



## Serious Further Offences (SFO) 2023

### Key guidance notes

#### SFO convictions

This bulletin reports SFO conviction figures by the **date of SFO notification**, (that is, the date on which the supervising probation region notifies HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) that an offender under its supervision has appeared in court charged with an offence which qualifies for an SFO review). It reports on the number of cases notified in 2021/22 and of those the number which have resulted in SFO convictions, as notified to HMPPS as at **30 September 2023**. This means that conviction figures are **provisional** as a proportion of cases have yet to reach a definitive outcome.

A more detailed description of SFO notifications and reviews is in the [glossary](#) section.

#### Main points

<b>As at 30 September 2023, there were 288 offenders convicted of an SFO, resulting from 528 notifications received in 2021/22.</b>	This represents a first annual increase in SFO convictions, following successive annual decreases from 2017/18, and this increase reflects the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions in 2021.
<b>Total SFO notifications received in 2022/23 was 578. By 30 September 2023, a review had been completed in 391 of these notifications.</b>	The number of SFO notifications received in 2022/23 increased by 9% to 578 compared to the previous year. However, the latest figure is 16% lower than the peak in 2016/17.
<b>In most years, between 50% to 60% of SFO notifications have resulted in a conviction of an SFO.</b>	For the remaining cases, charges are dropped, the offender is acquitted, or the offender is convicted of a less serious offence.

This bulletin and [associated tables](#) are part of the [Proven Reoffending statistics](#), and they provide statistics on SFO convictions received by 30 September 2023 and relating to notifications received from 2014/15 to 2021/22, as well as statistics on notifications received from 2014/15 to 2022/23 and their resulting completed reviews. The lag between notification period and publication date for conviction figures is to allow time for most cases to complete the criminal justice process.

Users should see the [background notes](#) in this bulletin and refer to the '[2012 Compendium of Reoffending Statistics and Analysis](#)' for further definitions of the terms in this bulletin.

## Statistician's comment

“Between 2014/15 and 2016/17, annual SFO notifications and resulting convictions increased markedly as a result of the implementation of the Offender Rehabilitation Act (ORA) 2014<sup>1</sup>. From 2016/17 the number of notifications decreased annually up to 2020/21. However, we have seen successive increases in notifications in the last two years.

From 2017/18, the number of SFO convictions broadly followed a similar decreasing pattern to notifications up to 2020/21. Figures for 2021/22 show a first annual increase in SFO convictions since 2017/18, and the increase reflects the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions. However, the latest numbers are lower than in 2017/18.

The increase in both notifications and convictions may also reflect the increased number of adult rape cases charged by the CPS and proceeding to Crown Court, following the Rape Review Action Plan aimed at increasing the number of rape cases reaching court.

We saw annual decreases in SFO convictions for murder in 2019/20 and 2020/21. However, we may see an increase in 2021/22 when all outstanding murder cases conclude at court.

The number of offenders convicted for offences related to rape and other serious sexual offences decreased annually from 2017/2018 to 2020/21, mirroring the decreasing pattern in [overall rape-related convictions](#) in the same period.

We have now discontinued publishing separate figures for ORA cases following a public consultation last year. We received no objection to discontinuing separate ORA figures.”

For feedback related to the content of this bulletin, please contact us at:  
[SFO@justice.gov.uk](mailto:SFO@justice.gov.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> Under the Offender Rehabilitation Act (ORA) 2014, offenders serving short prison sentences are now released on licence and a period of post sentence supervision. Offences which would not have previously been counted, as offenders were not subject to probation supervision, now come into scope and are counted as SFOs.

## 1. SFO convictions

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**As at 30 September 2023, there were 288 offenders convicted of an SFO, resulting from 528 notifications received in 2021/22 (compares with 245 convictions as at 30 September 2022 out of 498 notifications received in 2020/21).**

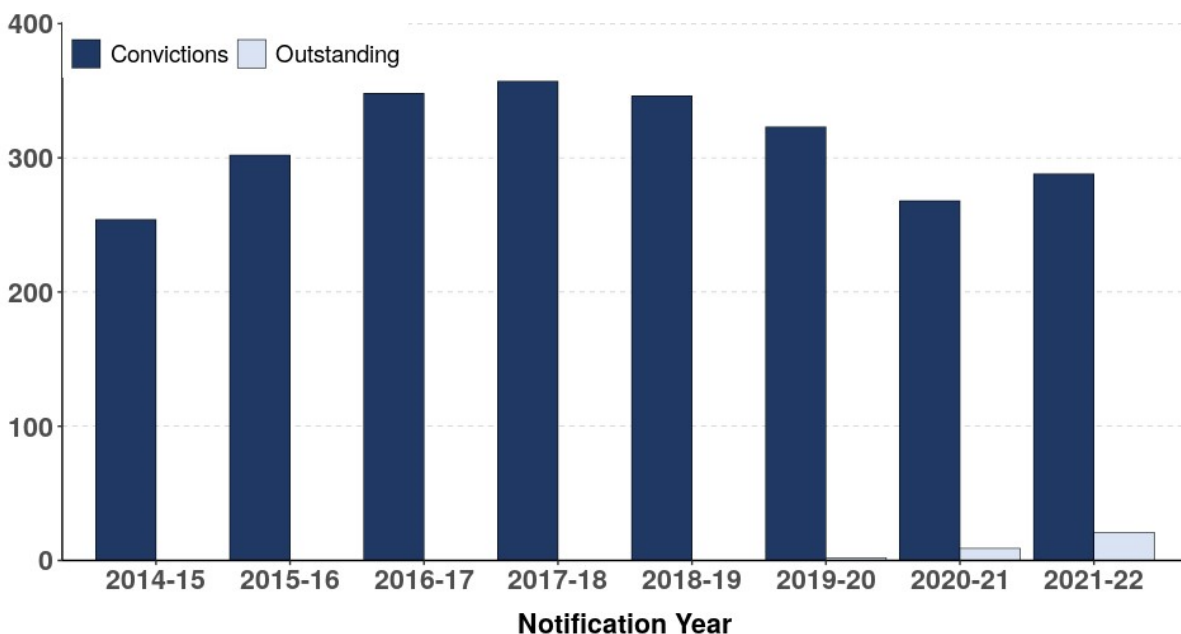
After decreasing annually from 2017/18, the number of offenders convicted of an SFO increased for the first time in 2021/22, partly due to the relation of COVID-19 restrictions and reflecting a corresponding trend in notifications received.

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The introduction of ORA in 2015 led to a significant increase in the number of offenders who became subject to post-release supervision. Where those offenders were charged with an SFO, their cases came into scope under the SFO Review Procedures. Consequently, there was a marked increase in the number of SFO notifications and marked annual increases in the number of offenders convicted of an SFO from 2014/15 to 2017/18.

There are 2 cases for 2019/20, 9 cases for 2020/21 and 21 cases for 2021/22, as at 30 September 2023, where HMPPS is yet to be informed of an outcome following Court proceedings. In most instances, these cases have not yet concluded at Court.

**Figure 1: Number of SFO convictions by year of notification as at 30 September 2023**  
[Source: Table 4]



### Convictions as a Proportion of Notifications

In most years, about 50% to 60% of SFO notifications result in conviction for an SFO. In the remaining cases, either charges are dropped, the offender is acquitted, or the offender is convicted of a less serious offence.

Of the 528 notifications received in 2021/22, 288 had resulted in SFO convictions as at 30 September 2023. Of these convictions, 59 were for murder and 75 were for rape and other

serious sexual offences. [At the same time last year](#), there were 245 SFO convictions (55 for murder, 49 for rape and other serious sexual offences) from 498 notifications for 2020/21.

The number of offenders convicted for murder annually increased from 2015/16 to 2018/19, partly as a result of the introduction of ORA and [increases in the overall murder convictions \(non-SFO and SFO\)](#) in the same period. There were annual decreases in 2019/20 and 2020/21; however, we may see an increase in convictions when all currently outstanding murder cases arising from 2021/22 notifications conclude at Court.

The number of offenders convicted for offences related to rape and other serious sexual offences decreased annually from 2016/17 to 2020/21, mirroring the decreasing pattern in [overall rape-related convictions](#) in the same period.

However, for the first time since 2016/17, we have seen an annual increase in the number of convictions for rape and other serious sexual offences resulting from notifications in 2021/22, the increase being partly due to the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions in 2021. The latest figure is lower than in 2016/17. Following the publication of the End-to-End Rape Review and Action Plan in June 2021<sup>2</sup>, there has been an increase in the number of adult rape cases referred to the CPS, charged by the CPS, and proceeding to Crown Court. The continuous progress made through the Rape Review Action Plan to increase the number of rape cases reaching court may have an upward impact on the number of SFO convictions for rape going forward.

### **Index sentence**

The majority of offenders convicted of an SFO were being supervised either on a community sentence or a determinate custodial sentence (their index sentence) at the time of the offence. Prior to ORA, those sentenced to community supervision made up the majority of those convicted of an SFO; whereas since 2016/17, about 60% of those convicted of an SFO were released from prison on a licence, including those on a period of post sentence supervision introduced by ORA and a small number of offenders serving indeterminate sentences.

Consistently fewer than 10% of those convicted of an SFO had an index sentence of a life sentence (life) or an indeterminate sentence for public protection (IPP) (Source: Tables 2 and 3).

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/end-to-end-rape-review-report-on-findings-and-actions>

## 2. SFO notifications and reviews

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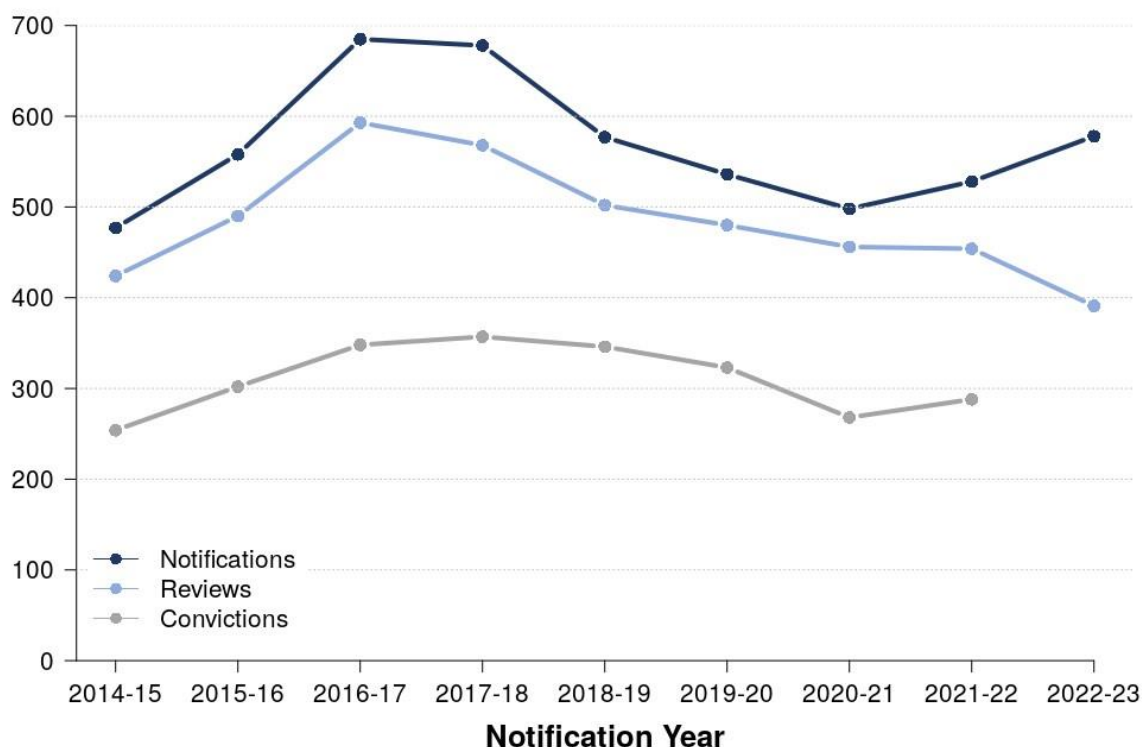
**Total SFO notifications received in 2022/23 was 578. As at 30 September 2023, reviews had been completed in relation to 391 of these notifications.**

The number of SFO notifications received in 2022/23 increased by 9% to 578 compared to the previous year.

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After increasing from 2014/15 to 2016/17, in part due to the introduction of ORA, the number of SFO notifications and resulting reviews decreased annually up to 2020/21, driving a corresponding decreasing trend in convictions. We have since seen successive increases in notifications in 2021/22 and 2022/23. The latest notification figure for 2022/23 represents a 9% increase from the previous year and a 16% decrease from 2016/17. This increase has largely been driven by an increase in notifications for rape charges, reflecting increases in the number of adult rape cases proceeding to Crown Court following the Rape Review and Action Plan.

**Figure 2: Number of SFO notifications, reviews and convictions by year of notification as at 30 September 2023 [Source: Table 4]<sup>3</sup>**



Not all notifications result in a review. In some cases, the charges are dropped, the offender is acquitted, or the offender is convicted of a less serious offence, prior to the review being completed.

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<sup>3</sup> We publish SFO conviction figures with a one-year lag to allow time for most cases to complete the criminal justice process.

### 3. Description of the Probation SFO Review Procedures

Since 1 December 2008, an SFO review will be triggered when an offender is charged and appears in court for a qualifying offence alleged to have been committed within the probation supervision period or within 28 working days of the supervision period terminating. The list of SFO qualifying offences is based on, but not identical to, Schedule 18 of the Sentencing Code and can be found as Annex A in the Probation Service Serious Further Offence procedures Policy Framework.

SFO reviews are automatically triggered and must be completed in the following cases (formerly known as mandatory reviews):

- any eligible supervised individual has been charged with (including ancillary and inchoate offences such as attempt, conspiracy to commit, incitement to commit and encouraging or assisting commission): murder, manslaughter, other specified offences causing death, rape or assault by penetration, a sexual offence against a child under 13 years of age, or qualifying offences under terrorism or anti-terrorism legislation during a period of management by Probation.

A review is conditionally triggered and must be completed in the following cases (formerly known as discretionary reviews):

- any eligible supervised individual who has been charged with another offence on the SFO qualifying list committed during a period of management by Probation is or has been assessed as high/very high risk of serious harm during the current sentence; and
- any eligible supervised individual has been charged with another offence on the SFO qualifying list committed during a period of management by Probation, prior to completion of an initial risk assessment.

The SFO Review Procedures require a notification when an offender is charged and first appears in court for a qualifying offence. The region which supervised the offender completes an internal management report, known as an SFO review. Not all notifications result in a review, e.g. where the charges are dropped/discontinued or if the offender is acquitted prior to the review being completed. Not all cases which are notified as an SFO will result in a conviction. In any year, in about 40% to 50% of cases either the charge is dropped, or the offender is acquitted, or the offender is convicted of a less serious offence.

Users should refer to the [‘2012 Compendium of Reoffending Statistics and Analysis’](#) for further definitions of the terms used in this bulletin, and for commentary to help interpret these.

## **4. Glossary**

### **SFOs**

The HMPPS SFO Review Procedures require the Probation Service to complete an internal management report, known as an SFO review when an offender is charged with a qualifying offence alleged to have been committed during a period of probation supervision or within 28 working days of the supervision period terminating.

### **SFO Notification**

The Probation Service will complete an SFO notification when an offender, who meets the criteria for an SFO review appears in court for the first time having been charged with an eligible offence under the SFO review procedures.

### **SFO notification date**

The date the supervising probation region submits the paperwork to HMPPS to notify that an offender under supervision has been charged and appeared in court for an offence which qualifies for an SFO review.

### **SFO Review**

Following the submission of an SFO notification, the Probation Service completes an SFO review which considers whether the action taken by probation to supervise the offender was reasonable and defensible and to identify any further action to promote good practice or address any areas for improvement.

## Further information

### Contact

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

Tel: 020 3334 3536

Email: [newsdesk@justice.gov.uk](mailto:newsdesk@justice.gov.uk)

Other enquiries about these statistics should be directed to:

**Eric Nyame**

Public Protection Group

HM Prison and Probation Service

8<sup>th</sup> Floor

102 Petty France

London

SW1H 9AJ

General enquiries about the statistical work of the Ministry of Justice can be e-mailed to:  
[SFO@justice.gov.uk](mailto:SFO@justice.gov.uk)

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