

# Probable Suicides

## 2020

Published on 17 August 2021



This statistical report details information on the number of deaths that were registered in Scotland in 2020 which are classified as probable suicides.

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## 1. Key Findings

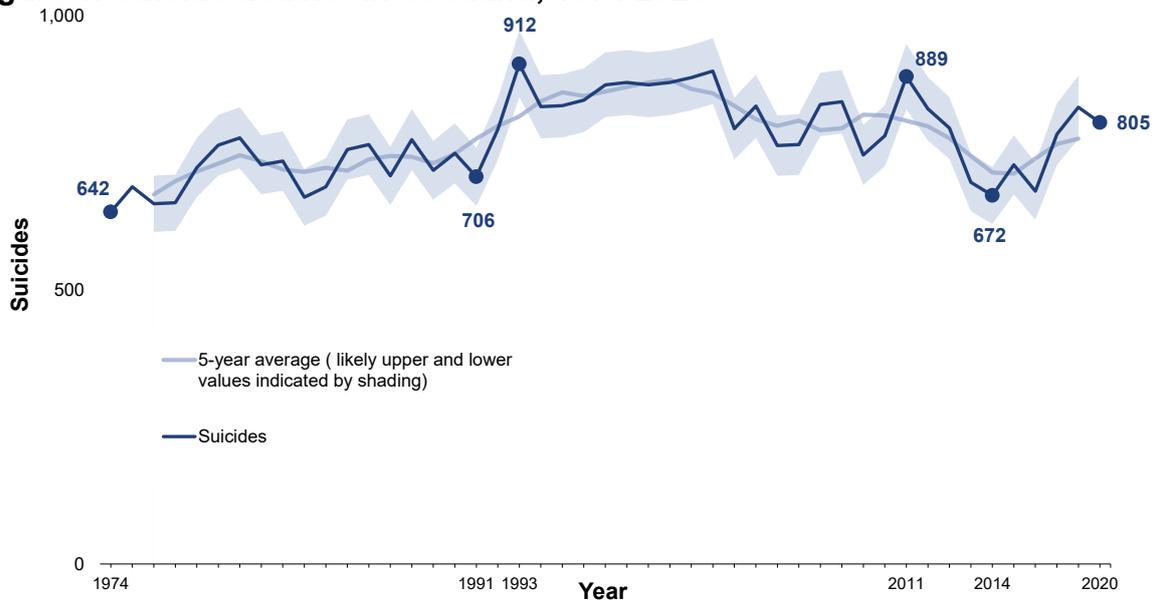
- There were 805 probable suicides registered in Scotland in 2020. This is a decrease of 28 (3%) since 2019. The rate of mortality was similar in 2020 to 2019.
- The rate of suicides in the population had been falling between 2011 and 2015 (from 16.6 down to 12.6 suicide deaths per 100,000 people), but is now at a level similar to 2013 at 14.8 suicide deaths per 100,000 people.
- Suicide deaths were consistently above average between July and September of 2020 (30% more suicides than usual for those three months).
- Men accounted for 71% of suicides in 2020.
- The number of female deaths from suicide rose slightly in the past year, but the overall mortality rate remained similar.
- The suicide rate in Scotland's most deprived areas is three times the rate in the least deprived areas.
- Over the past five years, Dundee City has had the highest rate of suicide mortality, and East Renfrewshire has had the lowest (note that numbers were too low to calculate a reliable rate for Shetland Islands).

## 2. Suicides in Scotland

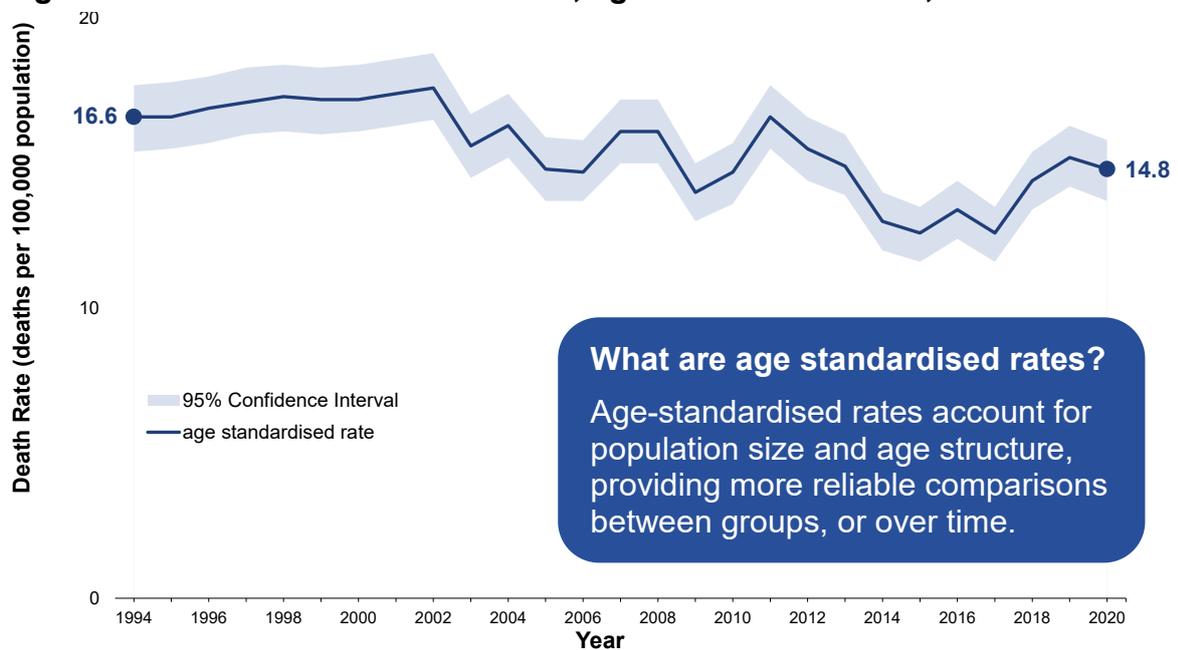
There were 805 probable suicides registered in Scotland in 2020. This is a decrease of 28 (3%) since 2019. Suicides decreased between 2011 and 2014, but have generally risen again since then.

The age-standardised death rate was similar in 2020 and 2019.

**Figure 1: Suicide deaths<sup>1</sup> in Scotland, 1974-2020**



**Figure 2: Suicide deaths<sup>1</sup> in Scotland, age-standardised rate, 1994-2020**



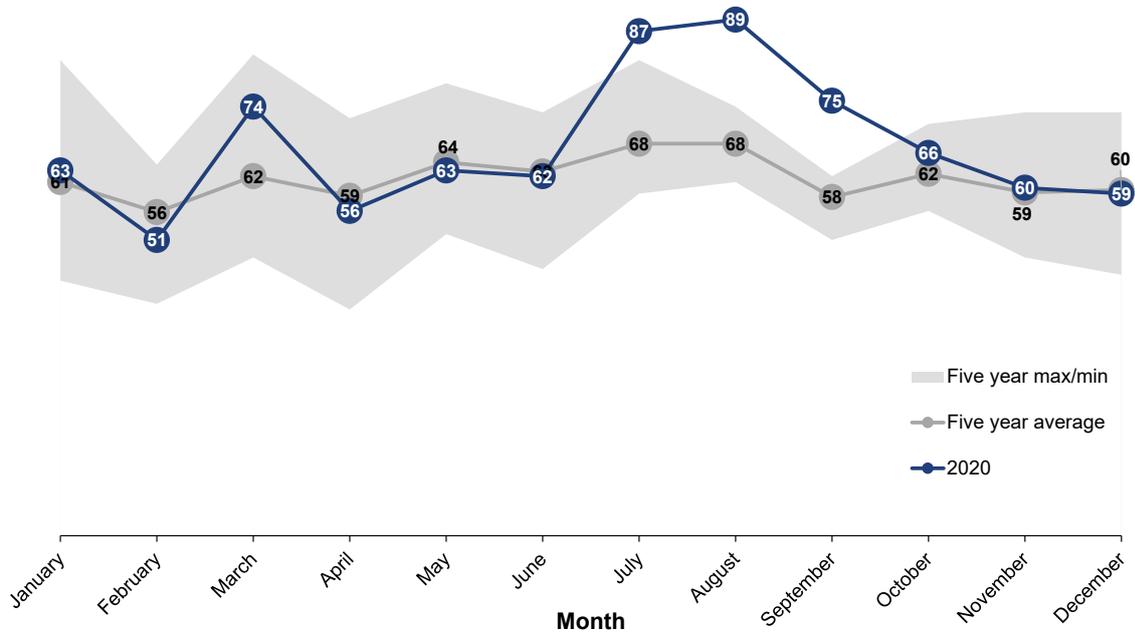
**What are age standardised rates?**  
 Age-standardised rates account for population size and age structure, providing more reliable comparisons between groups, or over time.

<sup>1</sup> 1. Following a WHO update to the international Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, the definition of probable suicides changed in 2011. This chart shows the numbers of probable suicides according to the new classification

Suicide deaths were consistently above average between July and September of 2020 (30% more suicides than usual for those three months).

Suicides were higher than the previous five year average (739) in 2020 at 805. Deaths between July and September of 2020 were higher than any previous value for those months between 2015 and 2019.

**Figure 3: Suicide deaths by month, 2020 and five year average, Scotland**



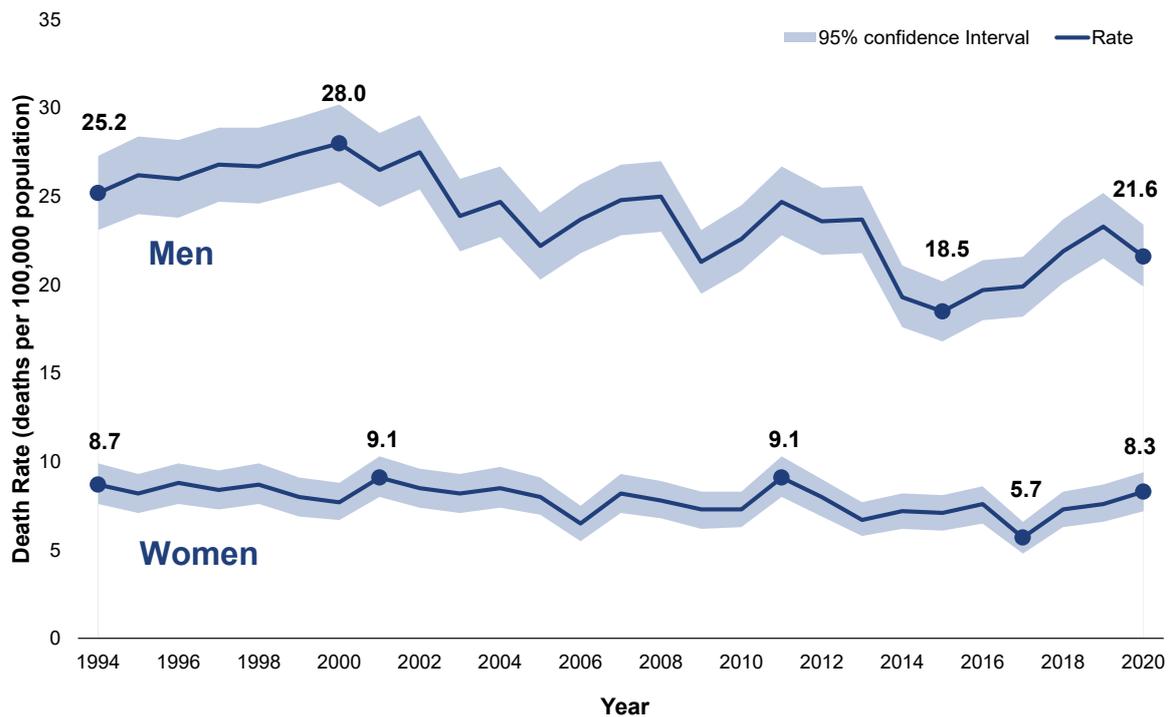
### 3. Age and sex

In 2020, 230 women and 575 men died from suicide in Scotland (71% male, 29% female).

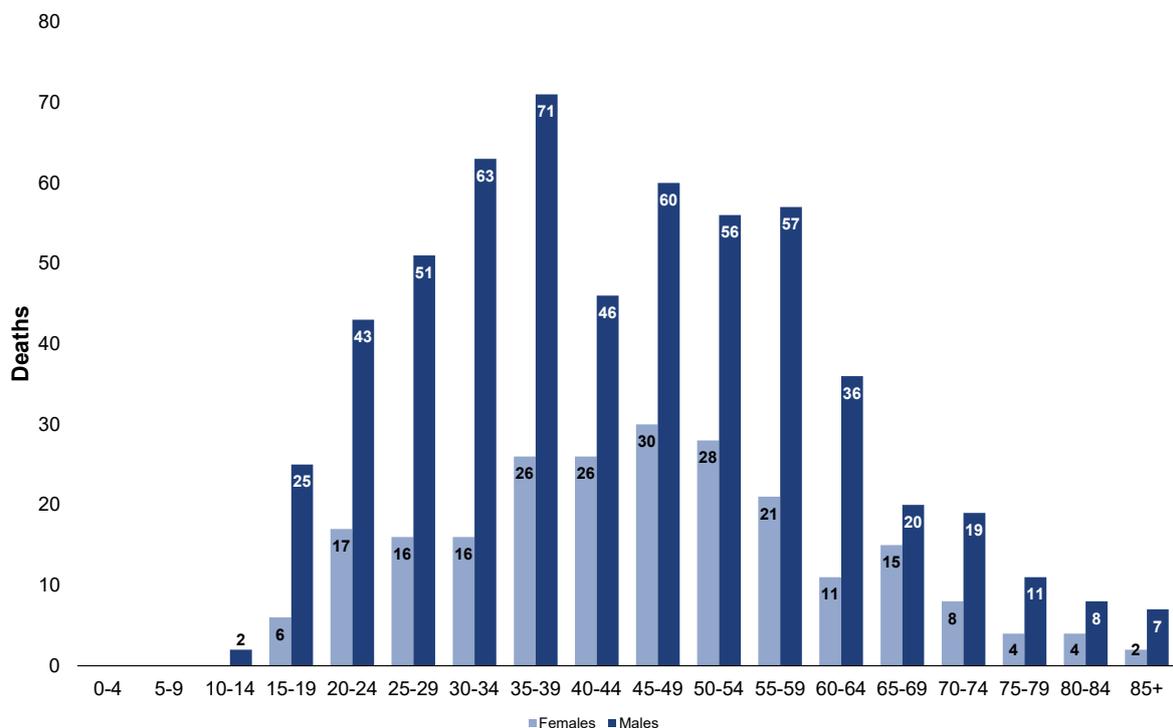
In every year since 1985, more than 70% of people dying from suicide have been male. Last year the percentage who were female rose by 3% due to an increase in the number of female suicides and a decrease in the number of male suicides.

Age standardised death rates for women have increased since 2017 (Figure 4) but have not changed by much since the mid-1990s (8.7 deaths per 100,000 women in 1994, 8.3 in 2020). Rates for men have fluctuated more over the same period, but men have generally been around 3 times as likely to die from suicide as women.

**Figure 4: Age-standardised death rates from suicide by sex, 1994-2020**



**Figure 5: Suicide deaths in Scotland by age and sex, 2020**



Suicides were highest for men between the ages of 35 and 39, for women the highest number of suicides were between the ages of 45 and 49. Overall, one in every five suicide deaths was to someone under the age of 30. This is similar to previous years.

## 4. Areas within Scotland

Four council areas had suicide rates that were significantly higher than the average for Scotland as a whole, when looking at age-standardised data for 2016 to 2020 (combined). Six areas had a rate significantly lower than Scotland.

The areas that were **higher** than Scotland (14.1 deaths per 100,000 people) were:

- Dundee City (23.9)
- Highland (21.8)
- Falkirk (17.1)
- Glasgow City (15.6)

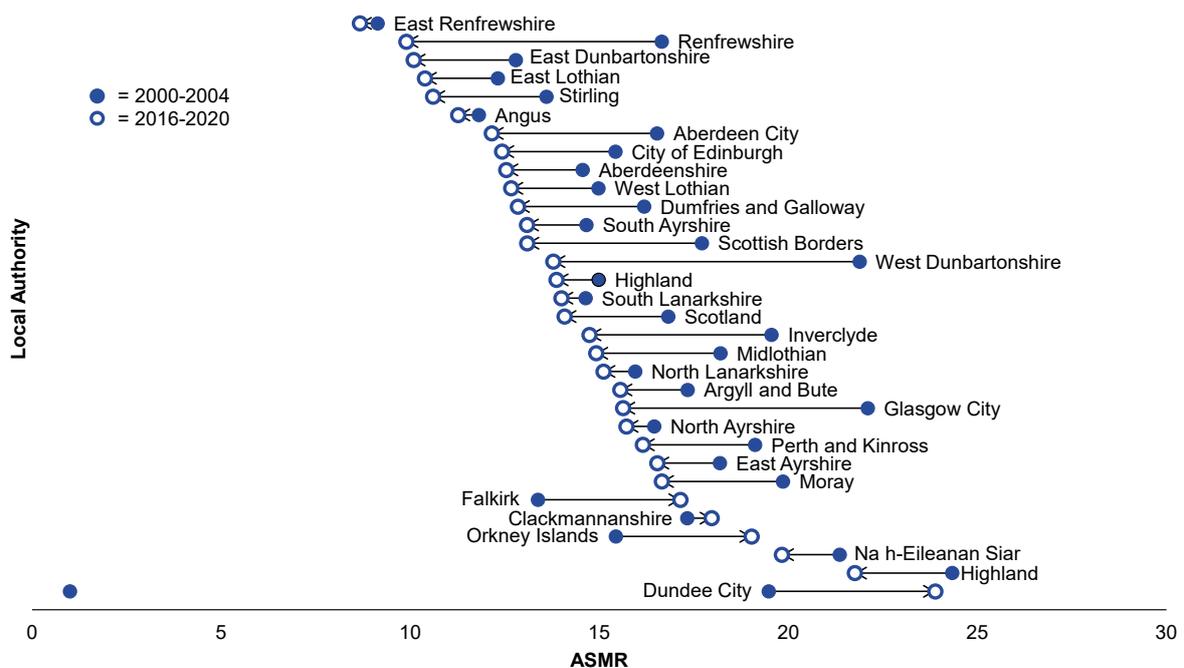
The areas that were **lower** than Scotland were:

- East Renfrewshire (8.7)
- Renfrewshire (9.9)
- East Dunbartonshire (10.1)
- East Lothian (10.4)
- Stirling (10.6)

Note: The number of deaths in Shetland Island between 2016 and 2020 was too low to calculate a reliable rate for.

Rates for all other council areas were not significantly different to the rate for Scotland as a whole.

**Figure 6: Changes in suicide rates, between 2000-04 and 2016-20, by local authority**

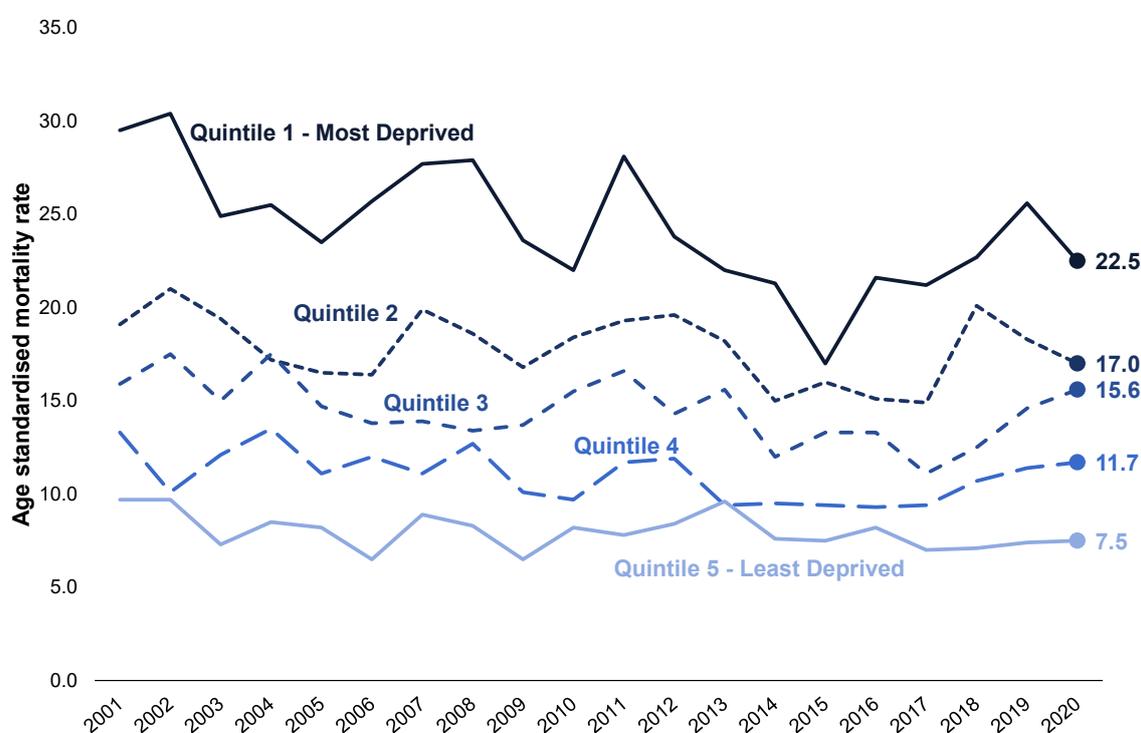


The largest change in mortality rate between 2000-2004 and 2016-2020 was in West Dunbartonshire, which decreased from 21.9 deaths per 100,000 to 13.8 deaths per 100,000 (down by 37%). Only four areas saw an overall increase in suicide mortality over this time. Falkirk, Clackmannanshire, Orkney Islands and Dundee City all increased, and make up four out of the top six highest rates among council areas. The rate in Highland fell in the intervening period to 16.5 in 2006-2010, but began to rise again, to 21.8 which was the second highest in 2016-2020.

## 5. Deprivation

Scotland's most deprived areas had a suicide rate that was three times that of the least deprived areas in 2020 (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Suicide rates by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation quintiles, 2001-2020, Scotland**



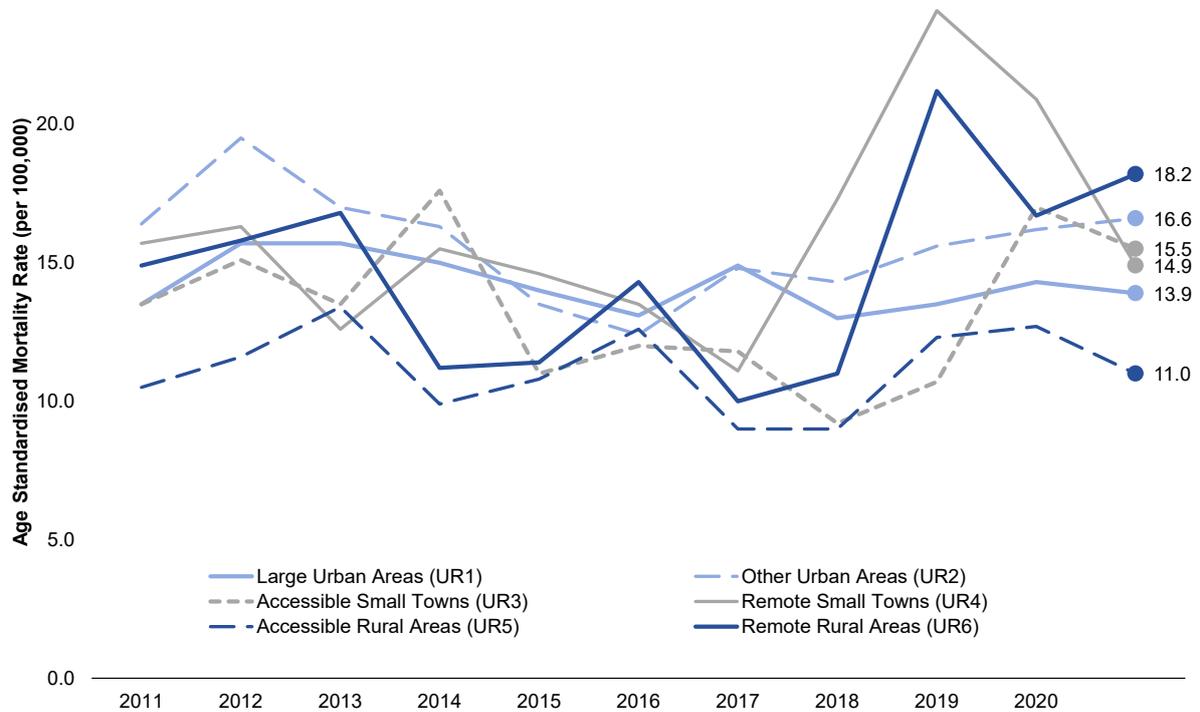
In 2020, the areas that were in the most deprived 20% had an age-standardised mortality rate for suicide of 22.5 deaths per 100,000 people. In the 20% least deprived areas, the rate was 7.5 per 100,000. The difference between these two rates in the past twenty years averages at 3.1, going as high as 4.0 in 2006 and as low as 2.3 in 2015.

### What is the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation?

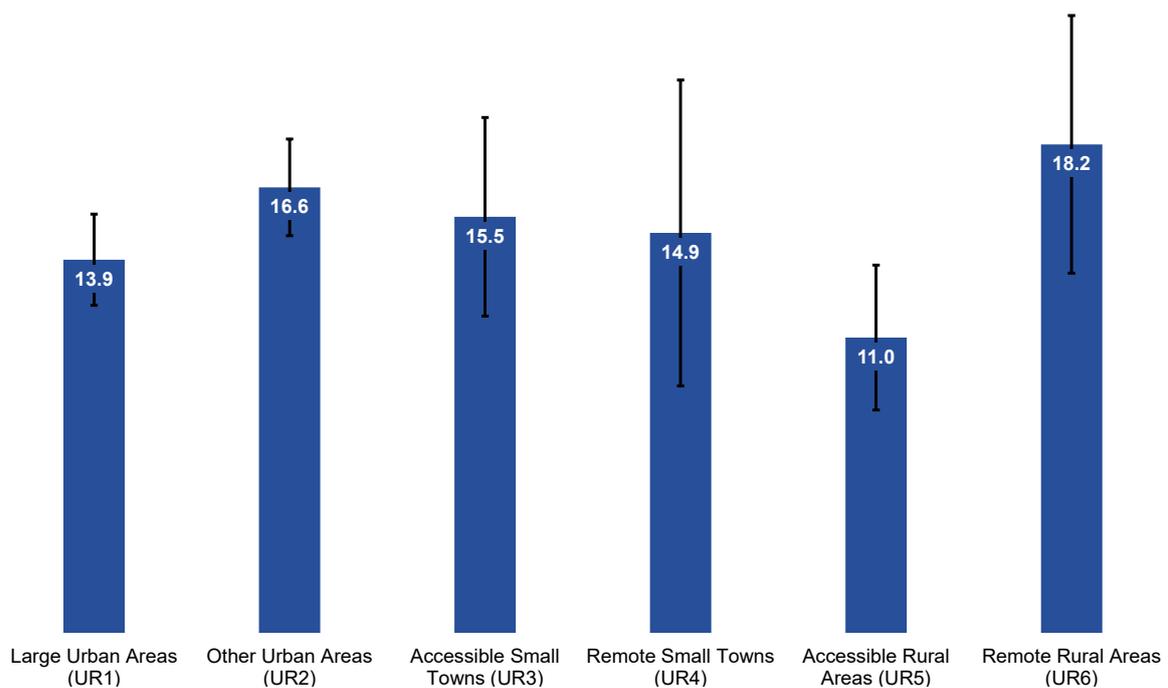
The Scottish index of multiple deprivation is a measure of how deprived an area is. A score is given to all of Scotland's datazones based on multiple indicators of deprivation. The datazones are then ranked 1 to 6,976 based on their score. Subsequently, the rankings are split into 10 equally sized groups forming SIMD deciles and five groups for SIMD quintiles

There is no clear pattern to suicide mortality rates by the Scottish Urban Rural classification, as the confidence intervals on most of the estimates are overlapping (Figure 8b). This means that it's hard to distinguish whether the age standardised mortality rates are truly different. Suicide mortality rates have a clear link to deprivation, but this data does not show any concrete evidence of a link with urban/rural locations.

**Figure 8a: Suicide mortality rates, urban and rural areas, 2011 to 2020**



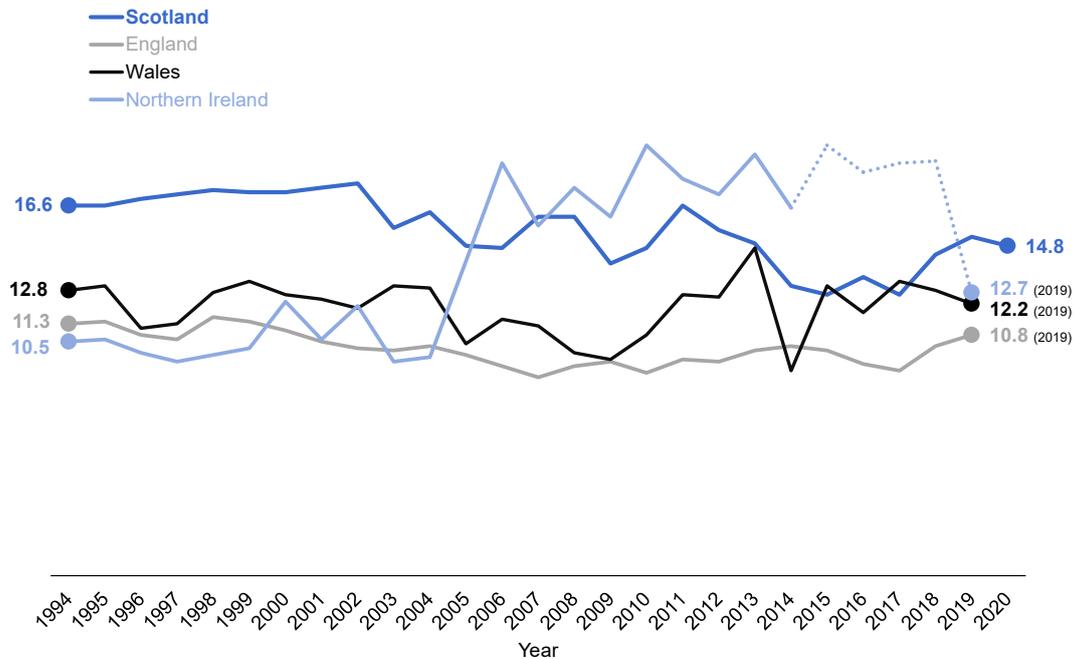
**Figure 8b: Suicide mortality rates, urban and rural areas, 2020**



## 7. Comparisons with other UK countries

For the last year that comparable data was available (2019), Scotland had the highest suicide rate in the United Kingdom at 15.7 per 100,000. Northern Ireland and Wales had similar values at 12.7 and 12.2 deaths per 100,000 people respectively, and England had the lowest with 10.8.

**Figure 9: Suicide mortality rates, UK constituent countries, latest year\***

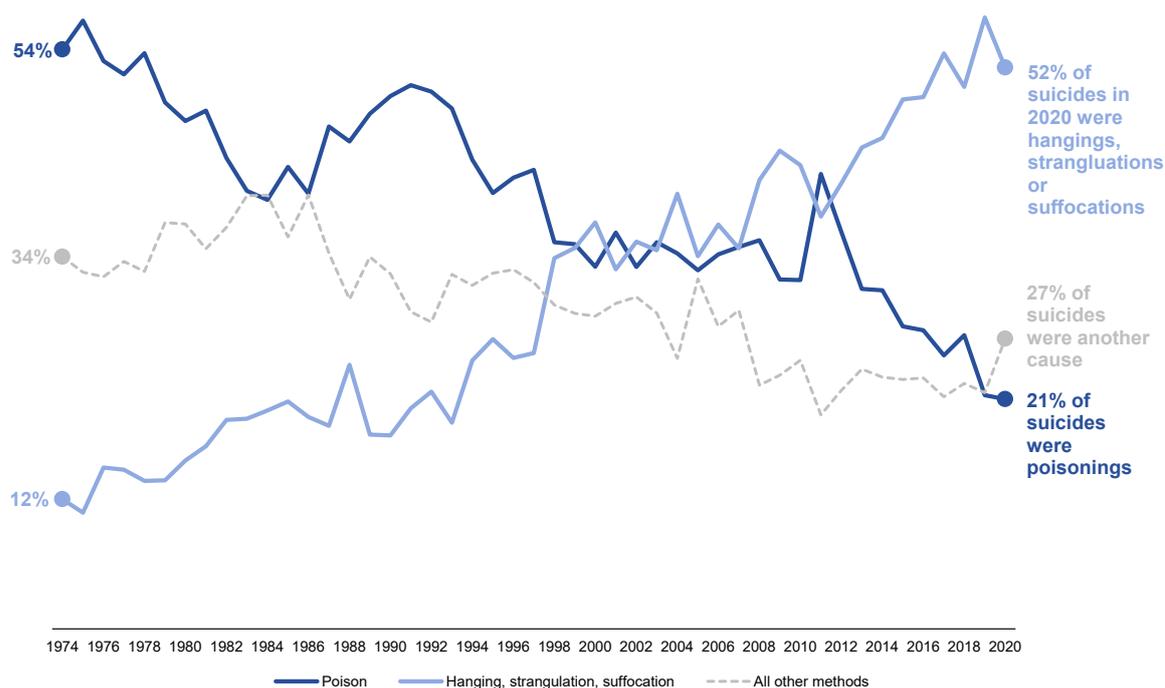


**\*Footnote:** Due to data issues reported by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), the time series for Northern Ireland has been affected from 2015 to 2018. ONS are yet to release 2020 data for England and Wales.

## 8. Method of suicide

Hanging, strangulation and suffocation were the method in over half of all suicides in Scotland in 2020. This method has been the most common every year since 2012, and first became the most common in 2000. Previously, poisonings had been the most common method of suicide, but the number of these has generally fallen since 2000.

**Figure 10: Suicides by method (% of all suicides), Scotland, 1974-2020**



## 9. Methodology

A full statistical methodology document is available on the [NRS website](#).

## 10. Strengths and Limitations

### Strengths

- Information is supplied when a death is registered, giving complete coverage of the population and ensures highly accurate estimates that are representative of the population.
- Coding for cause of death is carried out according to the World Health Organization (WHO) ICD-10 and agreed rule.
- The use of age-standardised mortality rates means our statistics are comparable between local health boards, councils and at national level.
- The use of the national statistics definition of suicide also makes the statistics in this report comparable with the rest of the UK.

### Limitations

- Age-standardised rates need to be compiled for a longer period at sub-Scotland level to ensure robustness, so small changes year-on-year are harder to identify at local levels.
- These statistics are collated using information from death registers, so things like sexual orientation, (mental) health history and reasoning behind the suicide are not available to NRS.

## 11. Future developments

The next scheduled publication for further probable suicides statistics in Scotland is June 2022. We welcome feedback on this output, how it has been used and any areas that we could provide more information on that could prove helpful.

## 12. Related Statistics and other info

- Prior to 2021, probable suicides statistics were published in a summary format on the NRS website.
- ONS publish [suicide deaths statistics for England and Wales](#).
- NISRA publish [suicide deaths statistics for Northern Ireland](#).

If you are covering these statistics in the media, please consider following the [guidelines issued by Samaritans](#) on the reporting of suicide.

If you are struggling to cope, help is available.

[NHS inform](#) has a list of resources available to anyone, with many of these available 24 hours a day.

Samaritans can be called for free on 116 123 (UK and Republic of Ireland) or contacted via email at [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org). Visit the [Samaritans website](#) for more information.

## 13. Notes on statistical publications

### National Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority (UKSA) has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in line with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics (available on the [UKSA](#) website).

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is National Records of Scotland's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether

these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

### **Information on background and source data**

Further details on data source(s), timeframe of data and timeliness, continuity of data, accuracy, etc. can be found in the metadata that is published alongside this publication on the NRS website.

### **National Records of Scotland**

We, the National Records of Scotland, are a non-ministerial department of the devolved Scottish Administration. Our aim is to provide relevant and reliable information, analysis and advice that meets the needs of government, business and the people of Scotland. We do this as follows:

Preserving the past – We look after Scotland’s national archives so that they are available for current and future generations, and we make available important information for family history.

Recording the present – At our network of local offices, we register births, marriages, civil partnerships, deaths, divorces and adoptions in Scotland.

Informing the future – We are responsible for the Census of Population in Scotland which we use, with other sources of information, to produce statistics on the population and households.

You can get other detailed statistics that we have produced from the [Statistics](#) section of our website. Scottish Census statistics are available on the [Scotland’s Census](#) website.

We also provide information about [future publications](#) on our website. If you would like us to tell you about future statistical publications, you can register your interest on the Scottish Government [ScotStat website](#).

You can also follow us on twitter [@NatRecordsScot](#)

### **Enquiries and suggestions**

Please get in touch if you need any further information, or have any suggestions for improvement.

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