

Article

Crime statistics presentation and communication review, current and upcoming work: October 2024

An internal review of the presentation and communication of crime statistics based on feedback from users and stakeholders, including the findings of this work and the actions we will take.

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1 . Overview of how we communicate crime statistics

Our Centre for Crime and Justice regularly publishes [crime and justice statistics](#) that aim to improve the understanding of the extent and nature of crime in our society.

Crime is an important topic. There are many different types of crime that harm people and society in different ways, and the type and nature of crime is constantly evolving. Our crime statistics are widely used by government, media, and the public to inform debate and support the development and monitoring of policy.

Understanding the changing picture of crime can, however, be complex. We use two main sources to measure levels and trends in crime in England and Wales: the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) and police recorded crime. The CSEW is a household survey that asks respondents about their experiences of crime. Police recorded crime statistics are based on administrative data that capture crimes reported to and recorded by the police, which are supplied to us by the Home Office.

Each source has different strengths and limitations. The CSEW is a better indicator of long-term trends, as it is not affected by changes to police recording practices. Police recorded crime statistics can give more insight into lower-volume but higher-harm offences, like homicide or offences involving a knife or sharp instrument. When used together, both sources provide a more complete picture of crime in England and Wales.

We publish our [User guide to crime statistics in England and Wales](#) and our [Crime trends article](#) about how we measure crime to support users in understanding crime statistics. However, the evolving policy landscape and public debate around crime means we need to keep reviewing how we communicate, given the wider context in which the statistics are used.

In March 2024, we therefore committed to reviewing feedback on how we should present and communicate our statistics, so that they are interpreted correctly by users.

2 . Our current position

We have engaged with a range of users and stakeholders to gather feedback on what we are doing well and where we could improve. We are also looking for good practice that we can learn from. This includes engagement with government departments and devolved administrations, the media, researchers, international organisations, public users, and other independent bodies with an interest in crime statistics. Thank you to everyone who inputted and gave us their views.

We have also considered insights and feedback that we gather from users of our statistics more widely, as well as reports from other recent reviews where the findings are relevant to how we present and communicate crime statistics. These include:

- the [Independent Review of the UK Statistics Authority 2023 to 2024](#)
- the UK Statistics Authority's [The quality of police recorded crime statistics for England and Wales review](#)
- the Office for Statistics Regulation's (OSR's) [Accreditation of the estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales \(CSEW\) review](#) on the presentation and communication of CSEW statistics

Stakeholder and user feedback

It is clear from the feedback we received that our crime statistics continue to play a vital role in informing decision-making and wider public debate. It is also clear that this is a complex and nuanced topic, both in terms of understanding the nature of crime itself and how we measure it, but also the high-profile and sensitive nature of the topic. The user base is also diverse, with both subject matter experts and the wider public seeking to understand the changing nature of crime. Not everyone wants the same things from our statistics.

Stakeholders and users were positive about many aspects of the way we present and communicate crime statistics. They generally felt that they could understand the main messages, but that there are areas for improvement. For those wanting to explore further, or to use the statistics in commentary or to inform policy decisions, there was a common theme that it took effort to understand how to interpret the data correctly and that it often was not easy to find what they were looking for.

Much of this is because of the topic, which has multiple data sources and a changing policy and legislative landscape. However, this in turn puts a real focus on our role in supporting users to understand the bigger picture and to feel confident interpreting crime statistics. It is important that our publications include simple messages on what the latest statistics tell us. However, many users fed back that it was just as important to be upfront about the coverage and caveats, as well as to provide a clear overview of the longer-term trends. A common theme was that users wanted a better and more interactive way to explore the data and to easily find the “right” answers to their specific questions, including any important points of interpretation.

Communicating the important messages from our statistics

Our Centre for Crime and Justice publishes regular statistics throughout the year, including quarterly headline estimates from the CSEW, alongside figures from police recorded crime data. The Centre also produces more detailed statistical bulletins on certain crime types, such as our annual bulletin on [domestic abuse](#). Our bulletins typically take the format of a written narrative, with main points summarised at the start and with relevant charts included throughout.

When reading our bulletins, stakeholders typically felt that they could understand the main points. However, they also emphasised how important it is to prominently explain how to interpret the statistics and what is included in different measures and crime types. There was a view that context may have been lost over time, or that messages may have been over-simplified, and that it would be valuable to review the guidance we include with this in mind.

There was also feedback about the main points. While they are very helpful for giving a quick overview of the statistics, they tend to focus on the headline number, or a specific crime type and the recent year-on-year change. However, it is as important to explain the longer-term picture of crime trends and to put the shorter-term changes into this longer-term context.

In addition, many users wanted us to be clearer on what our best assessment is of crime in England and Wales. They wanted us to bring the data sources together and to draw more of a narrative and story across them. There were some differing views on the best way to present the statistics. Some users see potential benefits in presenting CSEW and police recorded crime statistics separately, because of their different coverage. This is an approach taken in some other countries. There was also no clear demand for a single measure of overall crime. Stakeholders certainly want to understand the broad picture of the extent and nature of crime, but they recognise that it is difficult to draw real comparisons across very different types of crime and that each source has different strengths.

Supporting users to interpret our data

Alongside our statistical bulletins, we publish multiple datasets containing additional data tables from both the CSEW and police recorded crime. These serve a range of important purposes. Stakeholders use these data to produce their own analysis, or find more information to influence policy decisions, inform media reporting, or create metrics for benchmarking the delivery of services.

Subject matter experts who had worked in their field for some time felt they could navigate the underlying data, but mostly because they had experience and knew where to look. Those who were less experienced often found the data harder to navigate, because of the way the data have evolved and been added to over time. Stakeholders reported that they wanted us to look at structuring and streamlining the data in a more intuitive way.

Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of understanding how to use and interpret the data reported in the underlying tables. The amount of information available means there is potentially a greater risk of people misinterpreting the statistics or using them incorrectly. A common theme was that a more visual way to quickly find the latest figures and time series for important measures published throughout the year would be valuable. This would be alongside more interactive options for exploring and querying the data to get the best answer for a given question, with the relevant caveats attached, rather than users having to work it out for themselves.

Wider insights on communicating crime statistics

From engagement with other producers of crime statistics, we learned that many of the challenges and opportunities highlighted by our users are not unique. There is also no single “right” way to present and communicate crime statistics. Different organisations and countries take different approaches. The feedback highlighted the importance of considering the needs of different types of users and adapting what we do in response to important questions in public debate. Similarly, it highlighted the importance of using more visual approaches and mapping tools to help make the evidence base easier to use and understand.

Looking at wider research, the recent National Centre for Social Research [Public Confidence in Official Statistics report](#) also gives us some insights on public attitudes to our statistics, including on crime, Census 2021, the Consumer Price Index (CPI), employment, and gross domestic product (GDP).

Respondents tended to be positive about the timeliness, relevance, and usefulness of our crime statistics. There was an improvement in the percentage of respondents that agreed that our crime statistics are free from political interference since 2014, from 39% to 53%, though this was still lower when compared with the other statistics covered. While there will be a range of different factors influencing this, it shows the continued importance of helping citizens to find reliable, impartial statistics on crime. And the overall results continued to show that a high proportion of respondents (87%) trust the Office for National Statistics.

3 . Upcoming work

We are taking the following actions to respond to the feedback from our users and stakeholders.

We will improve the main points and narrative in our quarterly and annual crime statistics bulletins. We will ensure they:

- clearly set out what is and is not included in the headline measure and how this breaks down by crime type, so that users understand what is driving the headline figures
- give users a good understanding of the longer-term picture, and that the shorter-term changes are placed in this context
- bring together the available data sources and provide our best assessment of crime in England and Wales and how it is changing

We will review the information we provide in our bulletins on how to interpret the statistics and the “things you need to know”, so that this gives clearer advice on what should and should not be used for what purpose.

We will, as part of transforming our website and better exploiting modern technologies (in line with the recommendations of the [Independent Review of the UK Statistics Authority 2023 to 2024](#)), address our users’ needs to:

- quickly find the main statistics on crime, bringing together the picture from across the different statistical publications relating to crime and justice
- more easily explore and interact with the statistics and underlying data, to find the most appropriate data for their needs, alongside the important guidance on how to use or interpret them

In the interim, we will work to improve the usability of the underlying data tables published as part of our regular statistics. This includes reviewing the structure and content of the tables, so that these are simpler to navigate.

4 . Future developments

Our review has emphasised the importance of communicating our statistics in a way that helps our users understand and interpret them correctly. Crime is a complex topic, and continuing to improve how we communicate and present our statistics will help maintain public trust and allow more people to be confident in using them to inform decision-making and public debate.

Some of the recommendations outlined in [Section 3: Upcoming work](#) have already been actioned with work on others in progress. In our latest [Crime in England and Wales: year ending June 2024 bulletin](#), a number of these changes have been incorporated. This includes making improvements to the main points and narrative, adding a “things you need to know about this release” section, and reorganising data related to the bulletin for simpler navigation. We will continue to action the recommendations from this report throughout the coming year.

While the initial focus of the review has been on communication, our stakeholder engagement has also identified some growing priorities for crime statistics. These include continuing to address evidence gaps in violence against women and girls, and child abuse. See our [Violence against women and girls: research update November 2023 article](#) and our [Exploring the feasibility of a survey measuring child abuse in the UK: June 2024 article](#). This is alongside calls for more granular insights, including at local level.

This feedback is vital and we continue to engage with our stakeholders and users, including the new government, to understand emerging priorities and how our statistics can deliver even greater insights for the wider public good.

5 . Provide feedback

We welcome further feedback on our statistics and suggestions for how we could improve our publications. Get in touch at crimestatistics@ons.gov.uk.

6 . Related links

[Crime in England and Wales: year ending June 2024](#)

Bulletin | Released 24 October 2024

Crime against households and adults using data from police recorded crime and the Telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales. Includes the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on crime.

[Improving crime statistics for England and Wales – progress update: July 2024](#)

Article | Released 24 July 2024

Latest update on the progress being made to improve crime statistics for England and Wales.

7 . Cite this article

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