

# Probable suicides

## 2021

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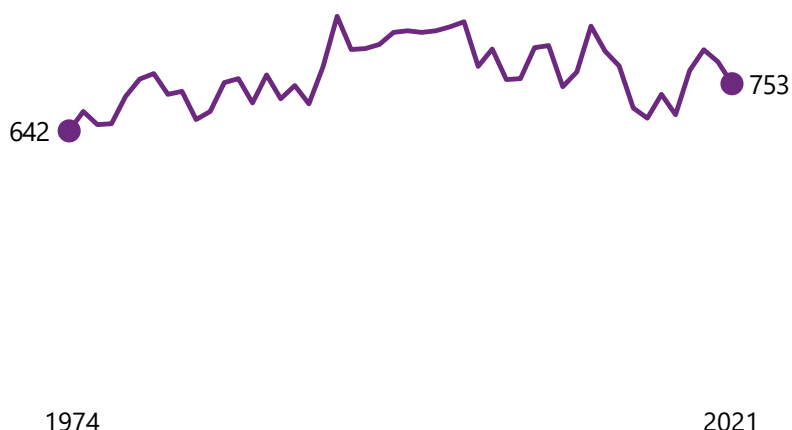


This statistical report details information on the number of deaths that were registered in Scotland in 2021 which were probable suicides. It also includes breakdowns by sex, age, cause of death, deprivation and method.

**Number of suicides in Scotland down 6% to 753 in 2021**

The number of probable suicides in Scotland has fallen for a second consecutive year. Prior to this, the number of suicides increased in both 2018 and 2019.

Number of deaths

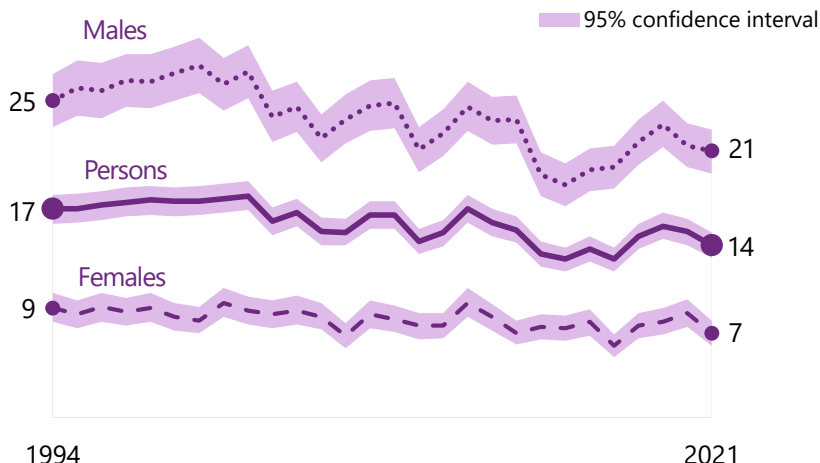


**Rate of female suicide in Scotland falls in 2021**

The mortality rate for suicides in 2021 decreased from 15 to 14 per 100,000 people, but the change was not statistically significant.

The rate for females fell from 8 to 7 per 100,000 (statistically significant) in 2021.

Age-standardised rate of mortality (deaths per 100,000 people)



**Average age for suicide deaths has risen by 3.4 since 1994**

The average age of deaths from suicide has generally increased over time, with a difference of 3.4 years between the average in 1994 and in 2021. There has been a sharp increase in the past three years, increasing by 5%.

Average age at death (years)



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## 1. Key Findings

- In 2021 there were 753 probable suicides in Scotland, a decrease of 52 (6%) on the previous year. This is the lowest number of suicides registered in a year since 2017.
- Most of the decrease in the past year can be attributed to a fall in female suicides, which decreased by 42 (18%).
- The rate of suicide in males was 3.2 times as high as the rate for females. Rates have been consistently higher for males throughout time, ranging from 2.6 to 3.6 times as high since 1994.
- Rates for death from suicide are highest at age 25 to 44 and 45 to 64. The rate for suicides at age 25 to 44 have fallen in the last ten years, having previously been 1.5 times as high as for age 45 to 64.
- The rate for probable suicide mortality was higher than the Scottish average in Highland, Tayside and Ayrshire and Arran at health board level for the 2017 to 2021 average.
- At council level, the rate was higher than the Scottish average in Highland, Dundee City, East Ayrshire and Glasgow City.
- The rate of suicide in the most deprived areas in Scotland was 2.9 times as high as in the least deprived areas in Scotland. This is higher than the deprivation gap of 1.9 times for all causes of death.
- Over half of all probable suicide deaths in 2021 were due to hangings, strangulations or suffocations. Around 1 in every 5 probable suicides were due to poisonings.

### How are probable suicides defined?

Deaths with an underlying cause of one of the following ICD-10 categories are counted as probable suicides:

- X60-84 Intentional self-harm
- Y10-34 Events of undetermined intent
- Y87.0 Sequelae of intentional self-harm
- Y87.2 Sequelae of events of undetermined intent

The terms probable suicide and suicide are used interchangeably throughout this report.

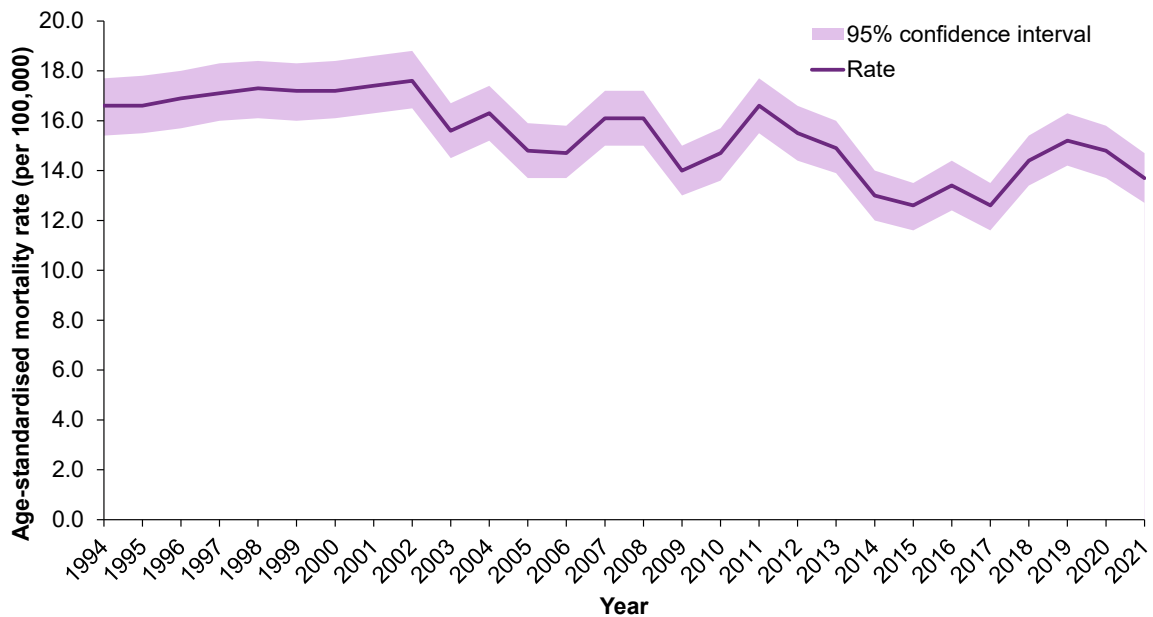
*Note: Sequelae refers to death occurring one year or more after the originating event.*

## 2. Probable suicides in Scotland

In 2021 there were 753 probable suicides in Scotland, a decrease of 52 (6%) on the previous year.

The rate of suicide mortality in Scotland fell to 13.7 per 100,000 people in 2021, but the decrease over the last year was not statistically significant (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Age standardised mortality rate for probable suicide deaths, 1994-2021**



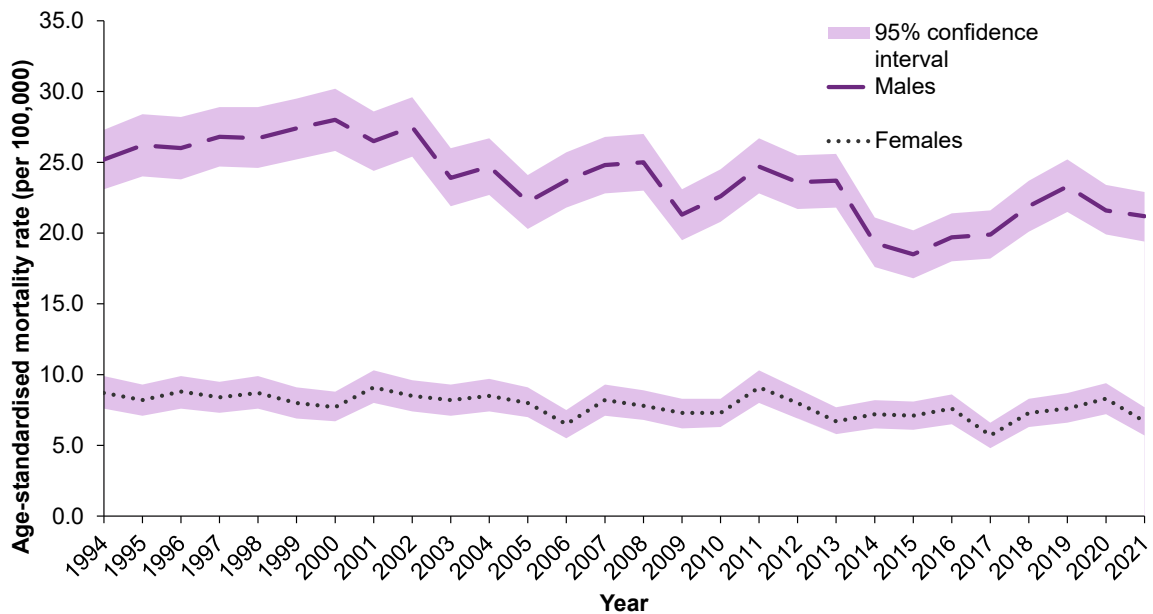
### What are age-standardised rates?

Age-standardised mortality rates are a better measure of mortality than numbers of deaths, as they account for the population size and age structure and provide more reliable comparisons between groups or over time.

More information on the calculation of age-standardised mortality rates is available on our website.

In 2021, most of the decrease in suicides was among females which decreased by 42 to 188. There were 565 male probable suicides (down by 10 on the previous year). The mortality rate for probable suicide in 2021 was 3.2 times as high for males as it was for females.

**Figure 2: Age-standardised mortality rate for probable suicide deaths, by sex, 1994-2021**

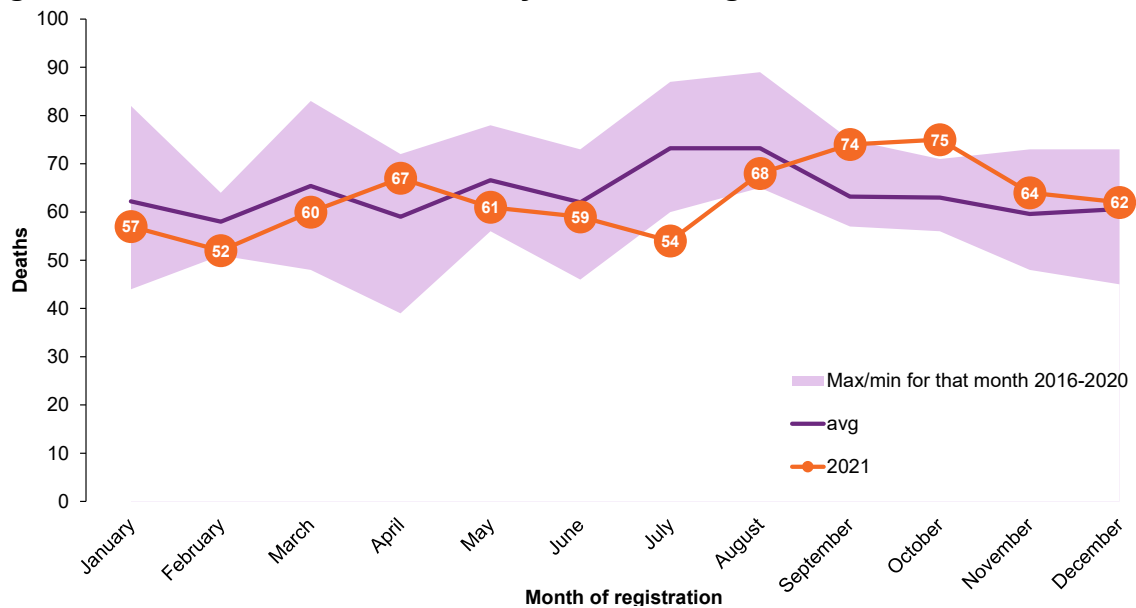


The age-specific rate of suicide in Scotland is highest at age 25-44 and age 45-64. The rate at age 25-44 is at a lower level now than at its peak in 2011. The rate for age 45-64 has been fairly consistent over time. Since 2000 (41.9 years), the average age of death for suicides has generally increased, which is now 46.6 years.

**Figure 3: Probable suicide deaths by age group, 1979-2021**



**Figure 4: Probable suicide deaths by month of registration**

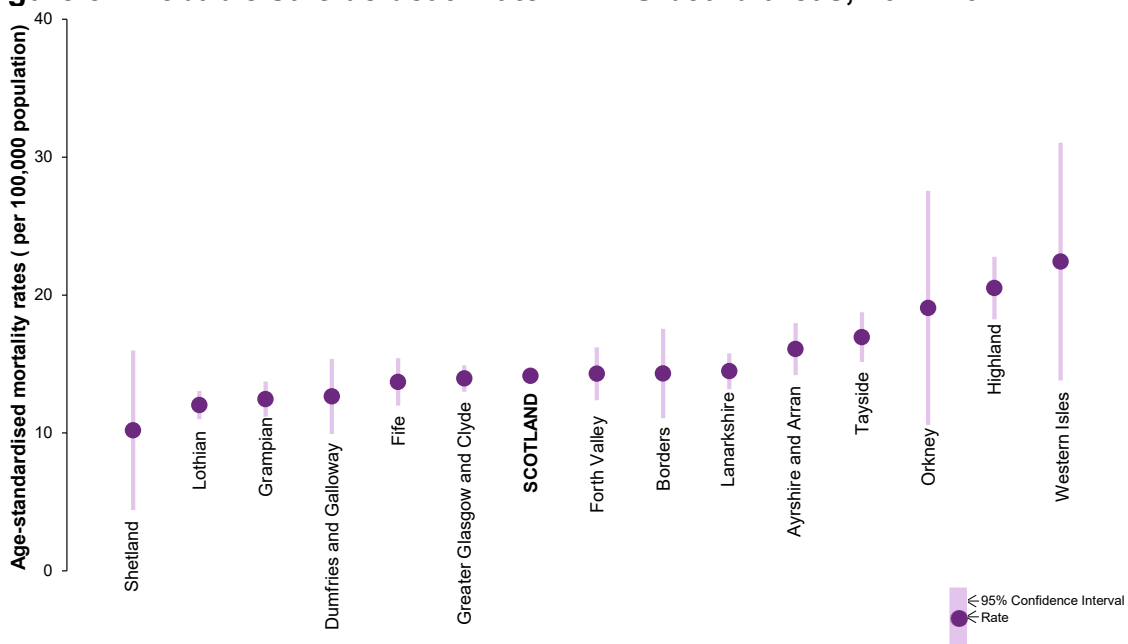


Suicide deaths in Scotland in the first half of 2021 were similar to the average of the last five years until July 2021, which was lower than usual. September and October were slightly higher than average levels in 2021.

### 3. Probable suicide deaths in Scottish areas

The rate for probable suicide mortality was higher than the Scottish average in Highland, Tayside and Ayrshire and Arran at health board level between 2017 and 2021. The rates were also high in Western Isles and in Orkney, but the confidence intervals on these estimates are very wide due to the relatively smaller populations in these areas.

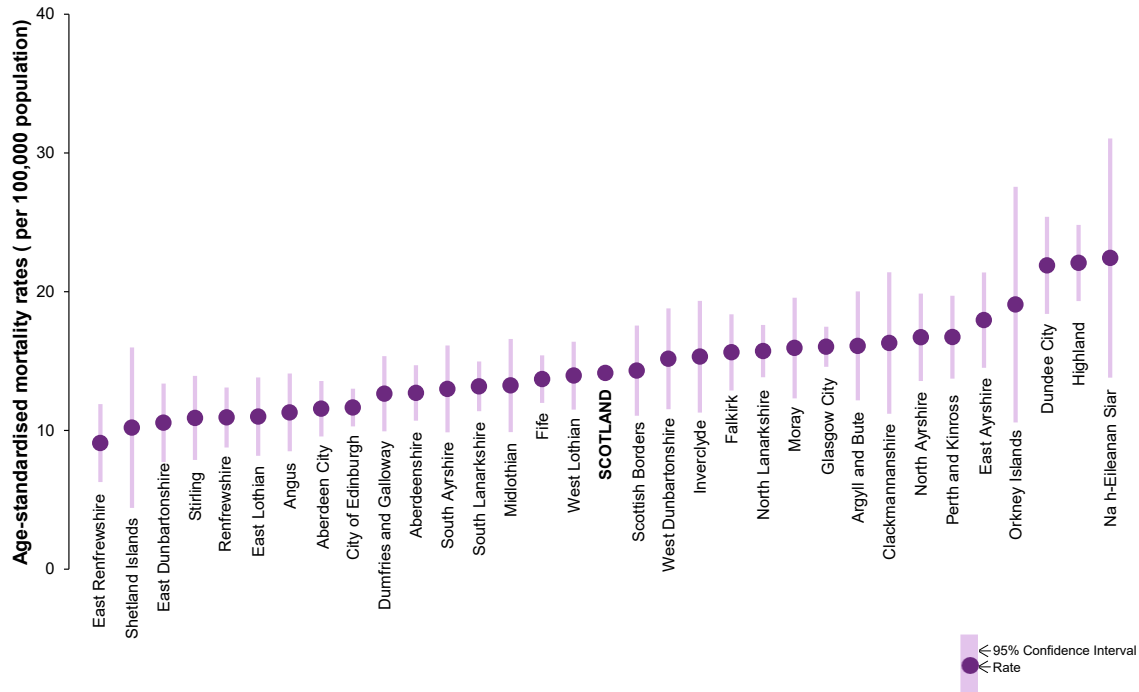
**Figure 5: Probable suicide death rate in NHS board areas, 2017-2021**



At council level, the rate was higher (statistically significant) than the Scottish average in Highland, Dundee City, East Ayrshire and Glasgow City.

Orkney Islands and Na h-Eileanan Siar also had high rates, but the confidence intervals on these estimates are very wide due to the relatively smaller populations in these areas (difference not statistically significant). Both areas have been above the Scottish average going back through a few five year averages, so while it is not a statistically significant difference there is some consistency in the trend.

**Figure 6: Probable suicide death rate in council areas, 2017-2021**



#### 4. Probable suicides by multiple deprivation and urban rural

The rate of suicide in the most deprived areas in Scotland was 2.9 times as high as in the least deprived areas in Scotland. This compares to a difference of 1.9 times for all causes of death. This difference in mortality rate by deprivation has been fairly stable since 2001.

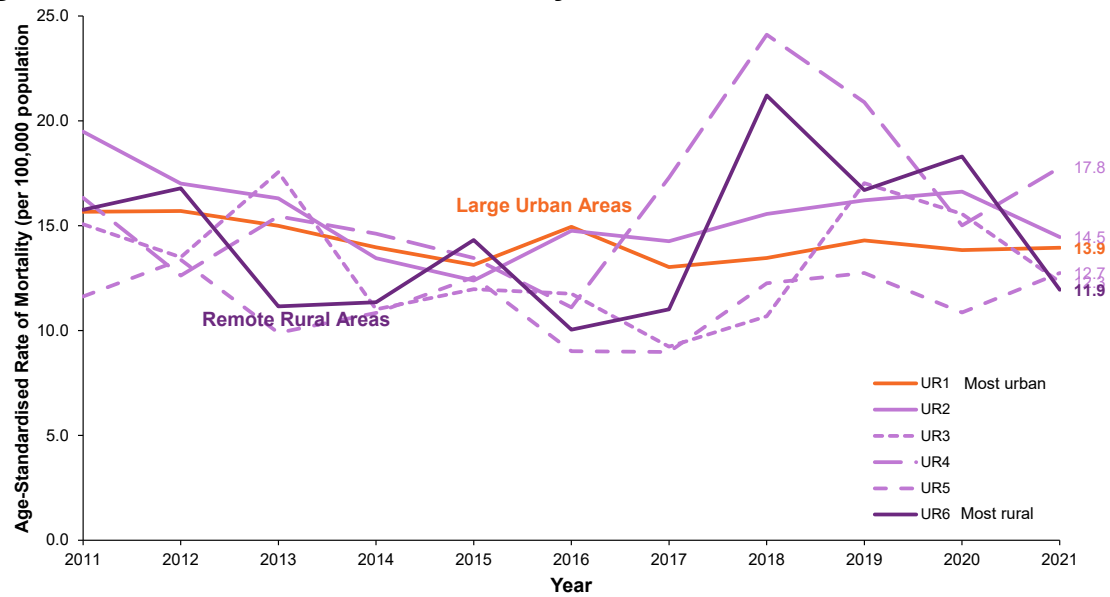
Looking at the rates for urban and rural areas produces a less clear pattern. There does not appear to be a strong relationship between urban or rural locations and increased suicide mortality rates.



**Figure 7: Probable suicide death rate in SIMD quintiles**



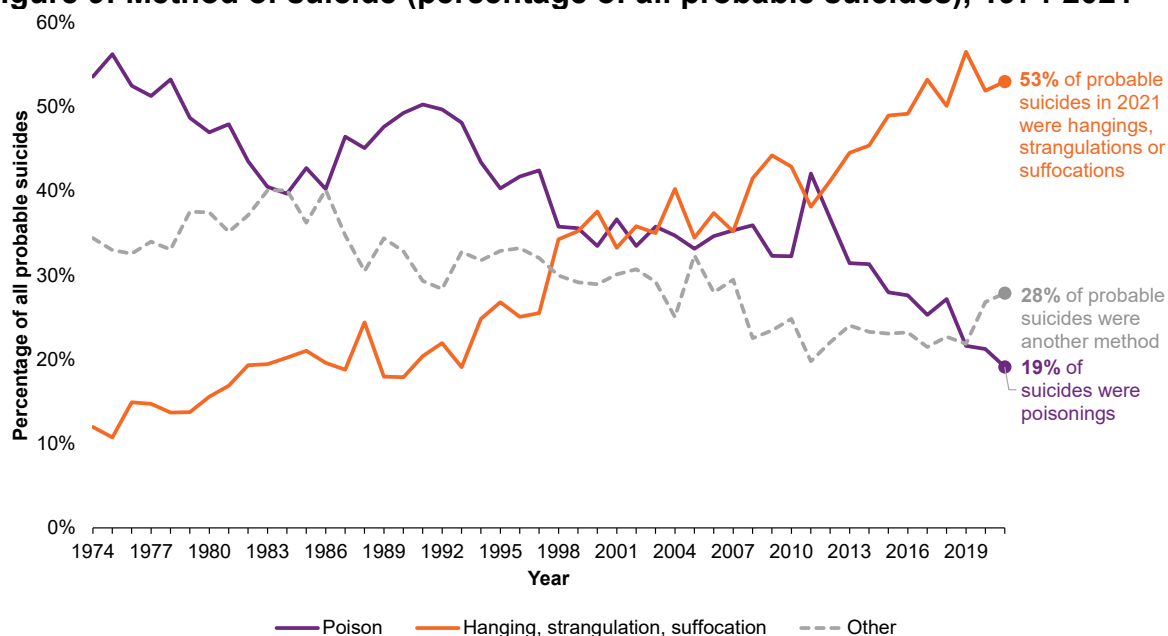
**Figure 8: Probable suicide death rate by urban rural classification**



## 5. Method of suicide

Over half of all probable suicide deaths in 2021 were due to hangings, strangulations or suffocations. Around 1 in every 5 suicides were due to poisonings. This trend has changed over time. Poisoning was the most common cause of suicide between 1974 and the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Figure 9: Method of suicide (percentage of all probable suicides), 1974-2021**



## 6. Suicides in the UK

Scotland had the highest rate of suicide of all countries in the UK in 2020 (14.8 deaths per 100,000), followed by Northern Ireland (13.3), Wales (10.3) and England (10.0). Comparable statistics for the rest of the UK for 2021 are yet to be released.

Probable suicide death statistics in the rest of the UK are produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). Links to the latest versions of these are available below.

- [Suicide deaths: England and Wales \(ONS\)](#)
- [Suicide deaths: Northern Ireland \(NISRA\)](#)

## 7. Other information

If you are a journalist 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.

## 8. 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

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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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