



QuickFacts

Career Offenders

What is a Career Offender?

A "career offender" is someone who commits a crime of violence or a controlled substance offense after two prior felony convictions for those crimes. The sentencing guidelines assign all "career offenders" to Criminal History Category (CHC) VI and to offense levels at or near the statutory maximum penalty of the offense of conviction.¹

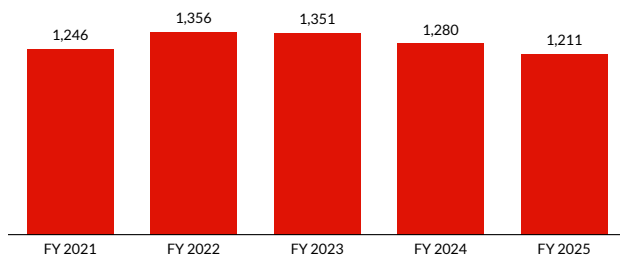
Population Snapshot

66,662 cases were reported in FY25;

1,211 involved career offenders.²

In 91% of such cases, the career offender status increased the guideline range.

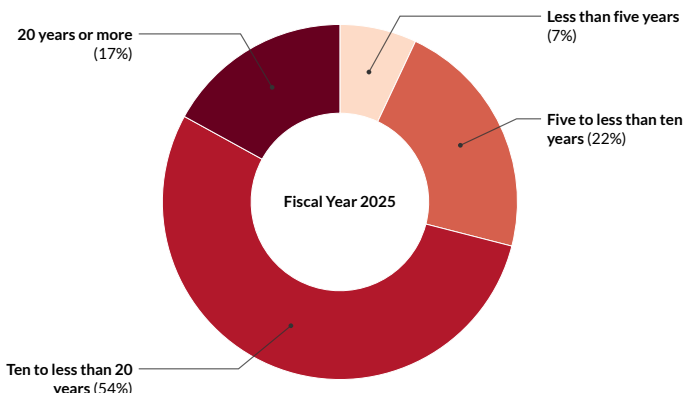
Number of Career Offenders



Most Common Offense Types



Sentence Length



Individual and Offense Characteristics

96% of career offenders were men.

59% were Black, 26% were White, 13% were Hispanic, and 2% were Other races.

Their average age was 42 years.

99% were United States citizens.

39% were assigned to Criminal History Category (CHC) VI before application of the career offender provision;

- 0% changed from CHC I to CHC VI;
- 1% changed from CHC II to CHC VI;
- 18% changed from CHC III to CHC VI;
- 18% changed from CHC IV to CHC VI;
- 24% changed from CHC V to CHC VI.

The top five districts for career offenders were:

- Eastern District of Missouri (48);
- Eastern District of Arkansas (42);
- District of New Jersey (37);
- Eastern District of Kentucky (36);
- Eastern District of North Carolina (34).

Punishment

The average sentence for career offenders was 159 months.

Almost 100% were sentenced to prison.

62% were convicted of an offense carrying a mandatory minimum penalty.

Impact of Career Offender Status³

40% of career offenders had an increase in both Final Offense Level (FOL) and CHC.

- Their average FOL increased from 25 to 31, and their average CHC increased from IV to VI.

30% had an increase in the FOL only.

- Their average FOL increased from 24 to 31.

21% had an increase in the CHC only.

- Their average CHC increased from IV to VI.

9% of career offenders had no increase in FOL or CHC.



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Sentences Relative to the Guideline Range

40% of sentences for career offenders were under the *Guidelines Manual*.

- 20% were within the guideline range.
- 16% were substantial assistance departures.
 - *The average sentence reduction was 45%.*
- Less than 1% were Early Disposition Program departures.⁴
 - *The average sentence reduction was 66%.*
- 3% were some other downward departure.
 - *The average sentence reduction was 48%.*
- Less than 1% were upward departures.⁵

60% of sentences for career offenders were variances.

- 60% were downward variances.
 - *The average sentence reduction was 37%.*
- Less than 1% were upward variances.
 - *The average sentence increase was 39%.*

The average guideline minimum and the average sentence imposed have increased over the past five years.

- The average guideline minimum increased from 214 months in fiscal year 2021 to 229 months in fiscal year 2025.
- The average sentence imposed increased from 141 months in fiscal year 2021 to 159 months in fiscal year 2025.

¹ In some cases, a state offense classified under state law as a misdemeanor (e.g., in Iowa, Massachusetts, and Michigan) is considered a felony in determining "career offender" status. For more information, see USSG §4B1.1.

² Cases with incomplete sentencing information were excluded from the analysis.

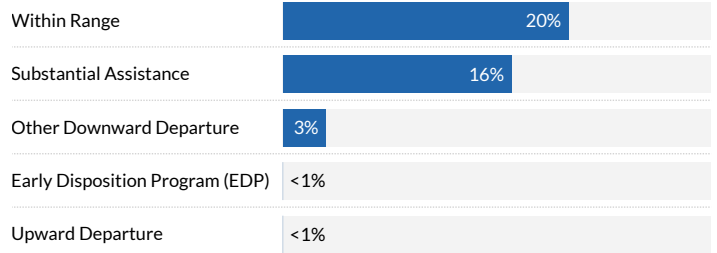
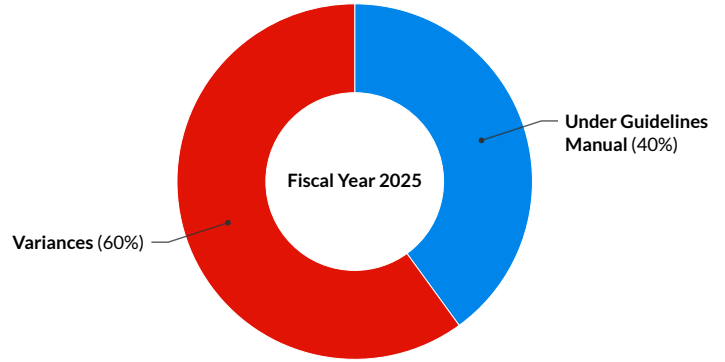
³ Cases missing Ch. 2 guideline data and cases in which §4B1.1(c) applied were excluded for this part of the analysis. Cases where both §4B1.1 and §4B1.4 (Armed Career Criminal) applied were assigned to the provision with the higher offense level.

⁴ "Early Disposition Program" (or EDP) departures are departures where the government sought a sentence below the guideline range because the defendant participated in the government's Early Disposition Program, through which cases are resolved in an expedited manner. See USSG §5K3.1.

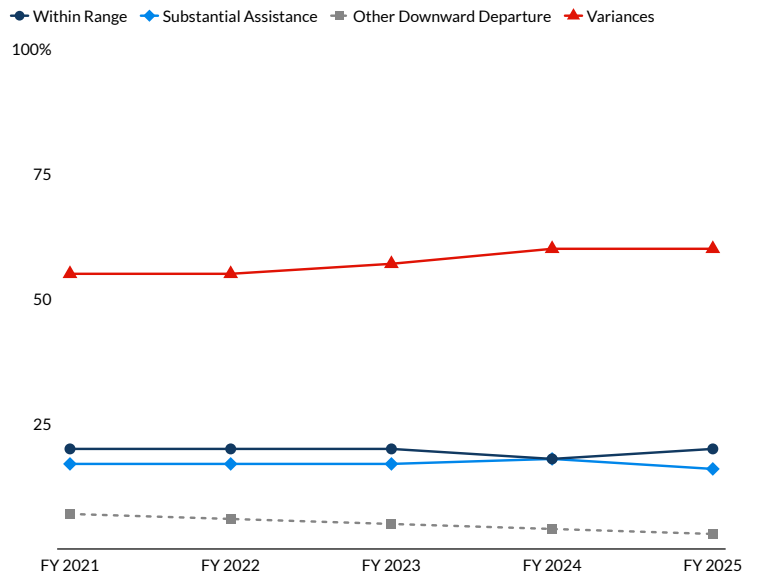
⁵ The Commission does not report the average for categories with fewer than three cases.

SOURCE: United States Sentencing Commission, FY 2021 through FY 2025 Datafiles, USSCFY21-USSCFY25.

Sentences Relative to the Guideline Range



Sentences Relative to the Guideline Range by Fiscal Year



Average Guideline Minimum and Average Sentence (months)

