woman being released to a home or area where she may be at risk from a perpetrator of abuse.

On an additional matter, Revolving Doors published a report that noted: “Beyond the stigma and social isolation [that women feel about tagging], there is also the issue of tagging being potentially triggering for women who have experienced abuse and coercive control in the past. The experience of being curfewed and tagged to a specific address can feel eerily similar to the control tactics used by their abusers.”^{xxx} They also highlighted a concerning issue about sexual exploitation, detailed below:

Case Study: Women exposed to exploitation

One particularly poignant insight from our female members is that wearing a tag can increase their vulnerability to exploitation by inadvertently exposing their vulnerabilities to exploiters.

“It [wearing a tag] highlighted to my exploiters that I was already committing crimes so they could persuade me to commit more crimes. It highlighted that I was a vulnerable young woman who could be taken advantage of because I was clearly in trouble. I don’t think it was a positive experience for me. I was pregnant when I was on tag and was tagged to an unsafe area. The police and council knew I was in the area of my exploiters, but I had to go there or I would be remanded. How many more women are tagged to unsafe areas too?”

Revolving Doors noted that “The idea of a tag increasing a woman’s risk of victimisation and targeting is something that has been given little consideration until now, but which should be explored more fully before a tag is issued. We believe that in cases like the one our member outlined above, the choice should not be a binary one between remand or tagging, but should instead be about putting a support package in place instead.” ^{xxxix}

Health, pregnancy and tagging

“My list of health problems is as long as my arm, but my main thing is [breathing] which I have to manage every day and night. I need to take up to 15 pills a day... I can drop down and die...it's painful and scary. Every day is a struggle.

I was shunted between intensive care, being on tag, and prison. They recalled me to prison after being discharged from the hospital at a time in the evening that meant I wouldn't get home for my curfew. They recalled me to prison because of that.”

Sandra, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

We have been extremely concerned about reports of women not receiving adequate maternity care whilst in custody. All pregnancies within prison are now classed as high risk,^{xxxix} with almost twice the risk of premature labour than in the general population. This is concerning as babies born preterm have a higher mortality rate and an increased risk of disability.^{xxxix} Pregnant women in prison are up to seven times more likely to experience stillbirth^{xxxix} and have higher rates of premature labour^{xxxix} than women in the community.

The Royal College of Midwifery recommends that “Women who...are on home detention curfew (or “tag”) or are on a curfew as part of a community sentence should be able to have their tag removed or repositioned while in labour or earlier in pregnancy should this become uncomfortable or provide a barrier to receiving care. Probation services need to respond flexibly and take account of the specific needs of perinatal women”.^{xxxix}

Swollen ankles are a well understood side effect of pregnancy and therefore ankle tags will never be a suitable option for pregnant women. In addition, rapidly swelling ankles may be a sign of a severe illness in need of medical care, for example pre-eclampsia.^{xxxix} In such circumstances a woman will need urgent treatment and there would not be time to contact Probation and have the tag removed. This risk is significant and therefore in the majority of cases, pregnant women should not be fitted with tags. Improvements in understanding women’s bodies also now help us understand that swollen ankles can be a symptom of menstruation, perimenopause, and menopause^{xxxix} and therefore such health factors should be carefully discussed and taken into account with women before a tag is fitted. Those holding the conversations should be sensitive to the fact that many women will not feel comfortable discussing such matters with a male member of probation staff.

We also had an extremely concerning situation detailed below. If a medical professional believes a tag is a risk to someone's health it should be removed immediately and there should be a clear chain of communication and accountability to ensure that that person suffers no repercussions, and is never recalled, due to health reasons.

Case study: Tagging unsuitable for medical reasons

"We have recently had an extremely concerning case. A woman we were working with was very unwell, she had endless physical health ailments. When she was released on tag, her feet and ankles swelled up, making wearing a tag far too tight and very uncomfortable. She raised this issue with Probation and provided them with all the evidence she could of her specific health needs. The hospital where she was seeking care had to intervene to say the tag was too tight and needed to be loosened or removed.

Probation stated that they wanted her GP to write a letter, stating that it was safe for her to wear. The GP was not willing to say it was safe, as they felt some risk was involved. We [Women in Prison] advocated for it to be removed but Probation said under no circumstances could it be removed.

Finally, a judge ordered it to be removed, but Probation then decided that she should be recalled to prison as she was 'not safe to wear a tag.' It was awful, she was caught in an impossible situation and Probation would not change the conditions of her HDC.

She was recalled to prison and her mental health deteriorated very severely, she has been suicidal due to the recall. Her mother then had to meet with the GP to try and persuade them to write the letter declaring the tag safe so that she could be released. She was not deemed to be a risk to the public by anyone on her support team and she may have a serious life-threatening illness developing."

Marie, Advocate, Women in Prison

Tagging, work and education

"I was actually studying before [entering the criminal justice system], I done a course in ICT, I did a beginners course and passed, I done two Level Twos and passed and my aim was let me go to Level Three... There are adult's courses [locally] but the time is 7pm [her curfew started at 7pm]. I couldn't apply because I couldn't go to the course."

Kisha, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

Several women described how their curfew times did not adjust quickly to allow them to take up work or got in the way of their studies, despite their Probation Officers working to

get the adjustment in place. Others described being extremely anxious every time the traffic was bad trying to get home from work.

Working Chance, who support women leaving prison back into work heard from women that tags were harming their ability to access work. They heard from women that current ankle tag models “are bulky and visible to others, and this hinders their ability to fully reintegrate back into society. Ankle tags are conspicuous, and we have heard of employers revoking an offer of employment because a candidate was wearing one, which not only acts as a barrier to work and rehabilitation but can lead to consequences, such as reoffending”.^{xxxix} They recommend more discreet technologies, such as smartwatches or apps on mobile phones to be explored to provide an equally effective and cheaper form of supervision, a suggestion we support.

“When I was released from prison on tag, I enrolled to start a degree at university. At first, I felt extremely embarrassed and tried to cover my tag as much as I could. I requested that my curfew times be amended slightly because I could not get to my 9am lectures on time. Despite my probation officer agreeing to this, it took 4 or 5 months for it to be changed.

I was also working in hospitality and could have taken on more hours if the time had been amended. I spent months chasing probation, only to be told she had sent emails and tried to make calls to the tagging company. When I called them myself, I would get through to people who could not see any correspondence logged on their system. I would have to explain the situation over and over again, only for them to say they needed my probation officer to confirm it. I would say she had, and they would say they could not see it on the system. When I spoke to my probation officer, she said she had emailed them.

This three-way communication reminded me of prison. It makes you feel like you are going insane. It makes you think you are being lied to, but you do not know which person is lying.

After months of calling myself, I finally got through to a woman who was compassionate and understanding. She said she was not surprised I was having such a nightmare. She explained that they had a new portal system in place and that this had not been communicated to my Probation Officer. She broke it all down for me, said good luck with my studies, and apologised that the system was like this.

I remember crying, just to be seen and for someone to tell me what had happened and to be empathetic. All the time I felt like I was not being believed. No one cared because I was someone who had been released from prison and was probably trying to pull a fast one, when all I wanted was to be able to attend my lectures like the rest of my class. Finally, with 1 month left on my tag, my hours were changed...

They need to ensure the equipment works and that probation and Serco have better lines of communication, as well as updates if systems change. People need to recognise that if tagging prevents people from getting on with their lives in terms of education, work, and family, then what is the purpose of the tag?

Tagging should be considered case by case. If people work nights, have lectures to attend, or have childcare issues, these positive things contribute to keeping people out of prison. Tagging should not make it harder for people to get on with these things.”

Beatrice, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

Housing

Despite the best efforts of our staff team to ensure the appropriate stakeholders put housing options in place, some women are released from prison homeless. Some women also find that the approved premises they have been released to feel unsafe, and they feel threatened or feel at risk of returning to drug use. Requiring someone to stay in accommodation where they feel at risk is not an appropriate use HDC and electronic monitoring and such risk factors should be taken into consideration before a tag is fitted.

Case study: Tagging a homeless woman

We recently worked with a woman who had been given a tag on license, but she was homeless. She didn't have a home to stay in and nowhere to charge her tag. It eventually ran out of battery and she was recalled to court. The judge rejected her claims that she was homeless as a reason for the battery running out, and she was recalled to prison.

Concerns raised about the use of tag for disabled and black and racially minoritised people

During a series of evidence sessions for the Justice and Home Affairs Committee^{xi}, a number of witnesses raised concerns about the lack of monitoring of electronic monitoring outcomes for those with disabilities and data on ethnicity and impact. Written evidence by Professor Anthea Hucklesby commented: "No data are published on the use of electronic monitoring for different ethnic groups [and] ... no account is taken of the different physiology of women, children or members of minority ethnic groups. Policies, procedures and regimes are generally 'diversity blind'.^{xii} In addition to this, the Black Equity Organisation has raised that on one programme, Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) data showed that Black people were nearly twice as likely (87% more likely) to be selected for the electronic monitoring scheme than white people.^{xiii}

Although this data doesn't cover gender, it is a cause for concern. The Ministry of Justice has said that because "the provision of electronic monitoring tags applies equally to all offenders, the provision is not directly discriminatory."^{xiii} However, we disagree, as our case studies in this report show that in some cases it is gender that has specifically led to a different and more negative experience.

Recall and electronic monitoring

The rates of recall are a significant driver of the rising prison population.^{xliv} There were 11,041 licence recalls between April and June 2025. This was a 13% increase on the same quarter in 2024.^{xlv}

In the last 12 months^{xlvi}, 3,149 women have been recalled, compared to 2,836 in the full year of 2024, 1,969 in 2023 and 1,593 in 2022.^{xlvii} The rise from 2022 to 2024 appears to mark a 78% increase and indications are that the number will rise again in 2025. In the time period of October 2020 to September 2025, breaches of HDCs were cited 200 times as reasons for recall for women.^{xlviii}

For women, prison can be a traumatic experience and any type of recall is at best upsetting, and at worst very traumatic, harmful and even life threatening. In one of our case studies, recall led the woman to thoughts of suicide. Recall disrupts all of the resettlement arrangements put in place for women. It disrupts their housing, potentially meaning they lose accommodation placements; it disrupts essential care for those with health problems; and it disrupts families and caring responsibilities. Recall should be viewed as a very serious punishment and the decision to recall a person should never be taken lightly.

The Recall Reform Coalition^{xlix} – a group of organisations working in criminal justice and legal practice – have set out their concerns about unnecessary recall. For example, how such recalls cost the government additional money bringing that person back to prison; counter efforts to reduce reoffending by disrupting all the resettlement plans that were put in place; and reduce the ability of people who've left prison to access employment, as any opportunities they had to access work on release will be lost due to recall. The Coalition have emphasised the importance of meaningfully involving individuals in co-producing their licence conditions, and on improving wider communication between Probation and those on license about their conditions. They highlight that this work should account for gender-specific needs; the impact of trauma and abuse and high levels of neurodiversity; literacy needs and wider speech and language needs among people on probation. We support such calls as co-producing license conditions with women will help them succeed and avoid unnecessary recalls. They also recommend a clear framework for decision-making for Probation practitioners about whether to recall, further investment in resettlement support, and an independent decision-maker for non-emergency recall decisions.

We have seen first-hand women being recalled to prison for administrative purposes. The case studies in this paper illustrate women being recalled to prison because they were fleeing domestic abuse and because tags are badly designed and not suitable for women. These are explicit discriminatory practices and would fail any equality assessment. Such administrative recall is costing the government unnecessary money and harming women. Women should never be recalled because there is a problem with their Electronic Monitoring. The Justice and Home Affairs Committee concluded that “We know that women are amongst the most vulnerable group in the Criminal Justice System.

Failure to consider adequately their specific needs risks breaching the Public Sector Equality Duty and every effort must be made to ensure that electronic monitoring is used appropriately with women.”¹

“I think tags like, you know, you were a minute late or whatever, there's no flexibility with it. And then people just end up back in prison. It's really, really hard when people live their normal lives. I met so many women inside who were recalled for tag breaches when it's [for example] you let it die because you've got three kids and like you're working shift work. So you can't charge it at regular time and you forgot about it and then you let it die. And because of that, your kids are back in care now and you're back in prison because you did what anyone else would do, which is be tired and stressed and forget to charge something.

It's so unworkable. I think when these people have never had a bit of metal around their ankle, that's watching everywhere you go and seeing everything you do. It's actually really bad technology, it's obviously made really cheap. They're really cumbersome and you can't see what charge they're on. It doesn't properly tell you when it's [running low] I think it's completely unworkable. It just sets people up to fail.”

Eden, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

What was notable from our interviews was that the threat of recall hanging over the relationship between the Probation Officer and the woman we spoke to meant that the women didn't trust their Probation Officer and wouldn't go to them to discuss work and the support they needed, harming progress in other aspects of their lives:

“I don't trust Probation at all, basically. Going forward, I won't trust Probation. I'm definitely not going to tell them anything that they don't ask. I don't tell them some of the things that they do ask. I thought with Probation, if I was open and honest and asked questions and, you know, just told them what I was doing because I knew that everything I was doing was fine, then it would be fine and we'd have a good relationship and they'd help me with getting a job or things like that. And instead, it's just been the complete opposite. So now, going forward, I'm incredibly distrustful and definitely won't be like offering any information at all.”

Eden, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

Faulty equipment and concerning practice by tagging companies

This theme came up repeatedly amongst the women we spoke to. The majority of women we spoke to described faults of one kind or another with the tags, several described poor practice by the staff employed by the companies, this included not showing ID when coming to a person's house, and several reports of the tagging company turning up very late at night, several times it was after midnight, which led to sleep deprivation for the women involved.

Another common theme was that whilst Probation Officers were trying to rectify faults on the company's system and record accurate information, their emails and requests were going unanswered by the companies involved.

In one case a woman had not been given access to her garden at home, despite her Probation Officer requesting this as it was important for her mental health. As a result, the tag team returned to redo the parameters of her home. She is in her 60s with heart and lung problems and they asked her to 'run around' the parameters of her home.

"At 11.10pm that night the phone went, the guy was screaming at me. He said 'you've broken your thing'. They were trying to do me for breach. He was so obviously rude to me, spoke to me like I'm the scum of the earth. I'm a victim of domestic abuse and being spoken to like that puts me on the defensive. The phone rang again at 3.10am... My Probation Officer made a formal complaint about the way they screamed at me..."

For a while the phone number – It's supposed to be private – was ringing at all times, they were saying 'did I want stocks and shares?' Then they asked for 'Dareen' then 'Amy', asking for the wrong person and at very weird times of night. I was getting cold calls! And every time the phone rings you panic, you rush to get to it quick, if you're like me and you have mobility issues it's horrendous. And some were so rude on the phone - to them you're not even human."

Another time they called and said I'd been out from 8pm to 2am, I said "I'm in my 60s with heart and lung problems, where am I going all night?"

Karen, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

"While I was on tag, it kept going off in error. It's been six years, and I still sometimes jolt up in the middle of the night looking for the [tag monitor] box."

Woman interviewed by Working Chance^{li}

"I had a faulty tag device that would consistently ring throughout the early hours of the morning, often starting at 2am and going on until 8am...Every time I got up to answer the phone there was no one on the other end. I would put it down, get back into bed, and then hear it ringing again. This went on for 2 months and, despite constant emails with video evidence explaining the mental impact and sleep deprivation it was causing, I was told someone from EMS would come out and fix it, but they never did.

When sentencing day finally came around, I had to leave my house before curfew hours to get to court on time. I was going to prison. Sentencing was adjourned that day for a week and, later that night in the early hours of the morning, I was arrested for breaching my curfew by Met Police, who handcuffed me. I was in a police cell for several hours while my solicitor went to Magistrates Court to explain what had happened. The police apologised and I left in my pyjamas with no belongings to walk home feeling utter despair. Looking back, I was in mental turmoil. My life felt completely hopeless and the system was agonising...."

Beatrice, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

Another important factor was the need to charge certain tags. Women described discomfort from having to charge and be positioned at an awkward angle whilst doing so. Others noted that it was hard to tell how well charged the tag was, and so practical errors could happen easily, but the consequences were very severe.

"I think like the hardest parts of being on tag was like having to be like plugged in, because like if it dies, that's a breach and you can go out to prison. So having to like constantly think about, where's my like nearest plug and when am I going to charge it? It doesn't tell you when it's going to die, it just beeps and then, well vibrates, and then it dies. And then, yeah, so you have like, you put on like 20 minutes notice basically to like get to a charger.

If we ever made any plans it would have to like kind of exist around being near a plug. Every time I've been on tag my whole life has just revolved around proximity to power because they're so temperamental and it seems like they can last for 24 hours sometimes and the next day and it might be like they're like a magnetic. Well, there's an old type and a new type and the new type is like a little magnet that fits on it. I think sometimes it just doesn't connect properly or something maybe, but the power can last for ages and then it can last for like 4 hours or something, which like that didn't happen very often. I think that was maybe when it just didn't charge properly, but you don't have any indication of like what charge it's on...

I was falsely arrested for a tag breach when I was on tag. It wasn't a curfew tag, but you know when you're first put on tag [you are told] 'stay inside from 5pm until midnight to allow the tag to be fitted'? Somehow that had then been written into the actual conditions of my tag. So, the tag company then thought that I had to be in between 5pm and midnight. So they fitted the tag, and I was in between 5 and midnight. And then the next

day I'd gone out with my friends and come back at like 10 maybe. Then I got in and that phone that they fit in your house was ringing and I answered it and they said, 'is this [Eden]?' And they said, 'have you just got in?' They said, 'you're late for your curfew.' I said, 'I'm not on a curfew' and they said, 'Well, it says here you've got to be in between 5:00 and midnight'. And I was like, 'that's obviously not a curfew, no one has that as a curfew. That's not real, what are you talking about?' And they were like, 'Oh, OK...we'll make a note'.

They made a note, and then, about 3 weeks later, the police appear. I was on my way to uni and they just arrest me and take me to the police station. I was explaining to them, I was explaining it over and over again. And then I was held until I was released at one or two in the morning with no money, no phone. And it was only when they had like a shift change and there was a new officer on who was like, 'Why are you here?' And I said 'I don't know'.

[A fundamental problem with the system is] the inability for people like the police [etc.] to make their own decisions. [At the moment], it's just like, this piece of paper here says we have to do this [and there's no flexibility]

I was done for loads of breaches while I was on tag as a licence condition, because when they changed my tag time from 8pm to 8am, I went to my probation meeting and she said, we're going to change it to 10pm to 7am. Well, she said 10pm to 8am.

And then I said, can you make it 7am instead? And she said, yeah, okay. So she told me out loud, 'effective immediately, your tag is now 10pm till 7am. We'll send you out a copy of your new licence to your address'. I said, 'great'. And I said, 'just checking, it's definitely active like as of now?' And she said, 'yeah, definitely as of right now, this is your new tag time.'

I never, ever received a copy of the new time sent to my address. And every single time I got home after 8pm, but like before 10pm, I'd get a phone call from the tag company on the box. And often when I'd be out and my parents would answer it, saying that I, had breached my licence conditions basically. And then I would say if I was around, to be fair, I got to a point, I just stopped picking the phone up. I must have been ringing, it was probably like four or five times a week it was happening. It was all the time. It was every single time I was out past 8pm, but before 10pm, I'd get a phone call or my parents would get the phone call and they'd say, like, you're in breach of your conditions. And we'd explain every time I'm not in breach, my tag times have been changed. And they would say, well, you need to ask your Probation Officer to send us the paperwork because we don't have it. So every appointment I'd go to, I'd tell her and I'd text her as well sometimes and to say, I just got a phone call again.

And I was less worried because I was like, I can't change this is happening. I'm not going to stay in from 8. But my parents were really, really worried that I was going to get recalled and also that this will impact if I ever go on tag in the future, it will like all be on my record.

And I never got nicked for it or anything like that. But yeah, I did a judicial review of my licence conditions and part of that we asked for a copy of my records from EMS. And they've all been listed as breaches, they've not been took off. So I've got a couple of pages of just tables of tag breaches on my EMS record, which obviously if I do go for tag again, that will come up.

Eden, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

Eden also explained that information about the boundaries of her GPS tag were very hard to understand:

[What are your recommendations to government?] "I think we have to stop using [tags]. But in terms of short-term, if you're going to use them, it has to be workable.... The first two times that I was put on tag, when it's a GPS tag, they send you your exclusion zones, they send you a map of where you can and can't go. The map that I was sent, the first time it had been cropped, so there was half the map I couldn't actually see. It just ended and I couldn't see where the rest of the exclusion zone or the map was.

...When I was banned from West Yorkshire, I genuinely do not know what's [the boundary], I know West Yorkshire is like Wakefield, Leeds, Bradford. I think that's it, Huddersfield, maybe. I'm not sure. I don't actually really know what West Yorkshire is...I went and met some friends somewhere in West Yorkshire.

We drove and I remember watching us on the maps and then comparing it to the paper that I had. It was on an A4 piece of paper, like a small map that had been where half of it was missing. Luckily not the half that we were going. And I was trying to work out if we were going past or not. And I couldn't tell at all. It was so unclear and so unworkable...

I was being like set up to fail by not even being told where I can and can't go."

Accountability for electronic monitoring

"It is so important that the equipment works and that there are clearer ways to get in contact with the tagging company. It is easy to understand why some people may feel like giving up and going back to prison if they feel unheard, exhausted and constantly anxious."

Beatrice, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

We are concerned about the lack of accountability and centralised oversight for electronic monitoring. We've heard time and again about problems women face with tagging, and between the prison, the tagging company and other agencies like healthcare, no one working in the system seems to be responsible. This is particularly poignant in cases like the ones cited above where a woman's health was at risk, and where the outcome was a recall to prison. It is absolutely unacceptable that any company delivering government contracts does not have easy-to-access communication and accountability mechanisms for such serious situations.

Women frequently described to us that they needed to ask a lot of questions to clarify their curfews and limitations of their tags, they described how the feedback could be very limited and hard to follow, and that the blockers were often with the tagging company.

"I asked 'what happens if I need to go to hospital?' And they said 'you need to prove you were in hospital' It feels like you're going blue in the face asking for the rules... My Probation Officer was good but they [the tagging company] didn't respond to her."

Karen, woman with lived experience, Women in Prison

Criticisms of the use of electronic monitoring

In 2018, the Ministry of Justice published a 'Female Offender Strategy'.^{lii} This directly addressed the issue of imposing short prison sentences on low-risk women who committed non-violent offences, offering the increased use of community provision as an alternative. Proposals included a pilot to use GPS electronic monitoring with women specifically and to develop the use of electronically monitored curfews. This was the first time that policy had referred directly to the use of electronic monitoring with women in England and Wales. The approach has been criticised by Holdsworth (2019) for using:

"...little reference to research evidence... This includes no research specifically on women's experiences, replicating the ongoing pattern of policy failing to take differences of female offenders into account. Instead, the report quoted a number of developments in the use of

Electronic Monitoring technology and suggested their possible use with women. Electronically monitored curfews were presented as a means to provide more 'support' to women if used creatively. This was suggested on the basis that it could 'improve outcomes when used in conjunction with interventions that contain rehabilitative components'.^{iviii}

In light of the government's proposals to tag nearly all those leaving prison, the Justice and Home Affairs Committee has raised some concerns, with their Chair, Lord Foster of Bath, noting:

"The Probation Service needs more funding, and many more well-trained staff if there is to be a successful Electronic Monitoring expansion. Without this, the Probation Service is being set up to fail.

It is startling that the Government is promoting the biggest expansion of Electronic Monitoring in a generation, at a time of great technological advancement yet does not see fit to accompany this with a new strategy.

There is also a new presumption that all prison leavers will be subject to Electronic Monitoring on their release from custody. This blanket approach to tagging, regardless of crime and circumstances, diminishes the role of effective, targeted probation interventions, and risks creating an unethical system that is overly punitive and disproportionate."^{liv}

The Committee go on to say that they "take... the view that there is a need for a new Electronic Monitoring strategy. Doubling the number of people subject to Electronic Monitoring, over such a short time span, is highly likely to create complex issues across a variety of areas, including ethical issues. These issues will require an overarching strategy to identify and address them..."^{lv} They also raised significant concerns about the performance of the private companies providing electronic monitoring and further concerns that the problems were not being addressed.

"The performance to date of the private sector in providing electronic monitoring services has been dire and does not inspire confidence for future performance."^{lvi}

Conclusion

At present the use of electronic monitoring has significant flaws that are harming women in serious and life changing ways. Flaws in electronic monitoring are leading to women being recalled. Being recalled to prison is a very serious loss of liberty. It disrupts and harms all of the resettlement plans put in place and adds to prison overcrowding. For some women it is also deeply traumatic.

Some of the problems with electronic monitoring are practical and impact men and woman in similar ways. Such cases should be examined carefully. However, some problems are due to specific gender discrimination and a criminal justice system that doesn't account

for women's specific needs and lived realities. Tags are not designed for women's bodies and women are suffering because of that. In these cases, it is unacceptable that women lose liberty due to gender discrimination.

Co-producing license agreements with women will significantly improve the success of license and resettlement plans. While some women can see the benefits of electronic monitoring and welcome the chance to be in the community, others find it shaming, stigmatising or harmful to their health. Good quality preparation by Probation will help to deal with this.

It is completely unacceptable that any woman is put in harm's way due to electronic monitoring and HDC conditions and how they relate to domestic abuse. With almost 70% of women in prison having experienced domestic abuse, the need to check for the presence of domestic abuse - and explore women's safety - should be a norm for all licence conditions for women, not an additional afterthought.

Recommendations

In the evidence above, we have demonstrated that there are cases where electronic monitoring is not going to be a suitable option for some women. This should not mean a return to prison or a delay in release. Instead, where electronic monitoring is not an option, other community approaches should be utilised, working with women's centres and community provision.

Violence Against Women

- No woman should be considered in breach of conditions or recalled for fleeing or suffering domestic abuse
- We want to see a robust strategy – with funding in place – to ensure that all staff involved in arranging and implementing tags and home detention curfews are trained and skilled to ask about, identify and act to prevent the risks posed by domestic abuse.
- As part of co-producing license conditions with women, all women should be asked if there is any risk to them from domestic abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls. Licence conditions should then be designed accordingly.
 - The Government should provide a significant amount of ring-fenced core funding, with matched funding granted from a local consortium of commissioners to ensure the long- term sustainability of such vital services.
 - The Government should provide mandatory commissioning guidance to local commissioners (police and crime commissioners, local health commissioners and local authorities) to ensure that a network of appropriate services is available nationwide.

Health:

- No women should be forced to wear a tag that places any form of risk to her health. The concerns of health professionals around tagging an individual should be given priority in decision making processes. No one should be recalled due to tag removal for health reasons.
- There needs to be a clear protocol and line of communication for the removal of tags due to medical needs that explicitly avoids recall for the wearer.

Technology designed for women

- No woman should be in breach or recalled due to the lack of gender aware designs or policy making with regards to tags and HDCs.
- We recommend that all technological alternatives in the criminal justice system are thoroughly gender informed and ensure a flexible response to women's experiences and needs.
- There should be a review of tagging equipment to explore what adaptations could be made to reduce pain and discomfort whilst wearing. Alternatives should also explore how they reduce the negative impacts on work and other aspects of lifestyle like exercise. Such considerations should include looking at tags that look like smart watches and options on phones. Alternatives to ankle tags should be made more readily available so that it is easy for Probation to switch to alternative placements due to medical or wellbeing needs.

Pregnancy and early motherhood

- There needs to be a new, non-custodial sentencing framework that avoids tagging pregnant women and mothers of dependent children unless strictly necessary to meet the seriousness of offence.
- There needs to be new Probation guidance to end the use of recall for pregnant women and mothers.

Accountability, recall and license conditions

- In line with the calls by the Recall Reform Coalition¹ steps should be taken to meaningfully involve women in the co-production of their license conditions and improve the wider communication of license conditions. This work should account for gender-specific needs; the impact of trauma and abuse and high levels of neurodiversity, literacy and wider speech and language needs among people on probation.
- There needs to be a clear and transparent line of accountability for decisions around tags and HDCs so that if a woman is at risk or unwell, it is clear to the woman, her family and any professionals supporting her – including health professionals – who they can raise their concerns with and who within Probation, private companies, private companies, courts or government, are ultimately responsible for making the decision about the risk and the necessity of the tag. To do this, Ministry of Justice, HM Prison and Probation should take forward HM Inspector of Probation's recommendation to introduce a clear framework for decision-making for Probation practitioners about whether to recall. This framework should include that no one should be recalled due to faults and administrative problems regarding their tags.
- An independent decision-maker for non-emergency recall decisions is needed to further improve accountability. This would take pressure off Probation Officers to take sole responsibility for recall decisions. It would also improve transparency and accountability around decision making.

About Women in Prison

Women in Prison (WIP) is a national charity which provides independent, holistic, gender-specialist support to women facing multiple disadvantage, including women involved in (or at risk of being involved in) the criminal justice system.

We work in prisons, the community and 'through-the-gate', supporting women leaving prison. We run women's centres in Manchester and London and work in partnership with a women's centre in Surrey. Our combined services provide women with support and advocacy, relating to domestic and sexual abuse, mental health, harmful substance use, debt, education, training and employment.

Our campaigning is informed by our frontline support services for women, delivered at every stage of a woman's journey through the criminal justice system. The experience and knowledge of staff and women directly affected by the criminal justice system enable us to see first-hand the effects of policy in practice and strengthen our recommendations for change.

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- ⁱ Sentencing Bill <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/4012>
- ⁱⁱ Ministry of Justice (2 September 2025) [Press Release: Tens of thousands more to be tagged under biggest ever expansion](#)
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ministry of Justice (2 September 2025) [Press Release: Tens of thousands more to be tagged under biggest ever expansion](#)
- ^{iv} A useful outline of when an electronic tag can be used can be found here: [Outcome of the Justice and Home Affairs Committee's inquiry into the use of Electronic Monitoring \(EM\): policy letter dated 5 November 2025 from the Chair to the Home Office and Ministry of Justice](#)
- ^v Prison Reform Trust, [Home Detention Curfew](#).
- ^{vi} MOJ (16th October 2025) [Electronic Monitoring Statistics Publication – September 2025, Official Statistics: Technical note](#)
- ^{vii} MOJ (16th October 2025) [Official Statistics: Electronic Monitoring Statistics Publication, England and Wales: September 2025](#)
- ^{viii} the remaining individuals were either of unknown gender, did not disclose their gender, or identified as non-binary.
- ^{ix} MOJ (18th July 2024) [Official Statistics Electronic Monitoring Statistics Annual Publication, March 2024 \(Section 8\)](#)
- ^x MOJ (18th July 2024) Official Statistics: [Electronic Monitoring Statistics Annual Publication, March 2024](#)
- ^{xi} Grehan, K. (October 2024) A closer look at electronic monitoring and women <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/a-closer-look-at-electronic-monitoring-and-women/>
- ^{xii} Holdsworth, E.R. (2019) Women's Experiences of Electronic Monitoring, Centre for Criminal Justice Studies, University of Leeds and White Rose Consortium https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/26547/1/Holdsworth_ER_Law_PhD_2019.pdf
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- ^{xiv} [Written evidence by NACRO](#) to Justice and Home Affairs Committee November 2025
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- ^{xvi} Working Chance (2025) [Written Evidence to the Justice Committee](#)
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- ^{xxi} Grimshaw, R. (October 20205) [Written Evidence to the Justice and Home Affairs Committee Electronic Monitoring Investigation](#), Centre for Crime and Justice Studies.
- ^{xxii} Delap, N. and Hogarth, L. (2025) Breaking out of the Justice Loop: Creating a criminal justice system that works for women, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/breaking-out-justice-loop-0>
- ^{xxiii} <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/dec/21/elderly-activist-to-spend-christmas-in-prison-because-tag-does-not-fit>
- ^{xxiv} Ministry of Justice (2025) Identified needs of offenders, custody and community, 31 October 2024, para. 3.8. Of all women with an OASys Layer 3 assessment, 68% of those in prison and 67% of those under community supervision were recorded as having been a victim of domestic abuse. This compares to 10% of men both in prison and in the community. For more information about OASys Layer 3 assessments, see the same publication at para. 2.2.
- ^{xxv} If you would like to hear more about this innovative programme, please contact Women in Prison Lucy.Russell@wipuk.org
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- ^{xxvii} Domestic Abuse Commissioner (2025) Sentencing Bill: Lords Committee Stage: Briefing from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner
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- xxxix Working Chance (2025) [Written Evidence to the Justice Committee](#)
- xl Justice and Home Affairs Committee (5th November 2025) [Outcome of the Justice and Home Affairs Committee's inquiry into the use of Electronic Monitoring: policy letter dated 5 November 2025 from the Chair to the Home Office and Ministry of Justice](#)
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- xlvi Justice and Home Affairs Committee (5th November 2025) [Outcome of the Justice and Home Affairs Committee's inquiry into the use of Electronic Monitoring \(EM\): policy letter dated 5 November 2025 from the Chair to the Home Office and Ministry of Justice](#)
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