



Deaths of offenders supervised in the community, England and Wales, 2021/22

Main points

Deaths of offenders supervised in the community decreased by 3%



In 2021/22, there were 1,385 deaths of offenders in the community, down 3% from 1,433 deaths in 2020/21.

Increase in deaths during court order supervision



727 deaths (52% of total) in the community were offenders serving court orders in 2021/22, an increase of 13% from 645 deaths (45% of total) in 2020/21.

Decrease in deaths during post-release supervision



656 deaths (47% of total) in 2021/22 were offenders on post-release supervision, a decrease of 17% from 788 deaths (55% of total) in 2020/21.

Deaths by natural causes decreased by 15% in 2021/22, but remains the main cause of death, followed by self-inflicted



Deaths due to natural causes decreased by 15% from 515 in 2020/21 to 436 in 2021/22. However, it still remains the most common cause of death, accounting for 31% of all deaths in the community in 2021/22.

There were 414 self-inflicted deaths in 2021/22 (accounting for 30% of all deaths), representing a 2% decrease compared to the previous year.

29% of deaths for 2021/22 were unclassified.

Death of offenders supervised 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 and a data tool on a financial year basis over a 12-year time series. The tables, along with previous editions of the publication series, can be found at www.gov.uk/government/collections/death-of-offenders-in-the-community.

Statistician's comment

The total number of deaths of offenders supervised in the community in England and Wales decreased by 3% in 2021/22, to 1,385 deaths, compared to the previous year. There were 1,193 male and 192 female deaths, representing a decrease of 4% and an increase of 4% respectively over the same period. With the exception of 2019/20 and 2021/22, these figures follow a broad upward trend since the introduction of the Offender Rehabilitation Act (ORA)¹ in 2014/15, which increased the number of offenders supervised by probation services.

As with the previously published deaths in the community statistics for 2020/21, this latest reporting period will include an impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and so comparisons of these statistics with pre-pandemic periods need to be interpreted with some caution.

Deaths by natural causes decreased by 15% from 515 (36% of all deaths) in 2020/21 to 436 (31% of all deaths) in 2021/22, and still account for the largest proportion of all deaths. While this cause of death represented a larger share of all deaths in 2020/21, partly due to COVID-19-related deaths, its share of all deaths returned to pre-pandemic levels in 2021/22.

Self-inflicted deaths, which represents the second largest proportion of deaths (accounting for 30% of all deaths), also decreased compared to the previous year, by 2%, to 414 deaths in 2021/22.

The number of offenders who died while serving court orders in the community increased by 13% to 727 in 2021/22 (52% of total deaths) compared to 2020/21, whilst those which occurred under post-release supervision decreased by 17% to 656 in 2021/22 (47% of total deaths) over the same period.

¹ Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 (ORA): www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/11/contents

Introduction

The Deaths of offenders supervised 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, and 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 occurring for those residing in Approved Premises, which are also included in this publication.

Offenders under supervision in the community (other than, to an extent, those in Approved Premises) are not in the care of HM Prison and 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 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.² These two sets of figures cannot be compared meaningfully.

Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014

The introduction of the Offender Rehabilitation Act (ORA)³ 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.

In June 2014, as part of the introduction of this Act, the National Probation Service (NPS) was also established to manage the most high-risk offenders across seven divisions whilst 21 Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) managed medium and low-risk offenders.⁴ They generally dealt with those aged 18 years and over (those under 18 were mostly dealt with by Youth Offending Teams, answering to the Youth Justice Board). They were responsible for supervising offenders who were given community sentences and suspended sentence orders by the courts, as well as offenders given custodial sentences, both pre- and post- their release.

However, probation has since been reformed under the Probation Reform Programme.⁵ As part of these plans, the Probation Service (formerly the NPS) is now responsible for managing all offenders on a community order or licence following their release from prison in

² Safety in Custody Statistics: www.gov.uk/government/collections/safety-in-custody-statistics

³ Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014 (ORA): www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/11/contents.

⁴ These arrangements ended in June 2021.

⁵ www.gov.uk/guidance/strengthening-probation-building-confidence

England and Wales, with enhanced monitoring of terrorists, serious organised criminals and very high-risk offenders carried out by the new National Security Division (NSD). In addition, from April 2020, the process of shifting the NPS from its previous formation of seven divisions to 12 Probation Service regions began; this process was completed by the end of 2020. Contracts for CRCs ended in June 2021 and management of offenders who were previously managed by CRCs transferred to one of the new Probation Service regions on 26 June 2021.⁶

Given this gradual transition in relation to data recording, this bulletin no longer includes commentary on separate figures for CRCs and the NPS. Furthermore, the main tables accompanying this bulletin no longer present a breakdown of figures by CRC and the NPS. Statistics broken down by probation region and, pre-June 2021, by CRC/NPS division are presented in the accompanying data tool, as well as previous releases of these statistics; caution should be taken where interpreting these figures however, as like-for-like comparisons by area are limited.

Deaths from COVID-19

'HM Prison and Probation Service COVID-19 Official Statistics' 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-19 figures are published on the MOJ website via the following link:

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

⁶ NPS Wales became responsible for Wales CRC on the 1st December 2019.

1. Overall trends

With the exception of 2019/20, there has been a broad upward trend in the number of total deaths of offenders in the community in England and Wales since 2014/15 when ORA was introduced. Latest figures, however, show a 3% decrease from 1,433 deaths in 2020/21 to 1,385 deaths of offenders in 2021/22.

Since 2014/15, the separate figures for male and female deaths have also been on a broadly upward trend. In 2021/22, there were 1,193 male and 192 female deaths, representing a decrease of 4% and an increase of 4% respectively compared to the previous year.

In 2021/22, male deaths accounted for 86% of all deaths whilst female deaths made up 14% of total deaths. The proportion of all deaths based on gender has remained stable over time. At the time of death, 36% of males were aged 36 to 49, compared to 45% for females in 2021/22. 25% of males and 21% of females were aged 50 to 65. Males were more likely than females to be in the oldest age group, with 11% of males aged over 65 at the time of death (compared with 1% of females).

2. Apparent cause of death⁷

Compared to the previous year, deaths from natural causes decreased by 15% from 515 in 2020/21 to 436 in 2021/22. Deaths due to natural causes remains the most common cause of death though, accounting for 31% of all deaths in the community in 2021/22, a decrease of four percentage points from 36% of total deaths in 2020/21. This follows the share of all deaths due to natural causes reaching a peak in 2013/14, accounting for 38% of all deaths, before a decrease until 2019/20.

There were 414 self-inflicted deaths⁸ in 2021/22, representing a 2% decrease compared to the previous year. Self-inflicted deaths accounted for 30% of all deaths, a 0.4 percentage point increase compared to the previous year. The proportion of all deaths which are self-inflicted has fluctuated over the years; it peaked in 2015/16 with 37% of deaths being self-inflicted, subsequently decreased until 2017/18, before then increasing again to reach 35% of all deaths in 2019/20.

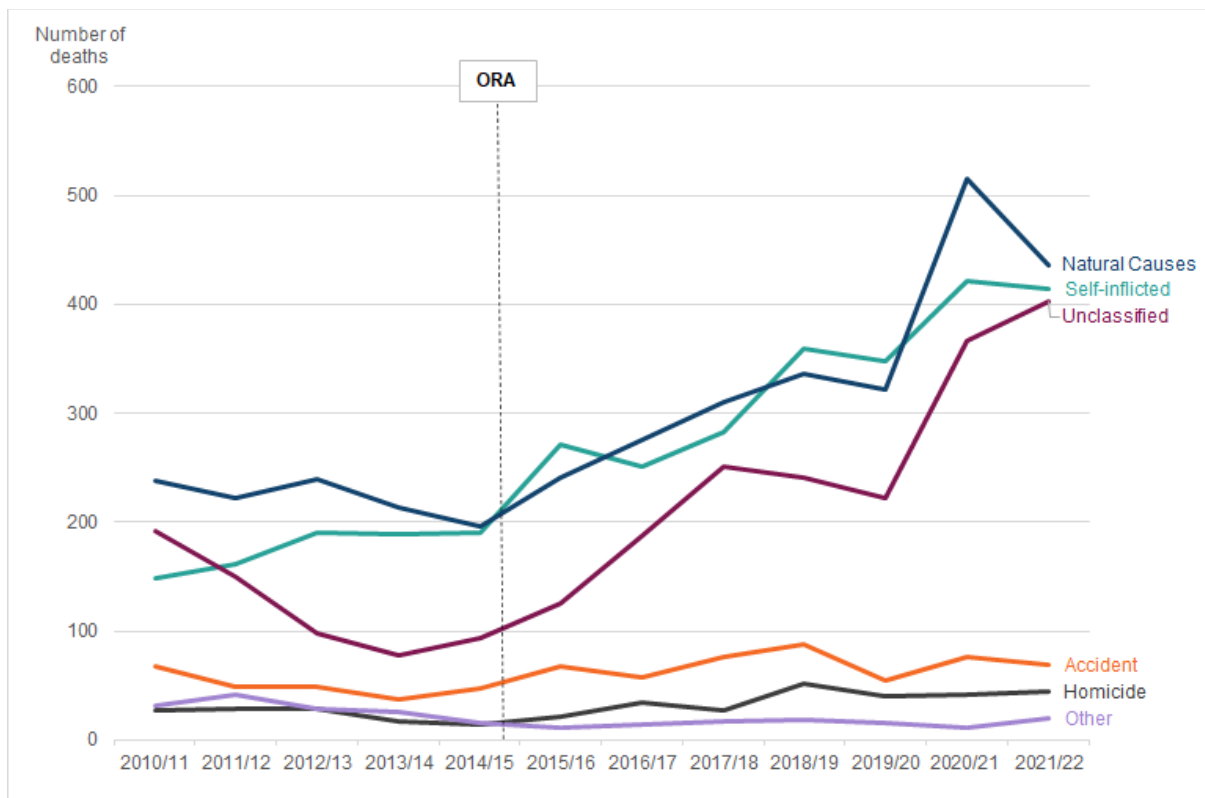
Accidents (accounting for 5% of all deaths) decreased from 76 in 2020/21 to 69 in 2021/22, whilst homicide (accounting for 3% of all deaths) increased from 42 in 2020/21 to 44 in 2021/22.

Both the 'other' and 'unclassified' cause of death categories saw increases since 2020/21. The 'other' cause of death category rose by 82% from 11 deaths in 2020/21 to 20 deaths in 2021/22. It now accounts for just over 1% of all deaths, an increase of 0.7 percentage points compared to 2020/21. The proportion of deaths where the apparent cause was unclassified stood at 29% in 2021/22, representing a three percentage point increase compared to the previous year.

⁷ Apparent cause of death refers to a provisional classification for administrative and statistical purposes. The official cause of death is determined by the Coroner.

⁸ The category of 'self-inflicted death' in these statistics 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 the Office for National Statistics (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.

Figure 1: Deaths of offenders in the community by apparent cause, England and Wales, 2010/11 to 2021/22 ⁹ (Source: Table 1)



By gender

Male deaths due to natural causes decreased from 463 in 2020/21 to 387 in 2021/22. The proportion of all male deaths which were due to natural causes decreased five percentage points in 2021/22 compared to the previous year, accounting for 32% of all male deaths and representing the most common cause of death. Since 2010/11, the proportion of male deaths due to natural causes has ranged from 32% to 39%.

Male self-inflicted deaths decreased from 357 in 2020/21 to 347 in 2021/22. The proportion of self-inflicted deaths accounted for 29% of all male deaths in 2021/22; this is in contrast to the years 2018/19 and 2019/20 when the number of self-inflicted deaths by male offenders exceeded those from natural causes. Over the years, the share of self-inflicted male deaths has ranged from 22% to 36%.

Female deaths due to natural causes decreased from 52 in 2020/21 to 49 in 2021/22. The proportion of female deaths due to natural causes decreased three percentage points in 2021/22 compared to the previous year, accounting for 26% of all female deaths. Since 2010/11, the proportion of female deaths due to natural causes has ranged from 23% to 42%.

There were 67 self-inflicted female deaths in 2021/22, an increase from 65 in 2020/21. Additionally, self-inflicted deaths remain the main cause of all female deaths in 2021/22 (35% of all deaths). Since 2010/11, the proportion of self-inflicted female deaths has ranged from 14% to 40%.

⁹ 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 duration from release

For deaths of offenders under post-release supervision in 2021/22, a higher number of deaths were self-inflicted deaths when the death was closer to the date of release, and a higher number 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 (65 deaths in 2021/22), 36 were self-inflicted and nine were from natural causes, whereas when the duration was over 365 days (198 deaths in 2021/22), 26 were self-inflicted and 106 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 March 2022, 82 deaths were confirmed or suspected to be due to COVID-19,¹⁰ 17 of which were between April 2021 to March 22 specifically.

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

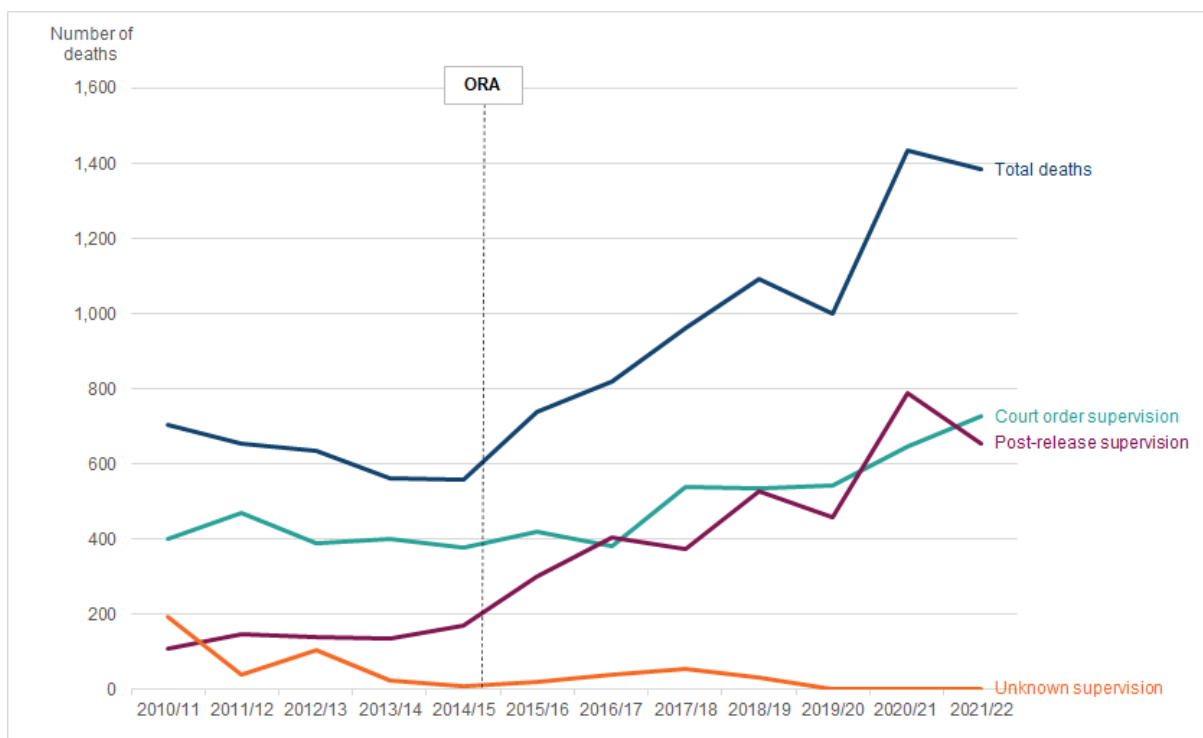
¹⁰ Reported deaths include all those where the person tested positive within 60 days of the death or where there was a clinical assessment COVID-19 was a contributory factor in their death. This number aims to only include service users where COVID-19 contributed or was suspected to contribute to the death. The cause of death is provisional until the official cause of death has been determined by the coroner.

3. Type of supervision

The number of offenders who died while serving court orders in the community increased by 13%, from 645 in 2020/21 (45% of total deaths) to 727 in 2021/22 (52% of total deaths) (Figure 2). This follows a broad upward trend in more recent years.

The number of deaths of offenders under post-release supervision in the community decreased by 17% from 788 in 2020/21 (55% of total deaths) to 656 in 2021/22 (47% of total deaths) (Figure 2). This follows a broad upward trend in deaths of offenders under post-release supervision, with the number of deaths under post-release supervision increasing particularly since 2014/15 (when there were 171 deaths, accounting for 31% of all deaths), which corresponds with the introduction of increased supervision under ORA.¹¹

Figure 2: Total deaths of offenders in the community, by type of supervision, England and Wales, 2010/11 to 2021/22 ¹² (Source: Tables 2 and 3)



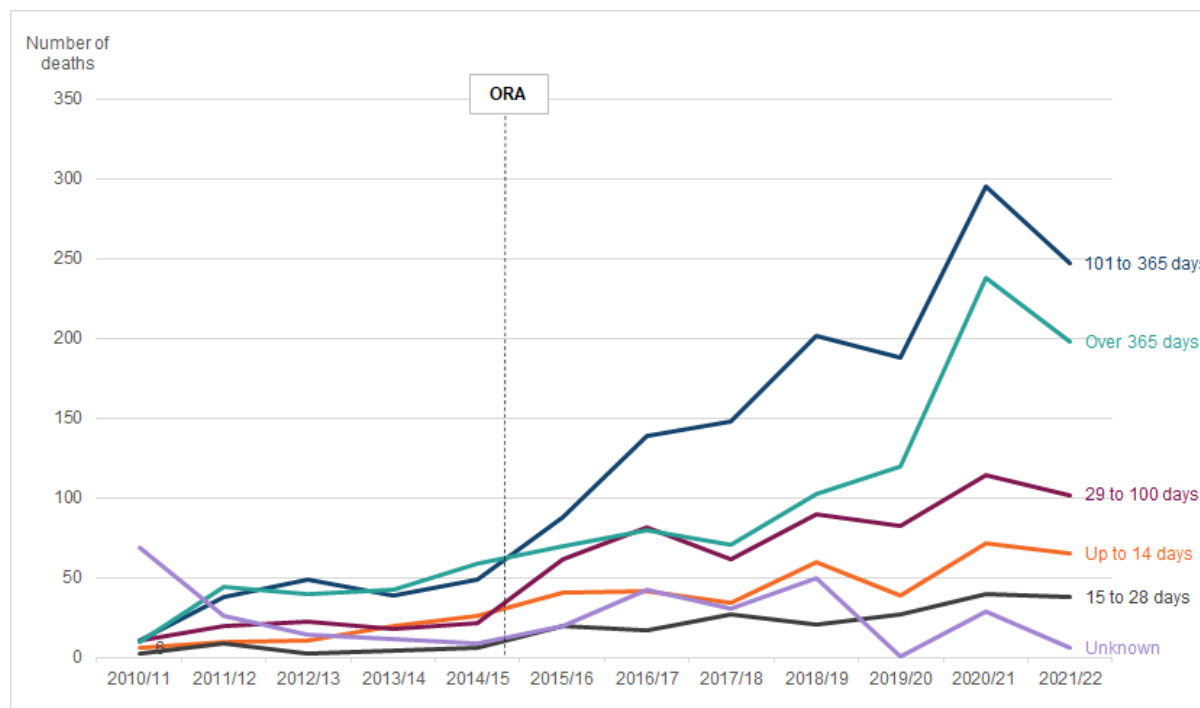
¹¹ Refer to the Introduction section of this bulletin for further details.

¹² 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.

Post-release supervision deaths by duration from release

Among deaths under post-release supervision in 2021/22, at 38%, most offenders died between 101 days and 365 days from the date of release (a 0.2 percentage point increase since 2020/21) and 30% died over 365 days from the date of release (no change since 2020/21). Ten percent of deaths occurred up to 14 days from their release and a further 6% of deaths occurred between 15 and 28 days from their release, representing increases of one percentage point for both since 2020/21.

Figure 3: Deaths 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 2021/22
¹³ (Source: Table 2)



¹³ 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. 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. Offenders in Approved Premises can either be on post-release supervision or on a court order.

There were 14 deaths of offenders with residence in Approved Premises in 2021/22, a decrease from 17 deaths in 2020/21. Deaths in Approved Premises accounted for 1% of all deaths of offenders in the community in 2021/22. Most deaths of offenders residing in Approved Premises across the time series were male, including 13 of the 14 deaths in 2021/22. However, greater volatility in the time series due to low numbers means that comparisons over time would not be meaningful.

5. Trends in deaths and probation supervision caseload

Following a downward trend in the number of offenders on court order supervision, there was an increase of 19% from 95,127 as at 31 March 2021 to 113,378 as at 31 March 2022 (Figure 4),¹⁴ whilst the number of offenders who died while serving court orders in the community also increased, by 13%, from 2020/21 to 2021/22. In contrast, the number of offenders on post-release supervision decreased by 2% from 63,434 as at 31 March 2021 to 62,236 as at 31 March 2022. The number of deaths of offenders under post-release supervision in the community also decreased, by 17%, from 2020/21 to 2021/22.

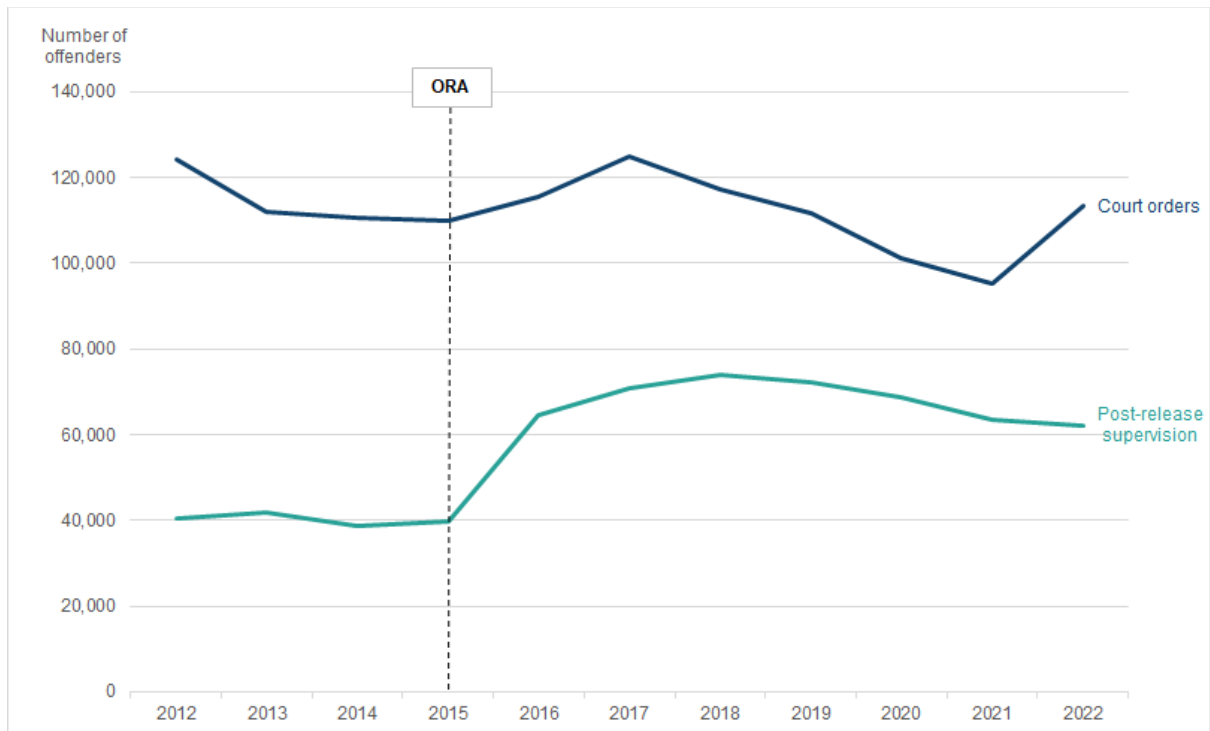
Court order and post-release supervision caseload figures decreased in the four years that followed the peaks of 124,823 as at 31 March 2017 for court orders and 74,043 as at 31 March 2018 for post-release supervision,¹⁵ unlike deaths of offenders in the community, which had been on an upward trend over the same period. Up to 31 March 2017, the court order and post-release supervision caseload figures and the number of deaths followed a similar trend.¹⁶

¹⁴ Probation caseload statistics are published in the Offender Management Statistics quarterly at www.gov.uk/government/statistics/offender-management-statistics-quarterly-january-to-march-2022.

¹⁵ To note, the number of offenders on the probation caseload in June 2020 was substantially reduced as a result of the operational restrictions that were put in place in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of these operational restrictions continued into subsequent periods; however, figures in more recent periods have recovered to pre-pandemic levels.

¹⁶ 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.

Figure 4: Number of offenders supervised by the probation service at the end period, by type, England Wales, March 2012 to March 2022 ¹⁷



¹⁷ 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.

Release schedule

This bulletin was published on 27 October 2022, and includes statistics covering financial year periods from 2010/11 to 2021/22. 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.

The next release of Deaths of offenders supervised in the community statistics, to include figures for the financial year 2022/23, is scheduled for October 2023.

Contact points

Press enquiries should be directed to the Ministry of Justice press office:

Tel: 020 3334 3536

Email: newsdesk@justice.gsi.gov.uk

Other enquiries and feedback on these statistics should be directed to the Data and Evidence as a Service division of the Ministry of Justice:

Liz Whiting, Head of Reducing Reoffending and Probation Statistics

Ministry of Justice, 10th Floor, 102 Petty France, London, SW1H 9AJ

Email: ESD@justice.gov.uk

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

General information about the official statistics system of the UK is available from: <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/>

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:

www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice

www.sps.gov.uk/FreedomofInformation/PrisonerDeaths.aspx

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

Alternative formats are available on request from ESD@justice.gov.uk

© Crown copyright. Produced by the Ministry of Justice.