



# Deaths of Offenders in the Community, England and Wales, 2020/21

## Main Points

**Deaths in the community increased by 34%**



In 2020/21, there were 1,343 deaths of offenders in the community, up 34% from 999 deaths in 2019/20.

**Increase in deaths during court order supervision**



614 deaths (46% of total) in the community were offenders serving court orders in 2020/21, an increase of 13% from 541 deaths (54% of total) in 2019/20.

**Increase in deaths during post release supervision**



728 deaths (54% of total) in 2020/21 were offenders on post release supervision, an increase of 59% from 458 deaths (46% of total) in 2019/20.

**Proportion of deaths by natural-cause increased by 60% in 2020/21, and remains the biggest cause of death, followed by self-inflicted**



While there were increases in most death classifications in 2020/21, the largest increase was for natural causes, which increased 60% from 321 in 2019/20 to 514 in 2020/21 (an increase from 32% of all deaths to 38% of all deaths)

Self-inflicted deaths increased by 18% from 347 in 2019/20 to 409 in 2020/21 (a decrease from 35% of all deaths to 30% of all deaths).

22% of deaths remained unclassified.

**Increase in deaths under CRC supervision**



716 deaths (53% of total) in the community were offenders supervised by CRCs in 2020/21, an increase of 20% from 599 deaths (60% of total) in 2019/20.

**Increase in deaths under NPS supervision**



627 deaths (47% of total) in the community were offenders supervised by the NPS in 2020/21, an increase of 57% from 400 deaths (40% of total) in 2019/20.

*Death of offenders in the community* covers deaths of offenders supervised in the community by the probation service in England and Wales. Presented alongside this bulletin are summary tables on a financial year basis over an 11-year time series. The tables, along with previous editions of the publication series, can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/death-of-offenders-in-the-community>

## Statistician's comment

The number of deaths of offenders in the community increased by 34% in 2020/21, to 1,343 deaths, the highest in the time series and a continuation of an upward trend from 560 deaths in 2013/14.

Statistics for the latest year relate to the exceptional period since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, and comparisons of these statistics with earlier periods will reflect the impact of Covid-19 as well as underlying trends. Deaths from natural causes represent the largest proportion of deaths (38% in 2020/21), and the number of deaths by natural causes increased by 60% from 321 deaths in 2019/20 to 514 deaths in 2020/21. The increase in deaths due to natural causes has been partly driven by deaths related to Covid-19:

There were 68 COVID-19 and suspected COVID-19 deaths to the end of 2020/21, of which 52 were due to COVID-19 (3 in 2019/20 and 49 in 2020/21), 12 were suspected to be due to COVID-19 (1 in 2019/20 and 11 in 2020/21), and 4 were where the offender had COVID-19 but did not die because of COVID-19 (all in 2020/21).

Although the population of offenders supervised by the probation service decreased for offenders under court order supervision (6% decrease in 2020/21) and under post-release supervision (8% decrease in 2020/21), as a result of starts to operational restrictions, the number of deaths increased for both offenders under court order supervision (13% increase in 2020/21) and under post-release supervision (59% increase in 2020/21).

## Introduction

The Deaths of Offenders in the Community statistics bulletin covers the deaths of offenders in England and Wales that occurred while they were under probation supervision because they were:

- serving their court order sentences in the community (including community orders, suspended sentence orders); or
- on post-release supervision after completing a custodial sentence.

These figures refer to deaths of offenders occurring outside custody, with the exception of the small number of cases occurring to those residing in approved premises, which are also included in this publication.

Offenders under supervision in the community (other than, to an extent, those occurring in approved premises) are not in the care of HM Prison & Probation Service (HMPPS) in the way they are when in custody. The main responsibilities of offender managers in the community are to assess, supervise and rehabilitate offenders. While they can encourage offenders to address issues affecting the offenders' health and wellbeing, their ability to manage these issues is limited. As a result, the level of responsibility and accountability of the probation service for the health and well-being of offenders is substantially different from that of the prison service in relation to deaths in custody.

Statistics on deaths occurring in custody are published separately in the Safety in Custody Bulletin<sup>1</sup>. These two sets of figures cannot be compared meaningfully.

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<sup>1</sup> Safety in Custody Statistics: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics>

## **Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014**

The introduction of the Offender Rehabilitation Act (ORA) <sup>2</sup> in 2014/15 increased the number of offenders supervised by probation services. The Act created 23 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs), a series of organisations established on 1 June 2014, responsible for the delivery of offender management to medium and lower-risk offenders in the community. The National Probation Service (NPS) was also established on 1 June 2014, and is responsible for the delivery of offender management to higher risk offenders in the community <sup>3</sup>.

Wales have a combined approach and NPS Wales became responsible for Wales CRC on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2019.

## **Deaths from Covid-19**

'HM Prison and Probation Service COVID-19 Official Statistics', a monthly publication, provides information on deaths where probation service users are known to have died having tested positive for COVID-19 or where there was a clinical assessment that COVID-19 was a contributory factor in their death.

The latest COVID figures are published monthly on the MOJ website via the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hm-prison-and-probation-service-covid-19-statistics-monthly>

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<sup>2</sup> Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 (ORA): <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/11/contents>

<sup>3</sup> These arrangements ended in June 2021

## 1. Overall Trends

There were 1,343 deaths of offenders in the community in England and Wales in 2020/21, up 34% from 999 deaths in 2019/20. Of these, 716 (53% of total deaths) were deaths of offenders supervised by Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) in 2020/21, an increase of 20% from 599 deaths (60% of total deaths) in 2019/20. 627 (47% of total deaths) were deaths of offenders supervised by the National Probation Service (NPS) in 2020/21, an increase of 57% from 400 deaths (40% of total deaths) in 2019/20.

The Offender Rehabilitation Act in 2014/15 increased the number of offenders supervised by probation services as all offenders given custodial sentences became subject to a minimum of 12 months' supervision in the community upon release from prison. This consists of a period spent on licence, and, depending on the length of custodial sentence, a period on post-sentence supervision. Previously, only adults sentenced to over 12 months in custody and all young offenders were subject to statutory supervision.

Following the Act, there has been a steady increase in the number of offenders who died under post-release supervision, peaking at 728 in 2020/21. This was an increase of 59% from 458 in 2019/20. The number of offenders who died while serving court orders in the community increased 13%, from 541 in 2019/20 to 614 in 2020/21.

### By Gender and Age

In 2020/21 there were 1,170 male deaths, accounting for 87% of all deaths. 40% of male deaths were due to natural causes in 2020/21, the highest in the time series, and an increase from 32% in each of the previous three years. The number of self-inflicted deaths by male offenders exceeded deaths from natural causes in the previous two years, but the proportion of self-inflicted deaths decreased from 34% in 2019/20 to 29% in 2020/21.

There were 173 female deaths in 2020/21, accounting for 13% of all deaths. The main cause of female deaths in 2020/21 was self-inflicted (39%), followed by deaths from natural causes (28%). The proportion of self-inflicted deaths by female offenders has been gradually increasing from 25% in 2017/18, and was just below the peak of 40% in 2015/16.

At the time of death, 38% of males were aged 36-49, compared to 47% for females in 2020/21. 24% of males and 21% of females were aged 50-65. Males were more likely than females to be in the oldest age group, with 12% of males aged over 65 (compared with 2% of females).

## 2. Apparent cause of death

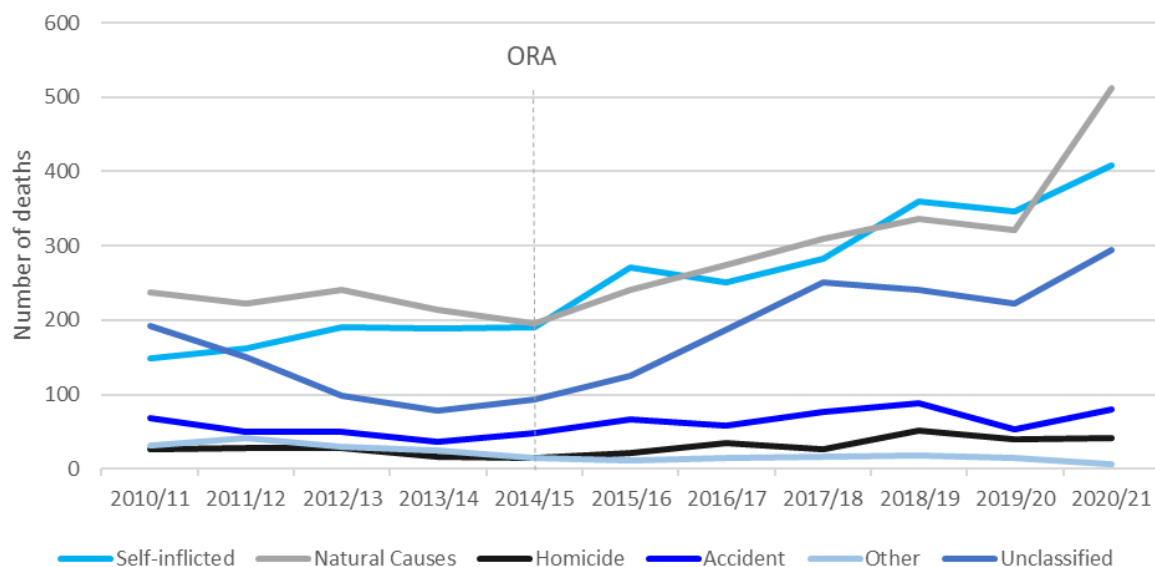
There were increases across most death classifications in 2020/21, with the largest increase being for deaths from natural causes, which increased by 60% from 321 in 2019/20 to 514 in 2020/21. Deaths due to natural causes account for 38% of all deaths in the community in 2020/21, an increase from 32% of total deaths in 2019/20, and remain the most common cause of death. This increase in deaths due to natural causes in 2020/21 partly reflects deaths from Covid-19 (with further information on these below).

The number of self-inflicted deaths increased 18% from 347 in 2019/20 to 409 in 2020/21. Self-inflicted deaths accounted for 30% of deaths in 2020/21, a decrease from a peak of 35% in 2019/20, which followed a gradual increase in the proportion of self-inflicted deaths since 2010/11 (when they accounted for 21% of deaths) <sup>4</sup>.

Accidental deaths increased 48% from 54 in 2019/20 to 80 in 2020/21, and deaths by homicide increased 5% from 40 in 2019/20 to 42 in 2020/21. Other deaths were the only category to decrease in 2020/21, decreasing 53% from 15 deaths in 2019/20 to 7 deaths in 2020/21.

The proportion of deaths where the apparent cause was unclassified remained unchanged at 22% in 2020/21.

**Figure 1: Death of offenders in the community by apparent cause, England and Wales<sup>1</sup>, 2010/11 to 2020/21 <sup>5</sup> (Source: Table 1)**



<sup>4</sup> The category of 'self-inflicted death' in this data set is not used in the same way as in the 'Safety in Custody' statistics and is much broader than that of 'suicide' in the general population statistics produced by ONS. In particular, it includes self-inflicted deaths regardless of intent, including a large number of drug-related deaths (see 'Categorisation of deaths' section in the accompanying technical note for full details). This means that caution is advised when attempting any comparisons with these other data sets.

<sup>5</sup> The introduction of the Offender Rehabilitation Act (ORA) on 1 February 2015 caused an increase in the number of offenders on post-release supervision. Caution should be used when comparing periods prior to and after the introduction of ORA.

## **By apparent cause of death and duration from release**

For deaths of offenders under post-release supervision in 2020/21, a higher proportion of deaths were self-inflicted deaths when the death was closer to the date of release, and a higher proportion of deaths were from natural causes when the date of death was further away. For all deaths where the duration between release and death was up to 14 days (70 deaths in 2020/21), 43% were self-inflicted and 10% were from natural causes, whereas when the duration was over 365 days (222 deaths in 2020/21), 14% were self-inflicted and 69% were from natural causes.

## **Deaths from Covid-19**

Statistics for the latest year relate to the exceptional period since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, and comparisons of these statistics with earlier periods will reflect the impact of Covid-19 as well as underlying trends. From the start of the pandemic in March 2020 to the end of March 2021, 68 offenders have died within 28 days of having a positive Covid-19 test or where there was a clinical assessment that Covid-19 was a contributory factor in their deaths regardless of the cause of death. Of these 68 deaths, 52 were due to Covid-19 (3 in 2019/20 and 49 in 2020/21), 12 were suspected to be due to COVID-19 (1 in 2019/20 and 11 in 2020/21), and the remaining 4 deaths are believed to be due to other causes although the prisoner had tested positive for Covid-19 (all in 2020/21).

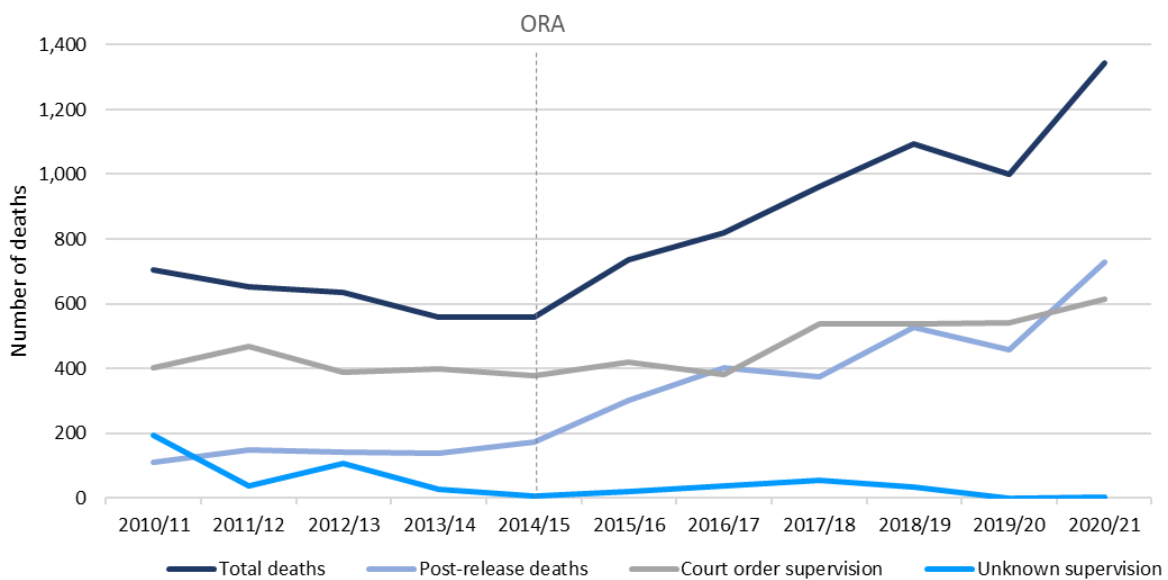
The most up to date data on deaths suspected to be due to Covid-19 can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hm-prison-and-probation-service-covid-19-statistics-monthly>.

### 3. Type of supervision

The number of deaths of offenders under post-release supervision in the community increased from 458 in 2019/20 to 728 in 2020/21, an increase of 59%. This continued an upward trend in deaths of offenders under post-release supervision, from 110 deaths in 2010/11 (16% of total deaths) to 728 in 2020/21 (54% of total deaths). The number of deaths under post-release supervision has increased particularly since 2014/15 (171 deaths), which corresponds with the introduction of increased supervision under ORA (see page 3 for further detail), and 2020/21 was the first time since 2016/17 that the number of deaths under post-release supervision exceeded those under court-order supervision.

The number of offenders who died while serving court orders in the community increased 13%, from 541 in 2019/20 (54% of total deaths) to 614 in 2020/21 (46% of total deaths) (see Figure 2).

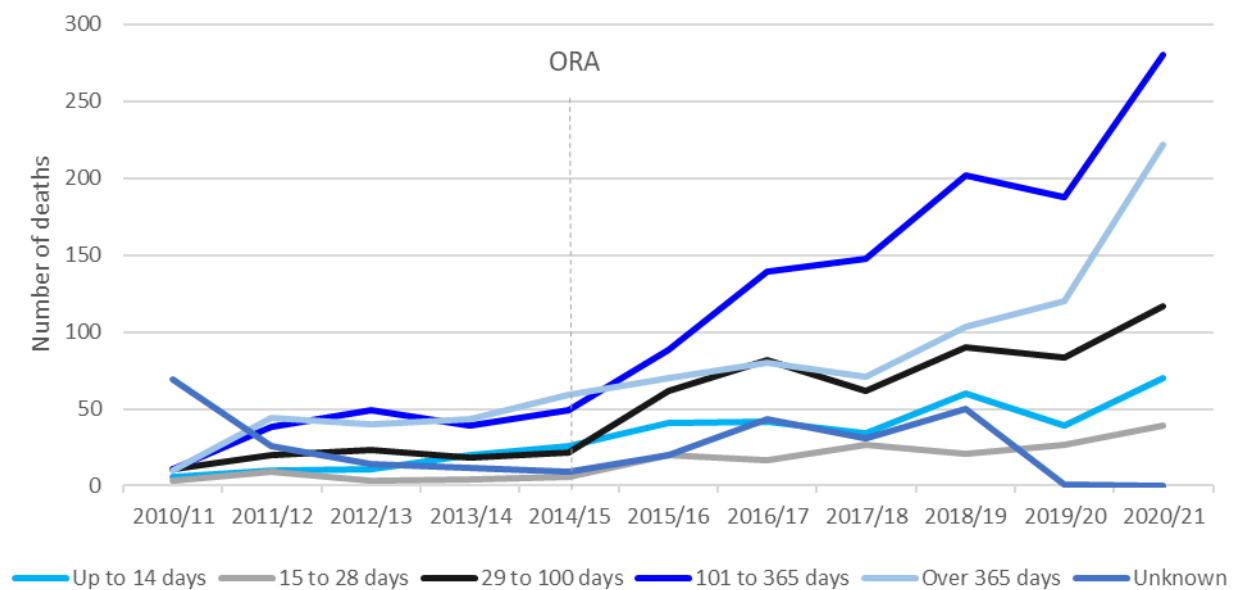
**Figure 2: Total death of offenders in the community, by type of supervision, England and Wales, 2010/11 to 2020/21 (Source: Tables 2 and 3)**



### Post-release supervision deaths by duration from release

Among deaths under post-release supervision in 2020/21, there was a small shift towards these occurring after longer under supervision; 38% had died between 101 days and 365 days from the date of release (a decrease from 41% in 2019/20) and 30% had died over 365 days from the date of release (an increase from 26% in 2019/20, and an upward trend from 19% in 2017/18). 10% of deaths occurred up to 14 days from their release and a further 5% of deaths occurred between 15 and 28 days from their release, both broadly consistent with 2019/20.

**Figure 3: Death of offenders in the community under post-release supervision, by duration from date of release to date of death, England and Wales, 2010/11 to 2020/21 (Source: Table 2)**



### Approved Premises

Approved Premises (formerly known as probation/bail hostels) provide accommodation for offenders on post-release supervision (released from prison on licence) and those directed by the courts to live there as a condition of their court order. Staff provide supervision, support and ensure that residents comply with conditions of their licence or court order. Some of the deaths while resident in Approved Premises occurred away from the premises. We do not know if offenders in Approved Premises are on post-release supervision or on a court order.

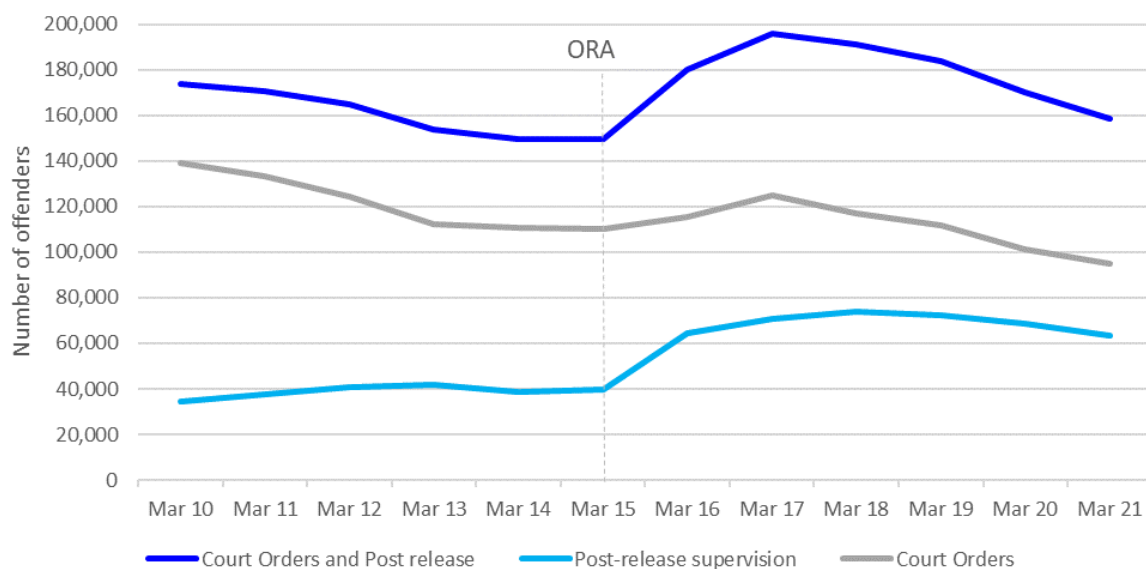
There were 17 deaths of offenders with residence in Approved Premises in 2020/21, a decrease from 21 deaths in 2019/20. Deaths in Approved Premises accounted for 1% of all deaths of offenders in the community in 2020/21. The majority of deaths of offenders residing in Approved Premises across the time series were male, including all deaths in 2020/21. Due to the greater volatility due to low numbers, comparisons across time would not be meaningful.



## Trends in deaths and total caseload of offenders

Deaths of offenders in the community (figure 2) showed an opposite trend to the total caseload of offenders supervised in the community (figure 4) in 2020/21. The number of deaths increased by 34% in 2020/21, but the combined caseload court orders (including community orders and suspended sentence orders) and post-release supervision decreased by 7%, from 170,163 at March 2020 to 158,561 at March 2021 (as published in the Offender Management Statistics Quarterly <sup>6</sup>). Previously the combined caseload figures had decreased in each of the last four years following a peak of 195,695 in March 2017, unlike deaths of offenders in the community, which had been on an upward trend. Up to March 2017, the caseload and the number of deaths followed a similar trend <sup>7</sup>.

**Figure 4: Number of offenders supervised by the probation service at the end period by type, England Wales, March 2010 to March 2021 <sup>8</sup>**



<sup>6</sup> Probation caseload statistics are published in the Offender Management statistics quarterly at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/offender-management-statistics-quarterly>

<sup>7</sup> Some caution should be used when considering caseload figures in conjunction with deaths. Offenders may appear both within the caseload figures of court orders (including community orders and suspended sentence orders) and post-release supervision, resulting in potential double counting. Accordingly, rates of deaths have not been calculated, and comparisons of trends in caseload to trends in deaths of offenders in the community should be seen as indicative

<sup>8</sup> The introduction of the Offender Rehabilitation Act (ORA) on 1 February 2015 caused an increase in the number of offenders on post-release supervision. Caution should be used when comparing periods prior to and after the introduction of ORA

## 4. Supervisory body

### National Probation Service (NPS) and Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs)

CRCs supervised more offenders in the community (62% of all offenders) and were more likely to supervise offenders under a court order sentence (74% of those under a court order on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, accounting for 63% of their caseload). The NPS supervised 67% of those offenders under pre and post-release supervision, accounting for 80% of their caseload<sup>9</sup>.

In 2020/21, 53% (716) of deaths of offenders in the community were under the supervision of CRCs and 47% (627) of deaths of offenders in the community were under the supervision of the NPS.

#### Offenders under the supervision of the NPS

For offenders under the supervision of the NPS, 73% of deaths (460) were offenders under post release supervision in 2020/21, up from 68% (271 deaths) in 2019/20. There was a smaller increase in the number of deaths of offenders serving a court order in the community, from 129 deaths in 2019/20 to 167 deaths in 2020/21.

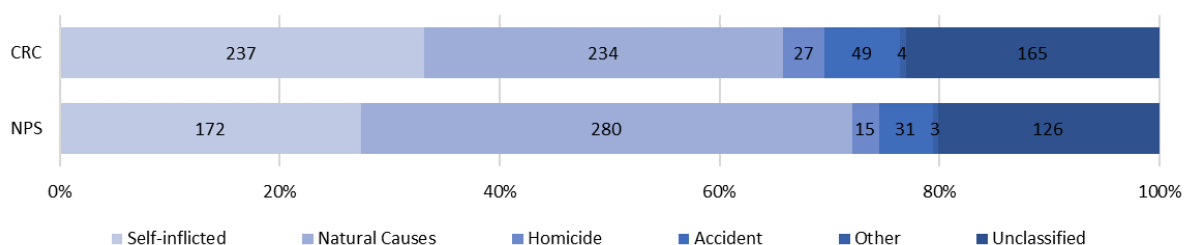
In 2020/21, 45% of deaths of offenders under the supervision of the NPS were by natural causes, up from 42% in 2019/20. 27% were self-inflicted deaths in 2020/21, down from 30% in 2019/20.

#### Offenders under the supervision of the CRCs

For offenders under the supervision of CRCs, most of the deaths were offenders serving a court order in the community. 62% (447) of deaths were offenders serving a court order in the community in 2020/21, compared with 69% (412) in 2019/20. There was an increase in both the number and proportion of deaths of offenders under post release supervision by CRCs, increasing from 187 (31%) in 2019/20 to 268 (37%) in 2020/21.

The proportion of self-inflicted deaths among offenders supervised by CRCs decreased from 38% in 2019/20 to 33% in 2020/21, whereas the proportion of deaths by natural causes increased from 26% in 2019/20 to 33% in 2020/21.

**Figure 5: Numbers of deaths by classification in NPS and CRCs, 2020/21<sup>10</sup> (Source: Table 1)**



<sup>9</sup> Probation caseload statistics are published in the Offender Management statistics quarterly at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/offender-management-statistics-quarterly>

<sup>10</sup> Caution should be used when comparing percentages of apparent cause of death for CRCs and NPS due to the high proportion of deaths that are as yet unclassified

## Release Schedule

This bulletin was published on 28 October 2021, and includes statistics covering financial year periods from 2010/11 to 2020/21. The earliest period for which data are held across probation is 2010/11. As such, the data presented in this publication represent the complete available time series.

Financial year figures are collected during August and September of each year and collated for the planned annual publication date in October. A new method of data collection was implemented in 2019/20, and additional steps and further quality assurance were required, resulting in a slight delay in publication. This is explained in more detail in the 'Data sources and data quality' section of the technical guide.

The next release of Deaths of Offenders in the Community statistics, to include figures for the financial year 2021/22, is scheduled for October 2022.

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General information about the official statistics system of the UK is available from <http://statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/uk-statistical-system>

The Ministry of Justice publishes data relating to offender management in England and Wales. Equivalent statistics for Scotland and Northern Ireland can be found at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice>

<http://www.sps.gov.uk/FreedomofInformation/PrisonerDeaths.aspx>

<http://www.dojni.gov.uk/index/statistics-research/stats-research-publications.htm>

Alternative formats are available on request from [statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk)

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