

Article

Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2020

Analyses of information held within the Home Office Homicide Index, which contains detailed record-level information about each homicide recorded by police in England and Wales.



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Release date:
25 February 2021

Next release:
To be announced

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1 . Main points

- There were 695 victims of homicide in the year ending March 2020, 47 more (7%) than the previous year; this figure includes the Grays lorry incident with 39 homicide victims – if this incident is excluded, homicide showed a 1% increase overall.
- The homicide rate was 11.7 per million population, with the rate for males (17 per million population) almost three times that for females (6 per million population); this is a higher difference than previous years because of a 20% increase in the number of male victims, from 422 to 506, and a 16% decrease in the number of female victims, from 225 to 188.
- The homicide rate over the three-year period to year ending March 2020 was 49.5 per million population for the Black ethnic group, approximately five times higher than for the White ethnic group (9.4 per million population).
- Just under two-thirds (443 or 64%) of all homicide victims in the year ending March 2020 were from the White ethnic group. The number of Black victims in the last year, at 105, was the highest seen since the year ending March 2002 (107 victims).
- There were 142 homicide victims aged 16- to 24-years-old, an increase of 32 on the previous year and a return to the relatively high levels seen in the year ending March 2018 (147).
- The most common method of killing continued to be by a sharp instrument, with 275 homicides by this method, an increase of 15 offences (up 6%) compared with the previous year and the second highest annual figure since 1946.

2 . Trends in homicide

There were 695 victims of homicide in the year ending March 2020, 47 more (7%) than the previous year ([Appendix Table 1](#)). Of these, 39 were victims of human trafficking whose bodies were found in a lorry in Grays, Essex, in October 2019. Excluding this single incident, the number of homicides increased by 8 (1%).

To put the raw numbers in context, incidence rates show the volume of offences as a proportion of the resident population. The incidence rate for homicide remains very low, with 11.7 (or 11.0 excluding the Essex lorry deaths) homicides recorded per million population during the year ending March 2020, a similar rate to the previous three years.

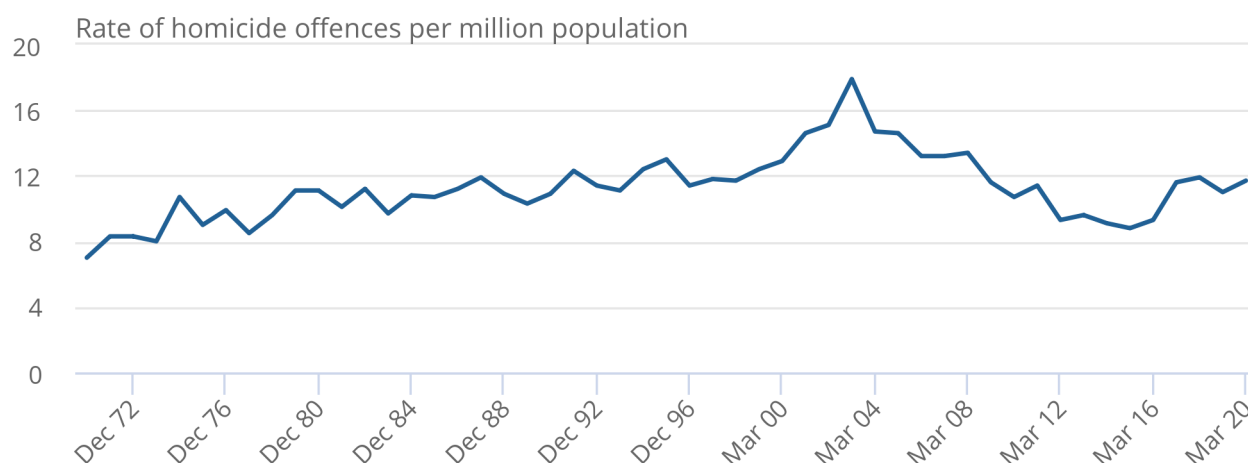
The number of homicides increased from around 300 per year in the early 1960s to consistently over 700 in the early years of this century. This was at a faster rate than population growth over the same period, with the rate of homicide increasing from around 6 per million population in the early 1960s to 15.1 by the year ending March 2002. However, from the peak in the year ending March 2002¹, the volume of homicides generally decreased while the population of England and Wales continued to grow. This led to a fall in the homicide rate to a low point of 8.8 per million population in the year ending March 2015. The rate then increased until the year ending March 2018 (11.9) before a fall in the following year (11.0). The latest year shows an increase and returns the rate to a similar level seen in the year ending March 2017 (Figure 1). However, if the Essex lorry deaths are excluded the rate is the same as last year (11.0).

Figure 1: The homicide rate has increased, following a decrease the previous year

Homicide rate, England and Wales, year ending December 1970 to year ending March 2020

Figure 1: The homicide rate has increased, following a decrease the previous year

Homicide rate, England and Wales, year ending December 1970 to year ending March 2020



Source: Home Office – Homicide Index

Notes:

1. Year ending December 1987 includes 15 victims of Michael Ryan.
2. Year ending March 2001 includes 58 Chinese nationals who suffocated in a lorry en route into the UK.
3. Year ending March 2003 includes 173 victims of Dr Harold Shipman.
4. Year ending March 2004 includes 20 cockle pickers who drowned in Morecambe Bay.
5. Year ending March 2006 includes 52 victims of the 7 July London bombings.
6. Year ending March 2011 includes 12 victims of Derrick Bird.
7. Year ending March 2017 includes 96 victims of Hillsborough and four victims of the Westminster Bridge attack.
8. Year ending March 2018 includes 31 victims of the terrorist attacks that involved multiple victims, including the Manchester Arena bombing, and the London Bridge attack. It also includes 11 victims from the Shoreham air crash.
9. Year ending March 2020 includes 39 victims of human trafficking whose bodies were found in a lorry in Grays, Essex.

In the 1960s, the proportion of homicide victims was fairly evenly split between males and females but have since showed different trends. The number of female victims has tended to fluctuate between 180 and 250 a year² from the 1960s. In contrast, the number of male victims increased, reaching an average of around 545 a year between year ending March 2001 and year ending March 2005 (Figure 3). After this, there was a fall in the number of male victims, which drove the downward trend in homicide during this time. In the year ending March 2015, there were 319 male victims of homicide, the lowest number in a quarter of a century.

The increase in homicide between the year ending March 2015 and year ending March 2018 reflected a 50% rise in the number of male victims, which increased from 319 in the year ending March 2015 to 479 in the year ending March 2018. Over the same period the number of female victims increased from 184 to 219 (19% increase).

In the latest year, there has been a 20% increase in the number of male victims (422 to 506). Conversely, the number of female victims fell by 16% (from 225 to 188), the first decrease since year ending March 2016³. More information is given in [Section 3: Groups of people most likely to be victims of homicide](#).

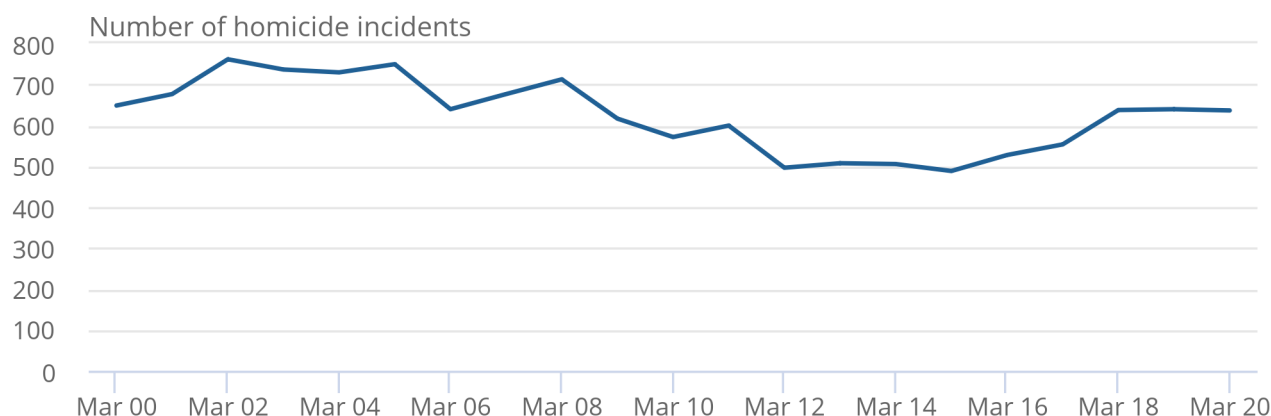
Compared with other offences, homicides are relatively low-volume, and year-on-year variations need to be interpreted with some caution. This is partly because trends can be affected by single incidents involving multiple victims (such as the Grays lorry incident in 2019 and the Manchester Arena incident in 2017). Figure 2 shows that in the year ending March 2020, there were 636 separate homicide incidents⁴, a similar number to the previous two years ([Appendix Table 2](#)).

Figure 2: The number of homicide incidents has been consistent for the past three years

Number of homicide incidents, England and Wales, year ending March 2000 to year ending March 2020

Figure 2: The number of homicide incidents has been consistent for the past three years

Number of homicide incidents, England and Wales, year ending March 2000 to year ending March 2020



Source: Home Office - Homicide Index

The number of incidents recorded in the year ending March 2020 was not statistically significantly⁵ different compared with the previous year but remains significantly higher compared with the year ending March 2017 ([Appendix Table 3](#)). The number of separate homicide incidents in the year ending March 2020 (636) was similar to the previous two years.

Notes for: Trends in homicide

1. Excluding the year ending March 2003, when 173 victims of Harold Shipman were recorded following the Dame Janet Smith Inquiry.
2. There are occasional years where the number of female victims has been higher than 250.
3. From 184 in year ending March 2015 to 172 in year ending March 2016 (negative 7%).
4. A homicide incident can involve one or more victims but is only counted as one incident (Homicide Index statistics are based on number of victims). Homicide incident trend data therefore are not affected by mass fatality homicides such as terrorist attacks.
5. Further information on the methodology can be found in Section 11 of the Homicide chapter of [Focus on violent crime and sexual offences, England and Wales: year ending March 2016](#).

3 . Groups of people most likely to be victims of homicide

Demographic factors discussed in this section are not necessarily independently related to homicide and the findings only report on differences between estimates. Although sex, age and ethnicity are important factors in homicide, there are likely to be many other factors that cannot be examined using the Homicide Index data. For example, socioeconomic indicators at the individual and neighbourhood level are also likely to be related to being a victim of homicide (Leyland and Dundas, 2009).

Sex

As in previous years, the majority of homicide victims in the year ending March 2020 were male. Compared with the previous 10 years (when there was an average of 399 male victims per year), there was a relatively high prevalence in the latest year (506 male victims).

Almost three-quarters of all victims were male (73%) and just over a quarter were female (27%).

The number of female victims in the last year (188) has returned to the levels seen between year ending March 2012 and year ending March 2017, following the two previous years when the number of these victims were higher. The latest figure is similar to the average of the previous 10 years (189 female victims per year).

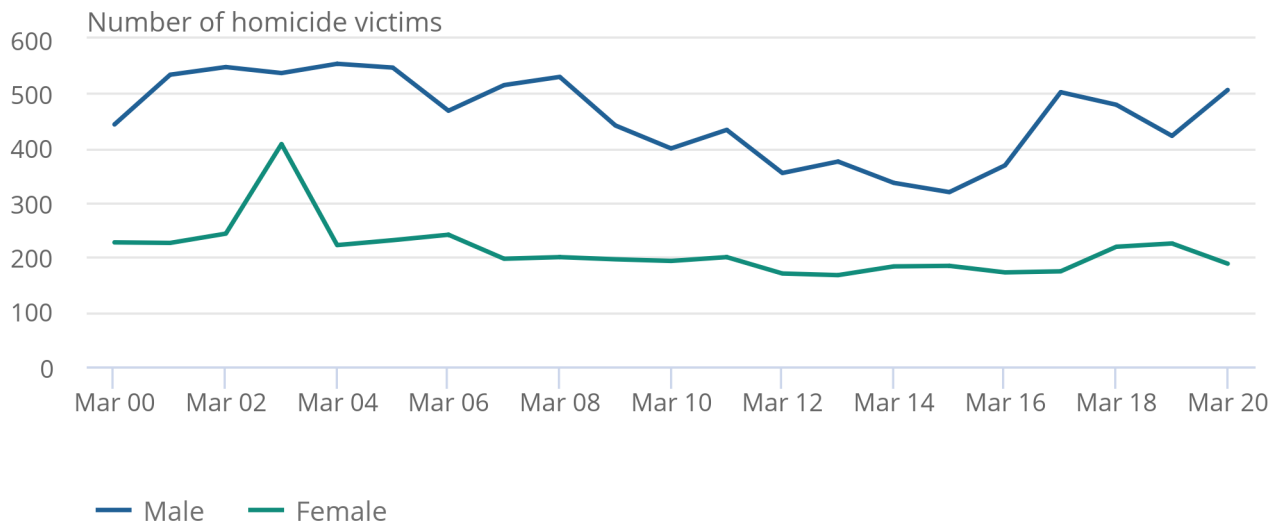
There is more information on homicide trends by sex in [Section 2: Trends in homicide](#).

Figure 3: The number of male homicide victims has increased in the latest year while the number of female victims has decreased

Number of homicide victims, England and Wales, year ending March 2000 to year ending March 2020

Figure 3: The number of male homicide victims has increased in the latest year while the number of female victims has decreased

Number of homicide victims, England and Wales, year ending March 2000 to year ending March 2020



Source: Home Office – Homicide Index

Notes:

1. Year ending March 2003 includes 43 male and 130 female victims of Dr Harold Shipman.
2. Year ending March 2017 includes 89 male and seven female victims of Hillsborough.
3. Year ending March 2017 includes one female and three male victims of the Westminster Bridge attack.
4. Year ending March 2018 includes 21 female, 10 male victims of terrorist attacks that involved multiple victims and 11 male victims of Shoreham air crash.
5. Year ending March 2020 includes 39 human trafficking victims who were found dead in a lorry in Essex.

The latest annual homicide rate for males (17 per million population) was almost three times that for females (6 per million population); this was a higher difference than previous years when the homicide rate was around twice that for females ([Appendix Table 4](#)). However, it should be noted that the nature of homicides differs between men and women, as discussed in [Section 4: The relationship between victims and suspects](#).

Age

The most common age group for victims of homicides recorded in the year ending March 2020 was 16- to 24-year-olds (142 victims) (Figure 4). This was followed by:

- 25- to 34-year-olds (138 victims)
- 35- to 44-year-olds (133 victims)
- 45- to 54-year-olds (92 victims)

As in previous years, children under the age of 1 year had the highest rate of homicide (28 per million population). This was followed by those aged 16 to 24 years (23 per million population) and 35 to 44 years (18 per million population).

The overall increase in homicide victims in the latest year was driven by an increase in victims aged 16 to 24 years, which rose from 110 to 142 (a 29% increase) ([Appendix Table 4](#)). This followed a large fall in this age group the previous year and the latest figures are similar to that seen two years ago (147 in year ending March 2018). Prior to that, the number of victims in this age group rose rapidly from between the year ending March 2016 to year ending March 2018 (from 86 to 147).

Those aged 35 to 44 years also saw an increase of 25% (from 106 to 133 victims). This followed a fall in this age group the previous year. The latest figures continue the upward trend seen previously in this age group since year ending March 2015.

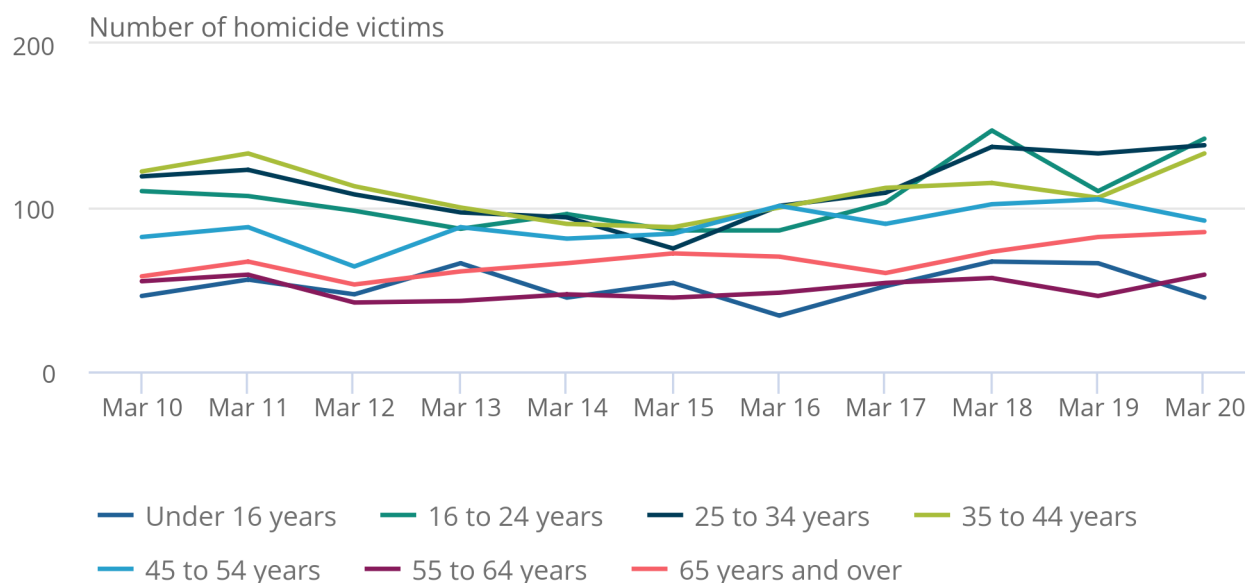
The largest decrease in the latest year was in the number of victims aged under 16 years, down from 66 to 45 (a 32% decrease). This was largely driven by a decrease in victims aged under 1 year, which fell from 30 to 18 victims. Trends for this age group tend to fluctuate from one year to the next because of the relatively low numbers (Figure 4).

Figure 4: There have been a relatively high number of victims aged 16 to 24 years in two of the last three years

Number of homicide victims, England and Wales, year ending March 2010 to year ending March 2020 (excluding Hillsborough victims)

Figure 4: There have been a relatively high number of victims aged 16 to 24 years in two of the last three years

Number of homicide victims, England and Wales, year ending March 2010 to year ending March 2020 (excluding Hillsborough victims)



Source: Home Office – Homicide Index

Notes:

1. Data for the year ending March 2017 do not match other published tables as Hillsborough victims are excluded from this analysis.

Ethnicity

Just under two-thirds (443 or 64%) of all homicide victims in the year ending March 2020 were from the White ethnic group¹. This was a decrease of 14 victims (from 457) compared with the year ending March 2019.

There were 105 victims identified in the Black ethnic group in the last year, accounting for 15% of all victims. This was an increase of nine homicides compared with the previous year and the highest number of Black victims since the year ending 2002 (107). The number of Black victims has been increasing steadily since the year ending March 2015.

Although the majority of homicide victims were White, accounting for different population sizes shows that Black people had higher rates of victimisation. In the three years to year ending March 2020², average rates per million population³ were around five times higher for Black victims than White victims and almost four times higher than victims of other ethnicities. The other ethnicities category includes Asian and Mixed or multiple ethnicities, to enable population statistics to match the categories in the Homicide Index. As stated previously, demographic factors are not necessarily independently related to homicide. Differences in homicide rates by ethnicity are likely to be influenced by variations in demographic and socioeconomic indicators across ethnic groups. These factors have not been taken into account in these figures.

Homicide rates across all ethnic groups have increased compared with the three-year period to year ending March 2014. The homicide rate for Black victims has increased by 68% compared with the three-year period to year ending March 2014 (from 29.5 to 49.5 per million population) ([Appendix Table 6](#)).

There were 56 (8%) victims in the Asian (Indian sub-continent) ethnic group and 64 (9%) in the Other group (which includes the 39 victims of the Essex lorry deaths). Excluding the Essex lorry deaths, these proportions have remained relatively stable over the last decade ([Appendix Table 5](#)).

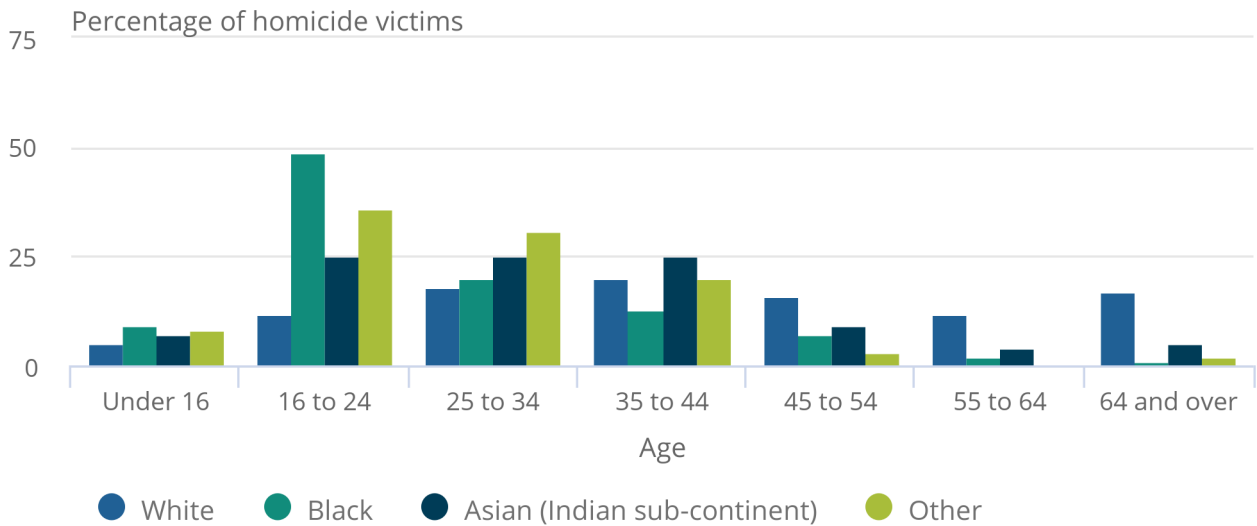
There were clear differences in the age-profile between different ethnic groups. Around half (49%) of Black victims were in the 16 to 24 years age group, whereas this was a much lower proportion for Asian (25%) and White victims (12%). Three-quarters (75%) of Asian victims were aged between 16 and 44 years, while White victims were the most evenly spread across different age groups (Figure 5). This may partly reflect the different age distributions of ethnic groups in the population.

Figure 5: Almost half of Black homicide victims were aged between 16 and 24 years old

Percentage of homicide victims, by age and ethnicity, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 5: Almost half of Black homicide victims were aged between 16 and 24 years old

Percentage of homicide victims, by age and ethnicity, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Home Office – Homicide Index

Notes:

1. Officer identified classification.

Notes for: Groups of people most likely to be victims of homicide

1. Officer identified ethnicity classification.
2. Three-year averages are used to calculate homicide rates by ethnicity because of the low numbers of victims in some of the groups.
3. Based on [mid-2016 population estimates](#).

4 . The relationship between victims and suspects

As in previous years, there were important differences between adult and child victims in their relationship with suspects. For that reason, our analysis examines patterns separately.

Adult victims

There were large differences in the profile of victim-suspect relationships between male and female victims. In the year ending March 2020, female victims were more commonly killed by a partner or ex-partner or a family member, while for males the suspected killer was more commonly a friend or acquaintance, stranger or other known person.

Almost half (46%) of adult female homicide victims were killed in a domestic homicide¹ (81). These homicides decreased by 24 compared with the previous year. The 81 in the latest year was the lowest figure since relationship data were collected on the Homicide Index in 1977. There has been a general downward trend in the number of domestic homicides over the last 10 years. Males were much less likely to be the victim of a domestic homicide, with only 7% (33) of male homicides being domestic in the latest year. This was an increase of four homicides compared with the previous year.

In just over a third of homicides of a female victim aged 16 years or over, the suspect was their partner or ex-partner (35%, 61 homicides). This was a decrease of 26 homicides compared with the previous year and the 61 homicides was the lowest figure since relationship data were collected on the Homicide Index in 1977. Over the last 10 years, there was an average of 80 female victims a year killed by a partner or ex-partner. In contrast, only 2% of male victims aged 16 years and over were killed by a partner or ex-partner (nine homicides, [Appendix Table 12](#), Figure 6).

The suspect in a homicide was a stranger for a third of male victims (33%, 154 victims). This apparently large increase (an 80% increase compared with the previous year when there were 85 victims) was driven by the 30 male victims of the Essex lorry deaths. Excluding this incident, the latest year saw a return to the levels seen in year ending March 2018 ([Appendix Table 12](#)). The suspect was less likely to be a stranger when the victim was female (13%, 23 victims).

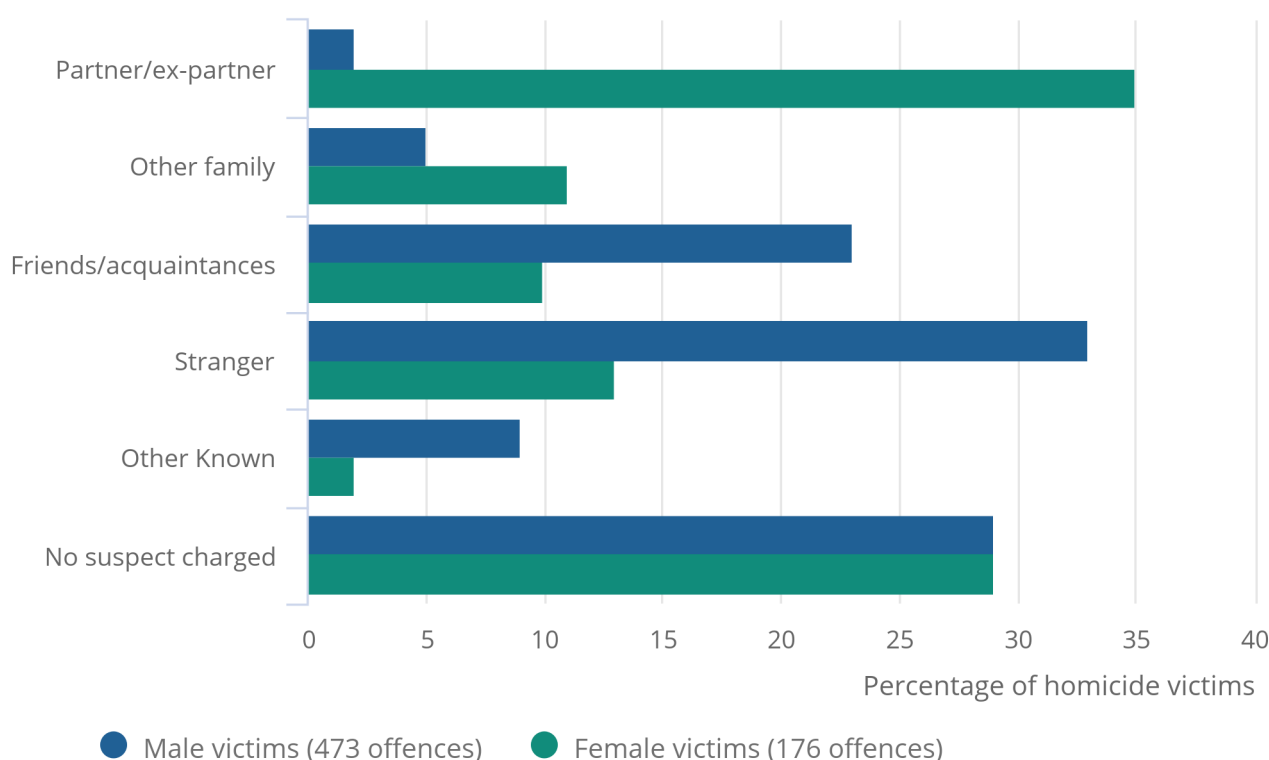
In 29% of female homicides recorded in the year ending March 2020, no suspect had been charged for the offence at the time of analysis (51 victims). The percentage of male victims (29%) with no suspect charged was the same (137 victims). These numbers are likely to decrease as the police continue their investigations.

Figure 6: For the majority of female homicide victims aged 16 years and over, the suspect was their partner or ex-partner

Relationship of victims aged 16 years and over to principal suspect, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 6: For the majority of female homicide victims aged 16 years and over, the suspect was their partner or ex-partner

Relationship of victims aged 16 years and over to principal suspect, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Home Office – Homicide Index

Notes:

1. Partner or ex-partner includes adulterous relationship, boyfriend or girlfriend, common-law spouse or cohabiting partner, ex-spouse, ex-common-law spouse or ex-cohabiting partner, ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend, spouse (including civil partner).

Child victims

There were 45 victims of homicide aged under 16 years in the year ending March 2020, the lowest number for four years (34 in the year ending March 2016). As in previous years, for just over a quarter of child victims the suspect was a parent or step-parent (27%, 12 offences). However, as at 15 December 2020, there were 20 victims aged under 16 years (44%) for whom no suspect² had been charged. This number is likely to fall as police investigations continue. For example, for the year ending March 2019, 53% of victims aged under 16 years had no suspect charged as at 5 December 2019; this has now fallen to 33% and the proportion where the suspect was a parent or step-parent has increased from 31% to 36% (as at 15 December 2020).

It is uncommon for under-16-year-olds to be killed by a stranger, with seven such offences in the last year, similar to previous years.

There is more information on suspect characteristics in [Section 8: Suspects in homicide cases](#).

Notes for: The relationship between victims and suspects

1. A domestic homicide is defined as an offence of murder or manslaughter where the relationship between a victim aged 16 years and over and the suspect charged falls into one of the following categories: spouse, common-law spouse, cohabiting partner, boyfriend or girlfriend, ex-spouse, ex-cohabiting partner or ex-boyfriend or girlfriend, adulterous relationship, son or daughter (including step and adopted relationships), parent (including step and adopted relationships), brother or sister, other relatives.
2. Includes homicide offences where all suspects have been acquitted.

5 . The most common methods of killing

Sharp instrument (including knives)

As in previous years, the most common method of killing, for both male and female victims, was by a sharp instrument (including knives) (40%). Since the year ending March 2007, the proportion of homicide offences committed by a sharp instrument has fluctuated between 35% and 40%¹.

There were 275 homicides committed using a knife or other sharp instrument recorded in the year ending March 2020, an increase of 6% compared with the previous year ([Appendix Table 7](#)). This was the second highest annual total seen since the Homicide Index began in 1946, and six fewer than the peak in year ending March 2018.

The increase was because of a 12% rise in the number of male victims, which rose from 199 to 223. The number of female victims killed by this method in this way fell by 10 (16%). The largest increase was seen for male victims aged 18 to 24 years, increasing from 57 to 68 homicides, a similar number to that seen in year ending March 2018 (70 victims) ([Appendix Table 8](#)).

The latest figures show just over half of sharp instrument homicide victims were identified as White (54%, 149 homicides), a decrease of 11 compared with the previous year. Just over a quarter (27%; 75 victims) were identified as Black, an increase of 15 compared with the previous year and the highest annual total since year ending March 1997 (when ethnicity started to be recorded on a consistent basis on the Homicide Index). Of these 75 Black homicide victims, 43 were aged 16 to 24 years ([Appendix Table 9](#)).

There is more information on the characteristics of victims in [Section 3: Groups of people most likely to be victims of homicide](#).

Other methods of killing

The second most common method of killing was by “kicking or hitting”, accounting for 115 homicides (17% of the total). As in previous years, the majority (83%) of victims killed in this way were male.

Almost one in six (16%) female victims were killed by “strangulation, asphyxiation” (31 victims). As in previous years, this was the second most common method for this group of victims. In contrast, a much smaller proportion (9%) of male victims were killed in this way.

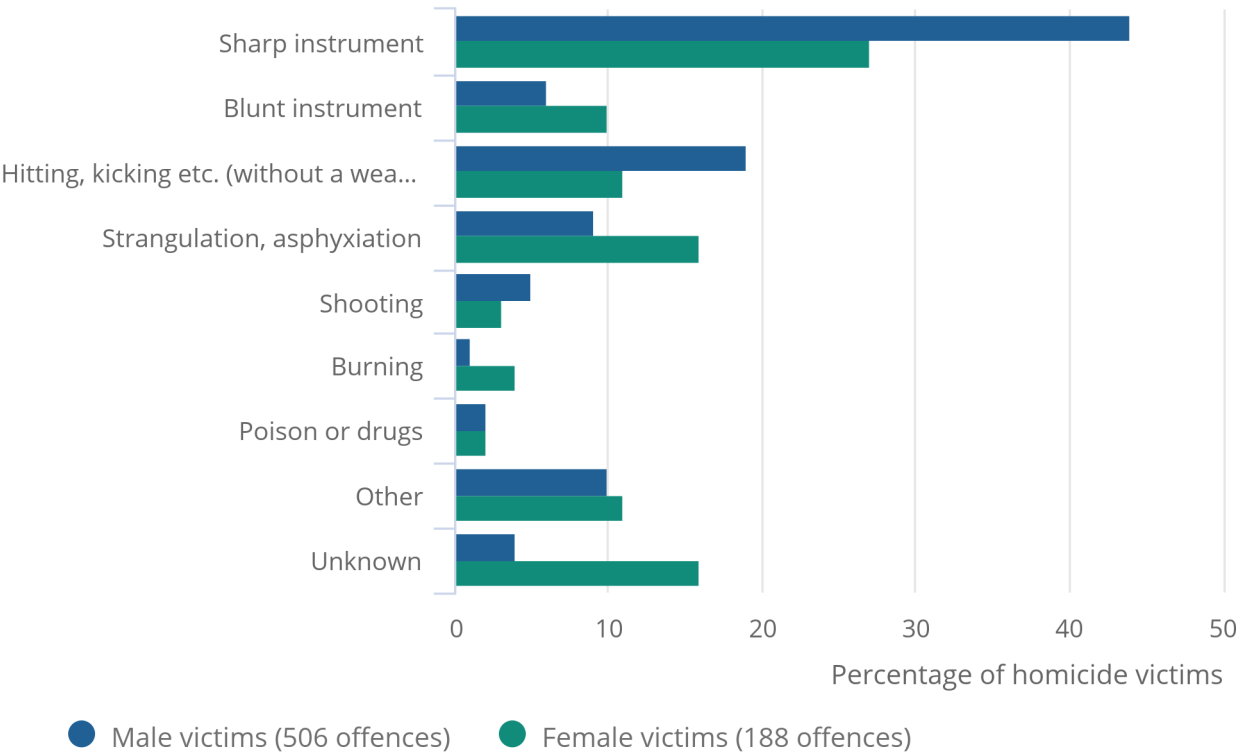
There were 30 homicide victims killed by shooting in the year ending March 2020 (4% of all homicides), two fewer than the previous year. The average number of homicide offences committed by shooting in the last five years was 29 compared with 36 for the previous five-year period. The proportion of homicide offences committed by shooting has fluctuated between 4% and 5% over the last five years. In the five years prior to this, the proportion fluctuated between 4% and 10%. The number of these offences is 27% lower than a decade ago (41 in the year ending March 2010).

Figure 7: Use of a sharp instrument was the most common method of killing in homicide offences

Percentage of recorded homicides, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 7: Use of a sharp instrument was the most common method of killing in homicide offences

Percentage of recorded homicides, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Home Office – Homicide Index

More detailed information on offences involving a firearm can be found in the [Offences involving the use of firearms article](#) and [Appendix Tables](#). More recent headline figures on offences involving firearms and those involving knives can also be found as part of the quarterly [Crime in England and Wales bulletin](#).

Notes: The most common methods of killing

1. The proportion was 37% in the year ending March 2017 if the Hillsborough manslaughter are excluded.

6 . Circumstances and location of homicides

Circumstances of homicide

In the year ending March 2020, around a half (49%, 341 offences) of all homicide cases resulted from a quarrel, a revenge attack or a loss of temper. This was a similar proportion compared with previous years. As might be expected, this proportion was higher where the principal suspect was known to the victim (60%), compared with when the suspect was unknown to the victim (41%).

Furtherance of theft or gain accounted for 7% of homicides (46 offences), and 4% (30 offences) occurred during irrational acts.

As at 15 December 2020, the apparent circumstances were not known for 18% of homicides (127 offences) recorded in the year ending March 2020. This figure was similar to the previous year and is likely to decrease as the police carry out further investigations.

Location of homicides

Homicides were mostly likely to take place in or around a house or dwelling or residential home. The number of victims killed in this setting has been largely consistent over the past ten years. Conversely the number of victims killed in a street, path or alleyway has been increasing since year ending March 2015, apart from a decrease last year. Excluding the Essex lorry deaths, the latest year shows an increase of almost a quarter (24%), rising to levels seen in year ending March 2018 ([Appendix Table 16](#)).

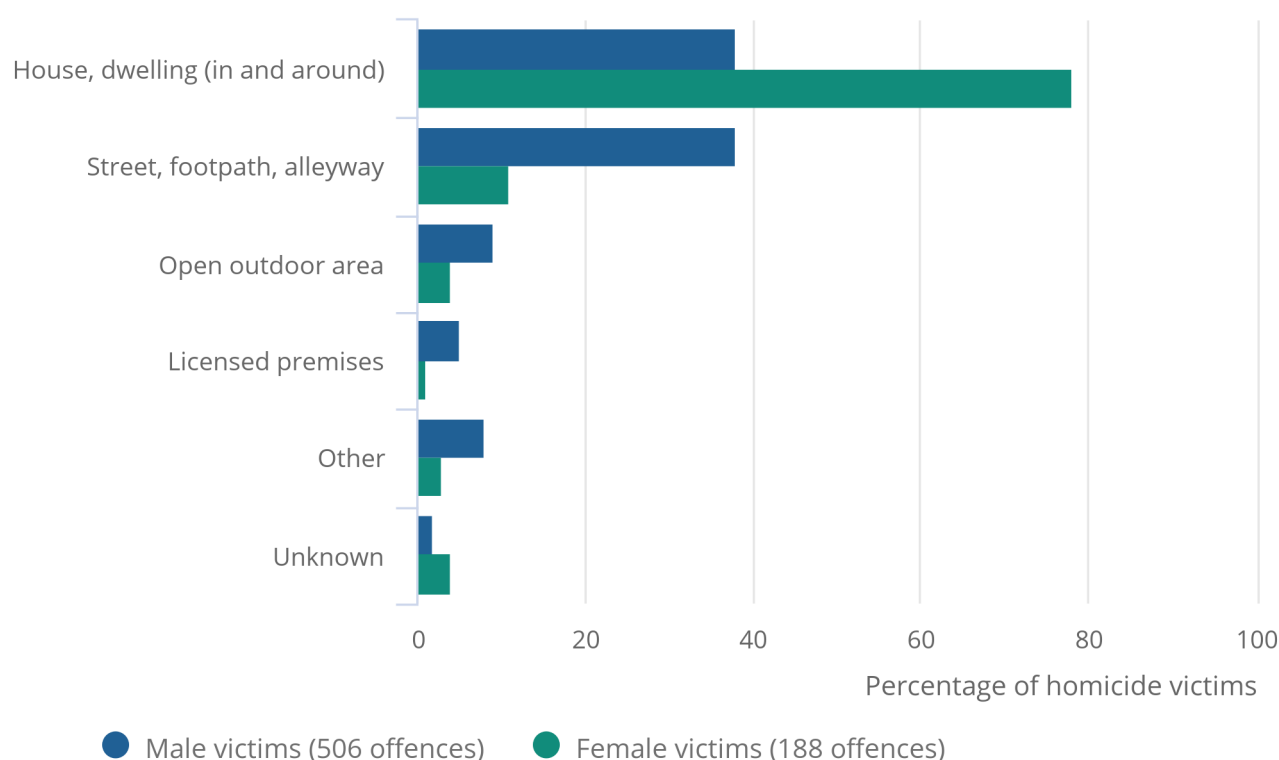
Female victims were most likely to be killed in or around a house or dwelling or residential home (78%, 146 offences for year ending March 2020). This compared with 38% of male homicides (193 offences). Almost four in ten (38%) male homicides took place in a street, path or alleyway (194 offences) compared with only 11% of female homicides (20 offences). These patterns reflect differing victim-suspect relationships and the circumstances of the homicide ([Appendix Table 16](#)).

Figure 8: Female homicide victims were most likely to be killed in or around a house or dwelling and males victims in public places

Percentage of recorded homicides, England and Wales, year ending March 2020

Figure 8: Female homicide victims were most likely to be killed in or around a house or dwelling and males victims in public places

Percentage of recorded homicides, England and Wales, year ending March 2020



Source: Home Office – Homicide Index

Notes:

1. "House, dwelling (in and around)" includes residential homes.
2. "Other" includes all other locations including other public places.

7 . Drug- and alcohol-related homicides

The number of drug- or alcohol-related¹ homicides fluctuates from year to year, so the analysis and commentary in this section focuses on data combined from the last three years (the year ending March 2018 to the year ending March 2020). The section is based on all victims and suspects charged from incidents recorded in that period.

According to the Homicide Index, in the last three years a third (33%) of homicide victims were under the influence of alcohol and/or illicit drugs² at the time of the homicide:

- 19% had been drinking alcohol
- 7% had been taking an illicit drug
- 7% were under the influence of both.

The proportion under the influence of alcohol and/or illicit drugs was higher among male victims (38%) than female victims (21%), similar to the analysis in previous years ([Appendix Table 17](#)).

The figures for suspects were similar to that for victims. Almost a third (31%) of homicide suspects were recorded by the police to have been under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs at the time of the homicide:

- 16% had been drinking alcohol
- 4% had been taking an illicit drug
- 10% were under the influence of both ([Appendix Table 17](#))

Almost a third (30%) of homicide victims were known to be drug users, and 15% were known to be drug dealers. These proportions were even higher among suspects: 43% were known to be drug users and around a quarter (26%) were known to be drug dealers. These proportions were higher among male than female suspects. In a small proportion of cases, the police identified the suspects' motive as "obtaining drugs" (5%) or "stealing drug proceeds" (6%). ([Appendix Table 18](#))

The proportion of homicides that have involved drug users or dealers, or have been related to drugs in any way, have increased over the last decade, from 39% in the year ending March 2010 to 48% in the year ending March 2020. In the last year, there were 337 homicides that were thought to involve drug users or dealers or were in some way drug-related, 26 more than the previous year (311) ([Appendix Table 19](#)).

Notes for: Drug- and alcohol-related homicides

1. Information on drug and alcohol use is recorded by the police from toxicology reports, suspect and witness statements.
2. Illicit drugs include all controlled drugs (class A to C) under Schedule 2 of the [Misuse of Drugs Act 1971](#) (and subsequent amendments).

8 . Suspects in homicide cases

Homicide cases are often complex and can take time to reach an outcome in court. The percentage of homicides recorded in most recent years that have concluded in court is likely to increase when the next figures from the Homicide Index are published, while those without suspects or with court proceedings pending is expected to decrease.

Data on court outcomes in the latest year may also have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. On the 23 March 2020, jury trials were suspended in response to the COVID-19 pandemic¹ and there was a phased reintroduction of jury trials during May 2020.

More than one suspect may be charged per homicide victim and in some cases no suspect is charged (Table 1). Therefore, the number of suspects charged is not the same as the number of offences. Table 1 shows that the number of homicides where no suspect has been charged falls over time as the police have had longer to conclude investigations.

Table 1: Number of suspects for initially recorded homicide victims, year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020

	April 2017 to March 2018	April 2018 to March 2019	April 2019 to March 2020	April 2017 to March 2018	April 2018 to March 2019	April 2019 to March 2020
	Number			Percentage		
No suspects charged	143	172	201	20	26	29
One	387	357	376	54	54	53
Two	77	57	59	11	9	8
Three or more	57	45	56	8	7	8
Suspects acquitted	50	29	11	7	4	2
All initially recorded homicides	714	660	703			

Source: Home Office - Homicide Index

Notes

1. As at 15 December 2020; figures are subject to revision as cases are dealt with by the police and by the courts or as further information becomes available.
2. Home Office statisticians and Police Forces have undertaken a review of all historical homicide data to update court outcomes and suspect data, this means totals shown in this table will not match previously published figures.

Investigative and court outcomes

In total, there were 681 suspects charged as at 15 December 2020 relating to the 703 homicides initially recorded in the year ending March 2020 ([Appendix Table 23](#)).

Court proceedings were pending for 439 suspects (64% of all suspects). For the past five years this proportion has been around 50% (as at the time of publication). This increase may have been in part due to the suspension of jury trials from 23 March to May because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Court proceedings had concluded for 218 suspects (32% of all suspects) and 24 suspects had committed suicide or died (4% of all suspects).

In the three years from the year ending March 2018 to the year ending March 2020, 79% of suspects indicted for homicide, where we have information on a court outcome, were found guilty of homicide, 14% were acquitted, and 4% were convicted of a lesser offence ([Appendix Table 24](#)).

The case outcomes for suspects of homicides recorded in the year ending March 2020 ([Appendix Table 24](#)) will change as cases progress through the criminal justice system and more information becomes available.

Age, sex and ethnicity of convicted suspects

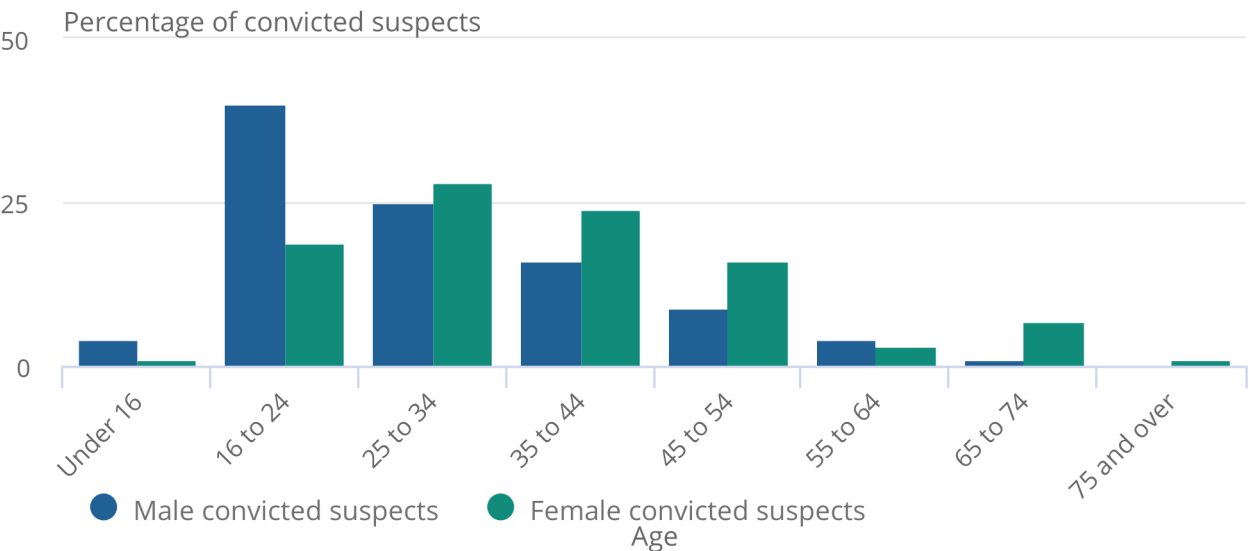
For the three-year period year ending March 2018 to the year ending March 2020, the vast majority of suspects convicted of homicide were male (1,023; 93%). Four in ten convicted male suspects were aged 16- to 24-years-old (40%), with 25% being 25- to 34-years-old and 16% being 35- to 44-years-old. ([Appendix Table 27](#) and Figure 9).

Figure 9: Male suspects convicted of homicide show a younger age profile than female suspects

Percentage of convicted suspects, England and Wales, three years combined - year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020

Figure 9: Male suspects convicted of homicide show a younger age profile than female suspects

Percentage of convicted suspects, England and Wales, three years combined - year ending March 2018 to year ending March 2020



Source: Home Office – Homicide Index

For the three-year period year ending March 2018 to the year ending March 2020, when looking at the principal suspect of a homicide offence, around two-thirds (67%) of suspects convicted of homicide were identified as White. This is a lower representation than in the general population² (around 85%). Around one in five (21%) suspects were identified as Black, seven times higher than the general population (3%) ([Appendix table 29](#)). Differences in these figures are likely to be related to the ethnicity of the population differing by age, region and socioeconomic factors which have not been taken into account.

Notes for: Suspects in homicide cases

1. [Review of court arrangements due to COVID-19, message from the Lord Chief Justice](#)
2. Based on [mid-2016 population estimates](#).

9 . International homicide comparisons

There are issues surrounding the comparability of international homicide data, therefore caution should be taken in comparing homicide rates across countries.

Homicide figures differ between countries for various reasons, including:

- different definitions of homicide between countries, although definitions vary less than for some other types of crimes.
- differing points in the criminal justice systems at which homicides are recorded, for instance, when the offence is - discovered or following further investigation or court outcome.
- figures for England and Wales are for completed homicides (that is excluding attempted murder) but, in some countries, the police register any death that cannot immediately be attributed to other causes as homicide.

[Eurostat](#) figures show that police recorded intentional homicide offences generally decreased across EU Member States from 2008 to 2018. Latvia had the highest rate of homicide in 2018 (52.2 per million population). In 18 countries the rate was below 10 per million. Norway had the lowest rate, at 4.7 per million population. England and Wales had a similar rate to many European countries.

The [Scottish Government](#) annual homicide figures showed that the number of homicide cases recorded by the police in Scotland increased by two offences in the year ending March 2020, from 62 to 64. Over the ten-year period from 2010 to 2011 to 2019 to 2020, the rate of homicides in Scotland has fallen from 19.0 to 11.7 homicides victims per million population. This latest figure is similar to the rate in England and Wales (11.7 per million population).

The [Police Service of Northern Ireland](#) figures show that there were 20 homicide offences recorded by the police in Northern Ireland in the year ending March 2020 (10.6 victims per million population), nine fewer offences than the previous year.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) publish a [Global Study on Homicide](#) which gives a comprehensive overview of intentional homicide across the world. The most recent publication was in 2019 and showed that the global average homicide rate was 61 per million population in 2017. Central America and South America, at 259 and 242 per million population, respectively, were the subregions with the highest average homicide rates in 2017¹. The subregions with the lowest levels of homicide, at around 10 per million population were Southern, Western and Northern Europe, East Asia and Oceania (Australia and New Zealand).

The [Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) publish figures showing that the homicide rate in the United States of America in 2019 was 50 per million, a similar rate to the previous year.

Notes for: International homicide comparisons

1. Excluding all the subregions of Africa, for which complete data are not available.

10 . Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2020 data

[Appendix tables: homicide in England and Wales](#)

Dataset | Released on 25 February 2021

Findings from the analyses based on the Homicide Index recorded by the Home Office, including long-term trends, sex of the victim, apparent method of killing and relationship to victim.

11 . Glossary

Homicide Offences

A collective term referring to the offences of murder, manslaughter and infanticide. Murder and manslaughter are common law offences that have never been defined by statute, although they have been modified by statute. The manslaughter category includes the offence of corporate manslaughter which was created by [Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007](#) which came into force on 6 April 2008. The offence of infanticide was created by the Infanticide Act 1922 and refined by the Infanticide Act 1938 (Section 1). Infanticide is defined as the killing of a baby under 1-years-old by their mother while the balance of her mind was disturbed as a result of giving birth.

12 . Data sources and quality

Data presented have been extracted from the Home Office Homicide Index contains detailed record-level information about each homicide recorded by police in England and Wales. The Homicide Index is continually updated with revised information from the police as investigations continue and as cases are heard by the courts. The version used for analysis does not accept updates after it is “frozen” to ensure the data do not change during the analysis period. The data in this article refer to the position as at 15 December 2020. The data will change as subsequent court hearings take place or as further information is received.

Homicide Index data are based on the year when the offence was recorded as a crime, not when the offence took place or when the case was heard in court. While in the majority of cases the offence will be recorded in the same year as it took place, this is not always so. Caution is therefore needed when looking at longer-term homicide trends. For example:

- the 96 deaths that occurred at Hillsborough in 1989 were recorded as manslaughters in the year ending March 2017 following the verdict of the Hillsborough Inquest in April 2016
- the 173 homicides attributed to Dr Harold Shipman as a result of Dame Janet Smith’s inquiry took place over a long period of time but were all recorded by the police during the year ending March 2003

Furthermore, where several people are killed by the same suspect, the number of homicides counted is the total number of victims killed rather than the number of incidents. For example, the 39 victims of human trafficking found in a lorry in Grays, Essex, in October 2019 are counted as 39 individual homicides.

For the purposes of the Homicide Index, a suspect in a homicide case is defined as either:

- a person who has been charged with a homicide offence, including those who were subsequently convicted and those awaiting trial
- a person who is suspected by the police of having committed the offence but is known to have died or committed suicide.

When the police initially record an offence as a homicide it remains classified as such unless the police or courts decide that a lesser offence, or no offence, took place. In all, 703 deaths were initially recorded as homicides by the police in the year ending March 2020. By 15 December 2020, eight were no longer recorded as homicides.

Where there are multiple suspects, they are categorised in the Homicide Index as either the principal or a secondary suspect. The suspect with the longest sentence or most serious conviction is determined to be the principal suspect. In the absence of any court outcome, the principal suspect is either the person considered by the police to be the most involved in the homicide or the suspect with the closest relationship to the victim.

Homicides are recorded to be “domestic” when the relationship between a victim aged 16 years and over and the perpetrator falls into one of the following categories: spouse, common-law spouse, cohabiting partner, boyfriend or girlfriend, ex-spouse, ex-cohabiting partner or ex-boyfriend or girlfriend, adulterous relationship, son or daughter (including step and adopted relationships), parent (including step and adopted relationships), brother or sister, other relatives.

Homicides classified as irrational acts cover those offences where there is evidence that the offender was suffering substantial mental illness. These do not account for all homicides committed by mentally ill people, as offences with an apparent motive (for example, during a quarrel or robbery) are instead included under the respective circumstance. Higher overall totals for homicides committed by those suffering mental illness are quoted elsewhere ([National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by People with Mental Illness](#)).

In collaboration with police forces and the Homicide Working Group¹, Home Office statisticians have undertaken an extensive data quality exercise on historical Homicide Index data to update court outcomes and suspect information. Information on these areas published in the tables may therefore differ from recent years – with data now being more complete.

Notes for: Data sources and quality

1. The Homicide Working Group is a National Police Chiefs' Council working group.

13 . Strengths and limitations

The Home Office Homicide Index contains detailed record-level information about each homicide recorded by police in England and Wales. These figures provide much more detail about the nature and circumstances of homicide offences than the main police recorded crime dataset. However, the level of detail in the Homicide Index means that these data take longer to collect and analyse than the more basic counts of recorded offences in the main recorded crime dataset. Headline figures, covering a more recent period, on the number of recorded homicides are published as part of the quarterly [Crime in England and Wales bulletin](#).

In accordance with the [Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007](#), statistics based on the Home Office Homicide Index have been re-assessed against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and found to meet the required standard for designation as National Statistics¹. Further information on the Homicide Index is provided in the [User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales](#).

Notes for: Strengths and limitations

1. The letter of confirmation can be found on the [UK Statistics Authority](#) website.

14 . Related links

[Guide to finding crime statistics](#)

Methodology | Released 17 July 2020

A guide that directs you on where best to find different crime statistics.

[User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales](#)

Methodology | Released 28 October 2020

Quarterly statistics on crime levels and trends in England and Wales. This user guide contains detailed information on the datasets used to compile crime statistics published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

[Crime in England and Wales: year ending September 2020](#)

Bulletin | Released 03 February 2021

Crime against households and adults, also including data on crime experienced by children, and crimes against businesses and society.

[The nature of violent crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2020](#)

Article | Released 25 February 2021

A summary of violent crime from the year ending March 2020 Crime Survey for England and Wales and police recorded crime.

[The offences involving the use of weapons – Data tables](#)

Dataset | Release 25 February 2021

Data tables relating to offences involving weapons as recorded by police and hospital episode statistics.

[The nature of violent crime – Appendix tables](#)

Dataset | Released 25 February 2021

Violent crime numbers, prevalence and location using annual data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, Home Office Data Hub, and police recorded crime. The nature of violent crime in England and Wales article pre-dates the most recent data.