



Ministry
of Justice

Guide to Deaths of Offenders in the Community Statistics

Ministry of Justice
Statistics bulletin

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 Bulletin¹. These two sets of figures cannot be compared meaningfully.

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

Glossary

Approved premises	Approved premises (formerly known as probation and bail hostels) accommodate offenders released from prison on licence, offenders directed to live there as part of their sentence (such as a requirement of a community order) and those directed to live there by the courts as a condition of bail. Their purpose is to provide an enhanced level of residential supervision in the community, as well as a supportive and structured environment.
Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC)	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. CRCs ceased to operate in Wales on 1 December 2019 and in England on 26 June 2021, with new arrangements replacing the CRCs from those dates.
Community order	Replaced all pre-Criminal Justice Act community sentences for adults. Under this order, a number of possible requirements must be added, such as supervision, unpaid work and drug treatment.
Community sentence	This places the offender under the supervision of the probation service and there will be a range of requirements that must be completed.
Licence	The period in which a prisoner is released from prison to serve the remainder of their sentence in the community. Offenders subject to post-release licence are required to adhere to specific conditions as part of their licence. Conditions for offenders released from determinate sentences are set by the governor/controller (on behalf of the Secretary of State) from the releasing prison for determinate sentences. Where the sentence is indeterminate, licence conditions are set by the Parole Board.
National Probation Service (NPS)	An organisation established on 1 June 2014, responsible for the delivery of offender management to higher risk offenders in the community.
Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 (ORA)	An Act passed by parliament that made changes to the legislative framework to support various reforms including ensuring offenders released from custodial sentences of over 1 day will be subject to a minimum of 12 months' supervision in the community, and making available a new 'Rehabilitation Activity Requirement' as part of a community order or suspended sentence order.
Post-release supervision	Offenders released from prisons after completing their custodial sentence are subject to supervision in the community. This consists of a period spent on licence, and, depending on the length of custodial sentence, a period on post-sentence supervision. Prior to the Offender Rehabilitation Act, the

supervision period comprised only the licence period.

Post-sentence supervision

Provisions in the Offender Rehabilitation Act created a new supervision period to be served by offenders released from custodial sentences of more than 1 day but less than 2 years. The supervision period follows the licence period, and tops up the licence so that the total period under supervision in the community is 12 months. For example, an offender subject to a licence period of 4 months would then be subject to a supervision period of 8 months. The purpose of the post-sentence supervision period is the rehabilitation of the offender. As with licence conditions, requirements under the supervision period are imposed by the Secretary of State.

Probation trusts

Probation trusts were organisations who managed the delivery of probation services to offenders prior to implementation of the Offender Rehabilitation Act. Probation trusts ceased to exist on 31 May 2014.

Suspended sentence order

A court may give an offender a 'suspended' prison sentence if it believes the offence merits a custodial sentence of between 14 days and 2 years (or 6 months in the magistrates' court. The offender then serves their sentence in the community and must comply with conditions set out in the order made by the court. These conditions can last for up to two years. If the offender breaks these conditions, or commits another offence, they will usually have to serve the original sentence in prison in addition to the sentence they get for any new offence.

Categorisation of deaths

Each death has been classified as one of the following apparent causes, based on information held and reported by the probation provider (NPS, CRC or Probation Trust) to HMPPS. It is important to note that this system for classifying deaths provides a provisional classification for administrative and statistical purposes. The official cause of death is determined by the Coroner.

Accident	Any death of a person arising from external causes, including deaths where taking a drug or alcohol consumption contributed to a death but not in fatal amounts.
Homicide	Any death of a person at the hands of another (includes murder and manslaughter).
Natural causes	Any death of a person as a result of a naturally occurring disease process, including those contributed to by alcohol or drug dependence.
Other	Any death of a person whose death cannot easily be classified as natural causes, self-inflicted, accident or homicide. The cause of death may never be known even after all of the necessary investigations have taken place.
Self-inflicted	Any death of a person who has apparently taken his or her own life, irrespective of intent. An examination of a sample of cases has revealed that this category is being used more broadly than in common parlance. In particular, it includes a large number of drug-related deaths in circumstances that would not lead to a designation of 'self-inflicted' in the 'Safety in Custody' statistics and do not fit the category of 'suicide' as defined in the general population statistics published by ONS.
Unclassified	Any death where there is insufficient information to make a judgement about the cause at the time of reporting.

A more detailed breakdown for classification of death is included in the data tool for deaths that occurred during 2019/20 and 2020/21.

Data sources and data quality

The data in the bulletin for periods up to and including 2018/19 are drawn from manual returns collected annually from each National Probation Service (NPS) Division and each Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC), and each Probation Trust prior to 2014/15.

A new method of data collection using electronic case records was introduced in April 2019. Implementation of this new method was not fully successful, with the result that the information required is not always being added to the electronic records. As a result, for the last two years NPS Divisions (and CRCs when they were still operating) have been contacted and asked to provide the information, by entering it retrospectively wherever possible, or by providing a manual return. Information from the electronic records and manual returns has then been brought together by staff at HMPPS HQ, who have undertaken some additional quality assurance, to produce the data in the bulletin.

Death classification figures in this bulletin are based on reports received by probation staff and their interpretation of these reports. These, in many cases, may not be the confirmed cause of death, but represent the apparent cause of death at the time deaths were reported to HMPPS. Because HMPPS' responsibility for the majority of these figures is predominantly in relation to the termination of the court order or post-release supervision, further information pertaining to the death that may influence subjective assessments of the apparent cause of death may not be subsequently reported to HMPPS. Therefore, while the apparent cause of death in this bulletin reflects the classification made at the time of reporting, it may not reflect the official cause of death as determined by the Coroner.

In the last two years central quality assurance of the data has revealed several issues with the way in which information is collected, recorded and reported, and further work to improve these processes is under way. This will include a review of the categorisation of deaths with a view to addressing the inconsistencies between this publication and the 'Safety in Custody' statistics and ONS data on the general population. This work will bring benefits in terms of data quality, but because of the time lag these will not be fully realised until the 2022/23 publication.

At the time of reporting probation staff may not have sufficient information regarding the circumstances of the death to assign an apparent cause, and the results of any investigations or inquests following the death do not always reach the probation providers. As such, a significant number of deaths remain unclassified each year, and many of these are unlikely to be subsequently updated. The retrospective data entry and central quality assurance undertaken in the last two years to address the problems described above provided an opportunity for some of the cases designated as 'awaiting further information' to be classified, and as a result the number of unclassified cases in the most recent year has been reduced. Accordingly, caution is advised when comparing deaths in individual categories across time.

As part of the Transforming Rehabilitation reform programme, Probation Trusts were replaced in June 2014 by the National Probation Service (NPS), which manages the most high-risk offenders across seven divisions; and 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs), who manage medium and low-risk offenders. There may be possible underreporting from the period during the transition. Figures for 2014/15 would include some deaths that occurred when the Probation Trusts existed but were reported by the NPS or CRCs that had

been allocated responsibility for these offenders prior to their deaths. From 1 December 2019, Wales CRC ceased to operate, with CRCs in England ceasing to operate from 26 June 2021. New arrangements replaced the CRCs from those dates.

Data on deaths of residents staying in Approved Premises may include those directed to reside there as part of their bail conditions. Where known, deaths of residents released on bail have been removed from the figures. Some deaths in Approved Premises occur away from the premises, as such it should not be inferred that all of such deaths were either directly supervised or occurring on the premises themselves.

Although care is taken when processing and analysing the returns, the information collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large-scale recording system. While the figures shown have been checked as far as possible, they should be regarded as approximate and not necessarily accurate to the last whole number shown in the tables.

Users and uses of these statistics

The statistics included in this publication have a wide range of uses, and this report adds to the body of learning in this area. It supports work to help identify possible means to reduce the risk of such tragedies occurring in future, meeting a broad spectrum of user needs as shown below:

User	Summary of main statistical needs
MOJ Ministers	Use the statistics to monitor the safety and wellbeing of the offenders in the community; and to assess policy impacts (e.g. changes to managing vulnerable offenders)
MPs and House of Lords	Statistics may be used to answer parliamentary questions
Monitoring and Accountability	E.g. Justice Select Committee. Deaths of Offenders in the Community may be used as a primary data source for monitoring and for public accountability.
Policy teams	Statistics are used to inform policy development, to monitor impact of changes over time and to consider future changes and their impact on the system
Agencies responsible for offender management	Current and historical administrative data are used to support performance management information at national and local levels to complement their understanding of the current picture and trends over time
Academia, students and businesses	Used as a source of statistics for research purposes and to support lectures, presentations and conferences
Trade Unions	Used as a source of statistics to inform the work of the unions in relation to the probation service.
Journalists	Used as a compendium of data on deaths of offenders in the community so that an accurate and coherent story can be told on rehabilitation and events occurring to offenders in the community
Voluntary sector	Data may be used to monitor trends of the safety and wellbeing of offenders, to reuse the data in their own briefing and research papers and to inform policy work and responses to consultations.
General public	Data may be used to respond to ad-hoc requests made under the Freedom of Information Act.

HMPPS regularly receives requests for statistics for more recent date periods than those covered in published statistics. In accordance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, HMPPS is unable to release figures for periods in advance of those published in Official Statistics publications. As explained above, until this year the figures appearing in this publication were received by HMPPS in annual returns, meaning that the publication date was the earliest that collated data were available. The new method of data collection introduced in April 2019 is intended to make data available for internal use during the year,

and when we have successfully implemented this method and are satisfied that the information from electronic case records is sufficiently reliable, we will consider moving to more frequent publication of these statistics.

Related publications

This bulletin is published alongside other inter-related bulletins:

*Safety in Custody Statistics Quarterly Bulletin*²: This covers deaths, assaults and self-harm occurring in prison custody. Although death in custody statistics are published on the same day as deaths of offenders in the community, attempts to compare these figures would not be meaningful and such comparisons should not be made.

*Offender Management Statistics Quarterly Bulletin*³: This provides key statistics relating to offenders who are in prison or under Probation Service supervision. It covers flows into these services (receptions into prison or probation starts) and flows out (discharges from prison or probation terminations) as well as the caseload of both services at specific points in time.

*Proven Re-offending Statistics Quarterly*⁴: This provides proven re-offending figures for offenders who were released from custody, received a non-custodial conviction at court, received a caution or received a reprimand or warning.

Safety in the children and young people secure estate: This provides statistics on youth secure estate assaults, self-harm and deaths.

*Multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) annual report*⁵: Presents statistics on the number of Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) eligible offenders in England and Wales, and information related to these offenders.

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>

Taken together, these publications present users with a more coherent overview of offender management, re-offending among both adults and young people and the safety of offenders whilst in prison custody.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/offender-management-statistics-quarterly>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/proven-reoffending-statistics>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/multi-agency-public-protection-arrangements-mappa-annual-reports>

Revisions

In accordance with Principle 2 of the Code of Practice for Statistics, the Ministry of Justice is required to publish transparent guidance on its policy for revisions. A copy of this statement can be found at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182363/statistics-revisions-policy.pdf

The three reasons specified for statistics needing to be revised are changes in sources of administrative systems or methodology changes, receipt of subsequent information, and errors in statistical systems and processes. Each of these points, and its specific relevance to the Deaths of Offenders in the Community statistics publication, are addressed below:

1. Changes in source of administrative systems/methodology changes

Where there have been revisions to data accountable to changes in methodology or administrative systems these will be clearly stated. Any statistics affected within the publication will be appropriately footnoted.

2. Receipt of subsequent information

Figures for deaths during previous years may change due to late notifications and changes in classification following an inquest, which may not be concluded for several years after the death. The changes tend to be small and do not affect reported trends.

3. Errors in statistical systems and processes

Occasionally errors can occur in statistical processes; procedures are constantly reviewed to minimise this risk. Should a significant error be found, the publication on the website will be updated and an errata slip published documenting the revision.

Symbols Used

..	Figures suppressed due to 1 or 2 incidents
0	Nil or less than half the final digit shown
-	Not applicable
(p)	Provisional data
(r)	Revised data

Contact points

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General enquiries about the statistical work of the Ministry of Justice can be e-mailed to: statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk

General information about the official statistics system of the UK is available from www.statistics.gov.uk

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.dojni.gov.uk/index/statistics-research/stats-research-publications.htm>

Alternative formats are available on request from statistics.enquiries@justice.gsi.gov.uk

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