

Northern Ireland Suicide Statistics, 2023

Frequency: Annual

Published: 5 February 2025

This report presents the finalised, Northern Ireland (NI) suicide statistics for 2023.

Suicide statistics and mortality statistics more generally are published by NISRA as the number of deaths **registered** within a calendar year, rather than the number of deaths that **occurred** in that period. This method ensures annual data do not continuously change; however, it introduces a limitation to the statistics as registration-based figures build in delays in procedural systems and processes and do not enable occurrence-based analyses, which may be important in informing operational and policy responses.

Following the review of NI suicide statistics covering the years 2015-2020, comparisons with the pre-2015 data series are advised with caution. Further information is provided in the background section.

Key points

- Since 2015, annual numbers of registered suicides have fluctuated, ranging from 195 in 2016 to 237 in 2021. There were 221 suicide deaths registered in Northern Ireland in 2023. Considering a three-year average trend drawing on post review data (from 2015), the average rose from 204.7 in 2017 to 220.3 in 2021 and has remained at a similar level since then (220.3 in 2023).
- The suicide rate (age-standardised) in Northern Ireland was 13.3 deaths per 100,000 population in 2023. This rate has fluctuated since the start of the revised series (2015), ranging from 11.9 per 100,000 in 2016 to 14.3 per 100,000 in both 2018 and 2021.
- 171 (77.4 per cent) of the 221 suicide deaths in 2023 were males and 50 (22.6 per cent) were females. The age-standardised rate for males increased from 19.2 per 100,000 males in 2022 to 20.9 in 2023, while for females, the equivalent rate increased from 5.7 per 100,000 females in 2022 to 5.9 in 2023.
- The suicide rate (crude rate) per 100,000 population (aged 16+) was higher among those with a marital status of single (21.7) or divorced (17.6), compared to those recorded as married (9.6) or widowed (8.3).

- The percentage of suicides in 2023 within Northern Ireland's most deprived areas (28.5 per cent) was over twice that of the least deprived areas (13.1 per cent).
- The Northern Ireland 2023 age-standardised rate of 13.3 suicides per 100,000 population was lower than the rate for [Scotland](#) (14.6 suicides per 100,000 population) but higher than the rate for [England and Wales](#) (11.4 suicides per 100,000). It should be noted, however, that cross country comparisons will be affected by differences in data collection and collation processes in the separate jurisdictions.
- The Northern Trust had the highest number of suicides in 2023 (56), followed by Belfast Trust (50). The Western Trust had the lowest number of suicides in 2023 (36).
- The most common method of suicide in Northern Ireland in 2023 was hanging, suffocation or strangulation, accounting for 73.8 per cent of all suicides; drug poisoning accounted for 9.0 per cent, while other methods were involved in the remaining 17.2 per cent.

Where to go for help

If you are struggling to cope, please call one of the organisations below. There is help available around the clock, every single day of the year, providing a safe place for anyone struggling to cope, whoever they are, however they feel.

Minding Your Head - find out more about mental health and the issues that can affect it; early warning signs that a mental health issue may be developing; tips on how to maintain good mental health.

Website <http://www.mindingyourhead.info/>

Lifeline – a free 24-hour crisis response helpline for people who are experiencing distress or despair, where trained counsellors will listen and help immediately on the phone and follow up with other support if necessary.

Phone 0808 808 8000

Website <http://www.lifelinehelpline.info>

Samaritans – a registered charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide throughout UK and Ireland, often through their telephone helpline or online chat.

Freephone 116 123

Website <https://www.samaritans.org/>

Information for the media

There is strong evidence that sensationalist media reporting about suicide and the nature of suicide deaths can lead to subsequent additional suicidal behaviours (suicides and suicide attempts) or indeed increase the likelihood of copycat deaths.

Media professionals should exercise caution and sensitivity in reporting on suicide, balancing the public's "right to know" against the risk of causing harm. It is therefore important that those reporting on suicide statistics adhere to the guidelines of safe reporting from [WHO/IASP](#) and [Samaritans](#) and, in particular, avoid reporting specifically on method of suicide information contained herein.

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What you need to know

Background

The United Kingdom (UK) Official Statistics definition of suicide includes deaths due to intentional self-harm as well as deaths of undetermined intent. Further detail on this definition is provided in Annex A.

Where a person has died from any cause other than natural illness, for which they have been seen and treated by a registered medical practitioner within 28 days prior to the death, the death must be referred to the coroner. Such deaths can only be registered after the coroner has completed his/her investigation.

In 2019, following the identification of a classification issue in published statistics for the period 2015-2020, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and the Coroners Service for Northern Ireland (CSNI) commenced a review of suicide statistics. Full details of the issues prompting the review and the impact of the revisions on the previously published time series are available in the [May 2022 review report](#) with finalised revised figures being available in the [NI Suicide statistics 2015-2021](#) report.

This review marked a major revision to this important statistical series and has had a significant impact on the existing Northern Ireland narrative in relation to suicide statistics compared with other nations. Seventy-nine per cent of all cases reviewed (2015 to 2020), out of 535 in total, moved from undetermined cause of death into accidental cause of death categories and thus outside the suicide definition, reducing the number of deaths classified as suicide in NI between 2015 and 2020. For this reason, users are advised to be careful when interpreting trends which incorporate pre-2015 data with later years.

Change in Standard of Proof

The standard of proof - the level of evidence needed by coroners to conclude whether a death was caused by suicide - for a verdict of suicide was changed from the criminal standard of “beyond all reasonable doubt”, to the civil standard of “on the balance of probabilities” because of an English case in July 2018 and confirmed in Northern Ireland in November 2018. Please note that the review of suicide statistics was carried out on this new basis.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) have reported that the change has led to the proportion of deaths in England and Wales with an underlying cause of intentional-self harm increasing, whereas the proportion coded to undetermined intent has decreased.

Rebased Mid-Year Population Estimates for Northern Ireland

On 29 June 2023 NISRA published the [rebased population and migration estimates Northern Ireland \(2011-2021\)](#). This statistical report provided updated population estimates from mid-2011 to mid-2021, based on the results of Census 2021. The death rates in this report for sex and age groupings are based on the updated population estimates for 2023. Table 7 in the accompanying [spreadsheet](#) provides updated population estimates for Local Government District, 2013-2022. Population estimates by LGD for 2023 are not yet available. Rebased population data for the years 2012 to 2020 are not yet available at Health and Social Care Trust.

Statistical Series for Suicides in Northern Ireland

Number of Suicide Deaths in Northern Ireland, 2003 to 2023

Registration based statistics will always be subject to fluctuations in the time which lapses between the date of death and the date the Coroner is able to close the investigation. Every death reported is carefully considered by the Coroner and is influenced by several factors specific to each case. These include whether the Coroner orders a post mortem, whether an inquest is required, the complexity of each case, and the number of cases reported to and being investigated by the Coroner at any point in time. It is therefore important to look at the trend over a longer period of time. Figure 1 below, shows the number of suicide deaths from 2003 to 2023 along with a three-year rolling average. Comparisons with earlier data prior to 2015 should be treated cautiously given the 2015-2021 review exercise noted above.

Since 2015, annual numbers of registered suicides have fluctuated, ranging from 195 in 2016 to 237 in 2021. There were 221 suicide deaths registered in Northern Ireland in 2023. Considering a three-year average trend drawing on the post-review data (from 2015) the average rose from 204.7 in 2017 to 220.3 in 2021 and has remained at a similar level since (220.3 in 2023).

Figure 1 Number of Suicide Deaths in Northern Ireland, 2003 to 2023



Age & Sex

171 (77.4 per cent) of the total suicide deaths in 2023 were males and 50 (22.6 per cent) were females. In every year since 2001, more than 70 per cent of suicide deaths have been male.

Figure 2 Number of Deaths from Suicide in Northern Ireland, by Age and Sex, 2023

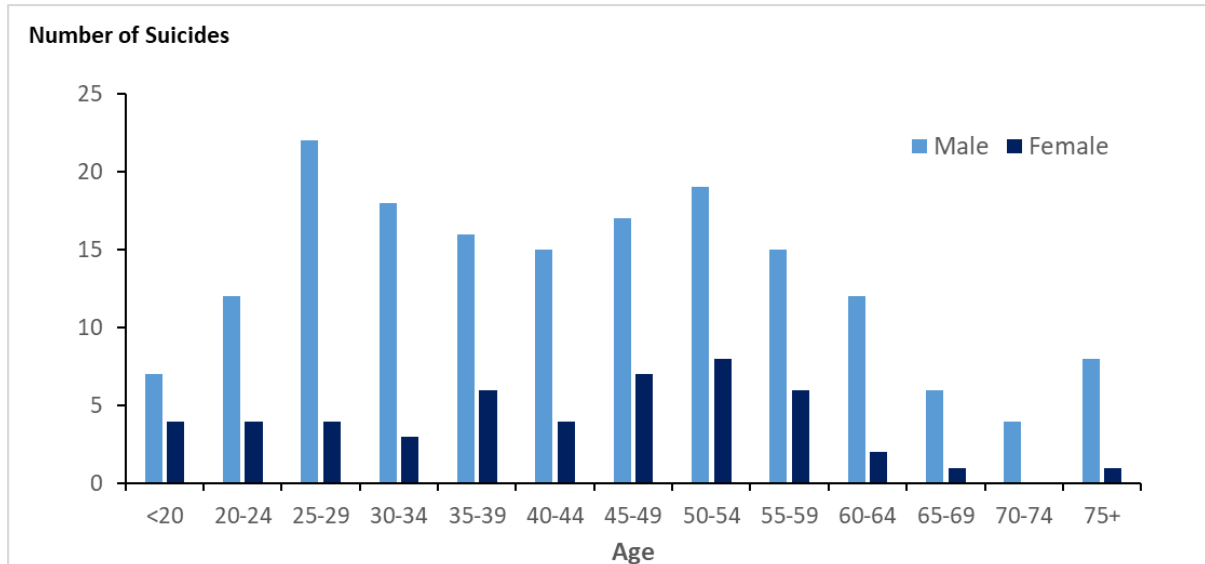


Figure 2 above shows that in 2023, suicide deaths were highest for men between the ages of 25 and 29, while for women the highest number of suicide deaths were between the ages of 50 and 54. Overall in 2023, one in every five suicide deaths was someone under the age of 30. This is in line with previous years.

Suicide remains the leading cause of death in males under 50. Of the 561 male deaths registered in 2023 where the deceased was under 50 years of age, 107 were to suicide (19.1%).

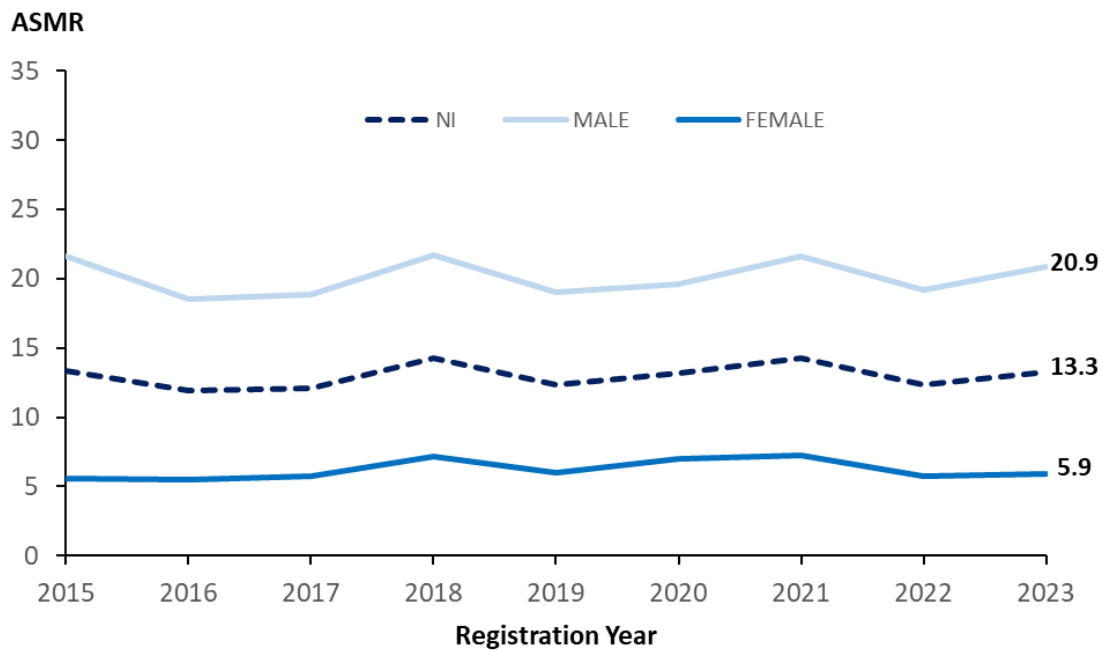
Age-Standardised Mortality Rate for Suicide

The age-standardised mortality rate for suicide in Northern Ireland was 13.3 deaths per 100,000 in 2023. This rate has fluctuated since the start of the revised series (2015), ranging from 11.9 per 100,000 in 2016 to 14.3 per 100 000 in both 2018 and 2021.

What are Age-Standardised Mortality Rates (ASMRs)?

Age-standardised mortality rates adjust for differences in the age structure of populations and therefore allow valid comparisons to be made between geographical areas, the sexes and over time. In this bulletin, age-standardised mortality rates are presented per 100,000 people and standardised to the 2013 European Standard Population.

Figure 3 Age-Standardised Mortality Rate for Suicide by Sex, Northern Ireland, 2015 to 2023

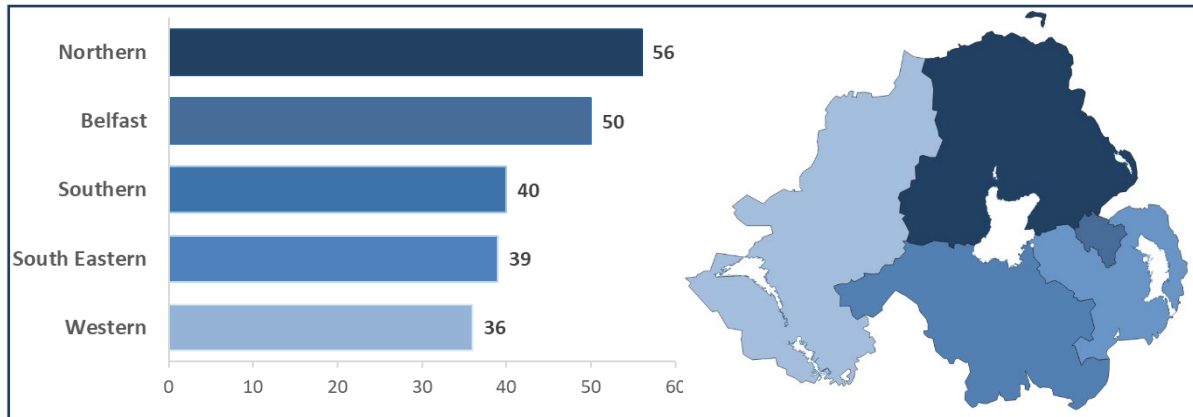


In 2023, the age standardised mortality rate for suicide for males was 20.9 deaths per 100,000, up from 19.2 deaths per 100,000 in 2022. The corresponding rates among females were 5.9 deaths per 100,000 in 2023, similar to the 2022 figure of 5.7 deaths per 100,000.

Health Trust

Figure 4 shows that, of the five Health and Social Care Trusts, Northern Trust had the highest number of suicides in 2023 (56). This was followed by the Belfast Trust (50), Southern Trust (40), and South Eastern (39). The Western Trust had the lowest number of suicides in 2023 at 36.

Figure 4: Number of Deaths from Suicide in Northern Ireland by Health Trust, 2023



Crude Mortality Rate by Marital Status

125 (56.6 per cent) of the total suicide deaths in 2023 were of single individuals at the time of their death; 72 (32.6 per cent) were married, 16 (7.2 per cent) divorced and 8 (3.6 per cent) widowed. In every year of the revised series (2015), more than 50 per cent of suicide deaths had a marital status of single.

What is Crude Mortality Rate?

Crude mortality rate is a measure of the number of deaths scaled to the size of that population. In this bulletin, crude mortality rates by marital status are presented per 100,000 people aged 16+, and are sourced from the NI Census. As the population is for people aged 16+, the Northern Ireland crude mortality rate for marital status will differ to that based on the entire population.

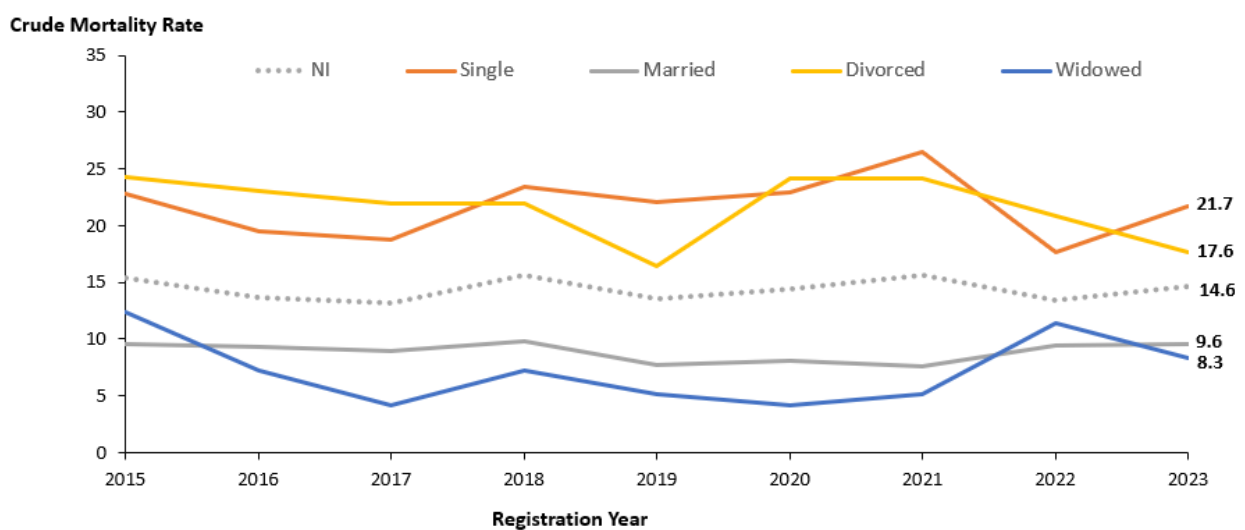
Why use a Crude Mortality Rate?

Crude mortality rates are used when the age structure of the population is unknown. In this example, population breakdowns broken down by marital status are not available on an annual basis.

For more information on crude mortality rates and age-standardised mortality rates for marital status in Northern Ireland, see [User Guide to Suicide Statistics in Northern Ireland](#)

Figure 5 shows that the crude mortality rate for suicide per 100,000 population aged 16+ was higher for those single (21.7) or divorced (17.6) compared to those recorded as married (9.6) or widowed (8.3). While these figures tend to fluctuate year on year, the general trend of a higher mortality rate for suicide for single and divorced individuals is consistent with other jurisdictions.

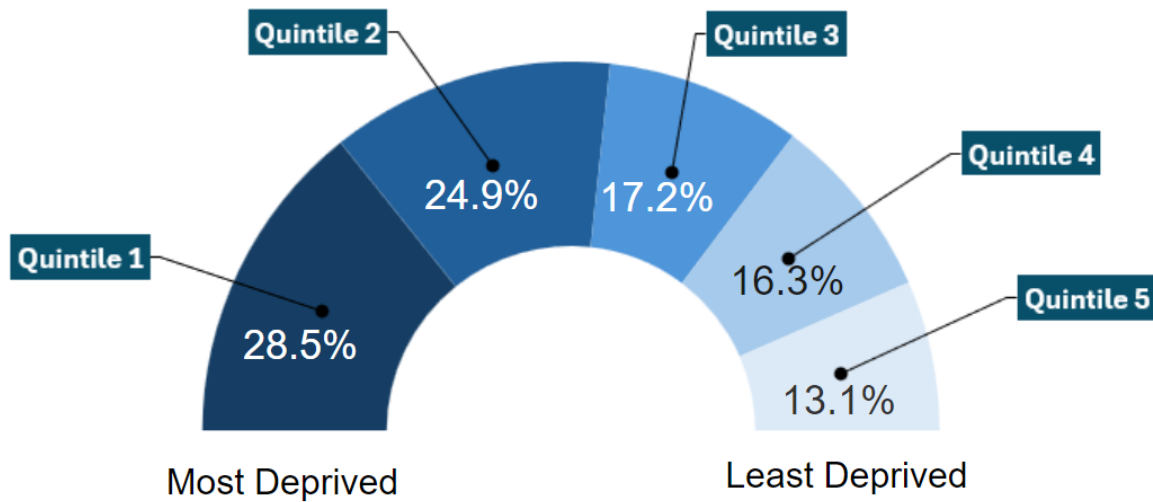
Figure 5 Crude Mortality Rate per 100,000 Population (aged 16+) for suicide, by Marital Status, 2015-2023



Deprivation

Figure 6 shows that the percentage of suicides in 2023 within Northern Ireland's most deprived areas (28.5 per cent) was over twice that of the least deprived areas (13.1 per cent).

Figure 6 Percentage of Suicides by Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (2017), 2023

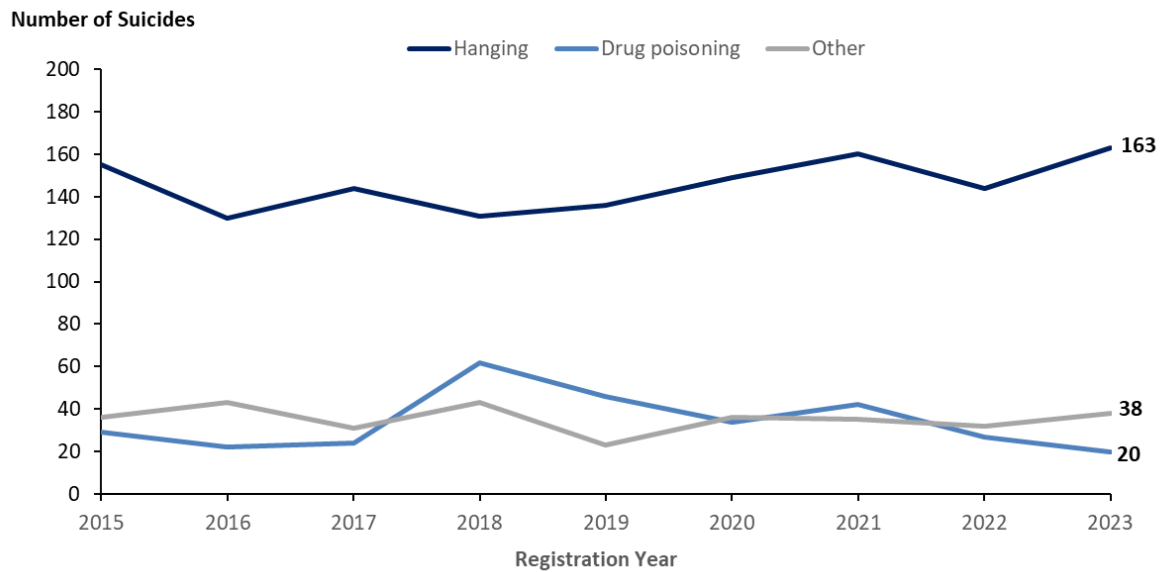


Method of suicide¹

As in previous years, the most common method of suicide in Northern Ireland was hanging, suffocation or strangulation. In 2023, this accounted for 73.8 per cent of all suicide deaths (163 deaths) (see Figure 7).

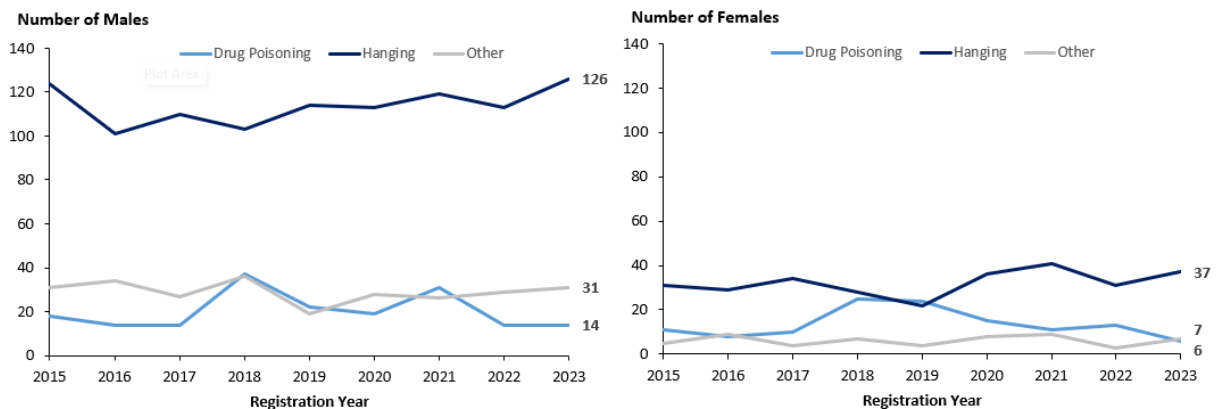
In 2023, drug poisoning accounted for 9.0 per cent of all suicides (20 deaths). The remaining 17.2 per cent (38 deaths) related to other methods of suicide.

Figure 7: Number of Suicide Deaths by Method, Northern Ireland, 2015 to 2023



Figures 8 and 9 provide some further breakdown by sex.

Figure 8 & 9: Male and Female Suicide Deaths in Northern Ireland by Method, 2015-2023

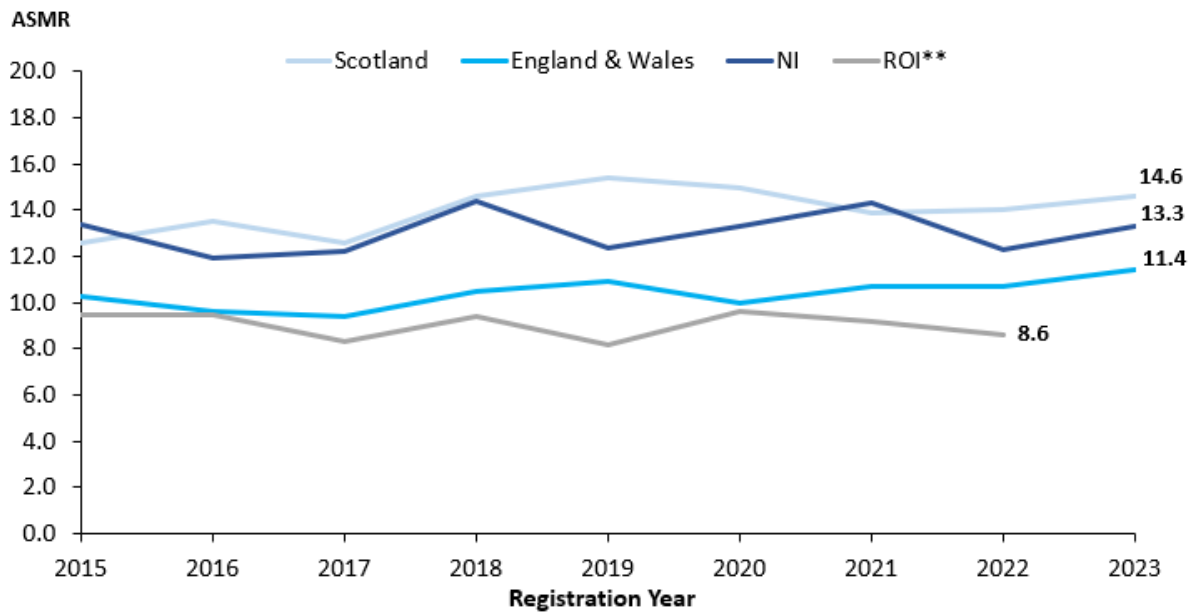


¹ Media professionals should exercise caution on referencing this data in media releases. Please see *Information for the Media* for further information.

UK and Ireland Country Comparisons

ASMRs allow populations with different age structures to be compared. Suicides are more common in certain age groups; therefore, it is important to adjust for this factor by using a 'standard population'. Figure 10 shows that after accounting for the age structure of each country across the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland (ROI), the suicide ASMRs for Northern Ireland have fluctuated in recent years but are most comparable with Scotland's rates (although it is important to note that the standard of proof change was only applied to England and Wales and Northern Ireland rates.)

Figure 10: Age-Standardised Mortality Rate for Suicide Deaths by Country, 2015-2023



**ROI ASMR are based on Occurrence year figures and include fewer ICD10 codes.

For the latest year, 2023, the Northern Ireland rate was 13.3 suicides per 100,000 population. This is lower than the 14.6 suicides per 100,000 population for [Scotland](#) but above the rate for [England and Wales](#) at 11.4 suicides per 100,000 in 2023. Again, it should be remembered that cross country comparisons will be affected by differences in data collection and collation processes in the separate jurisdictions.

The definition used for the [Republic of Ireland](#) rates is not directly comparable to Northern Ireland rates as the coverage includes fewer ICD10 codes and is based on the date of occurrence and not date of registration. More analysis on comparisons between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is provided in the next section.

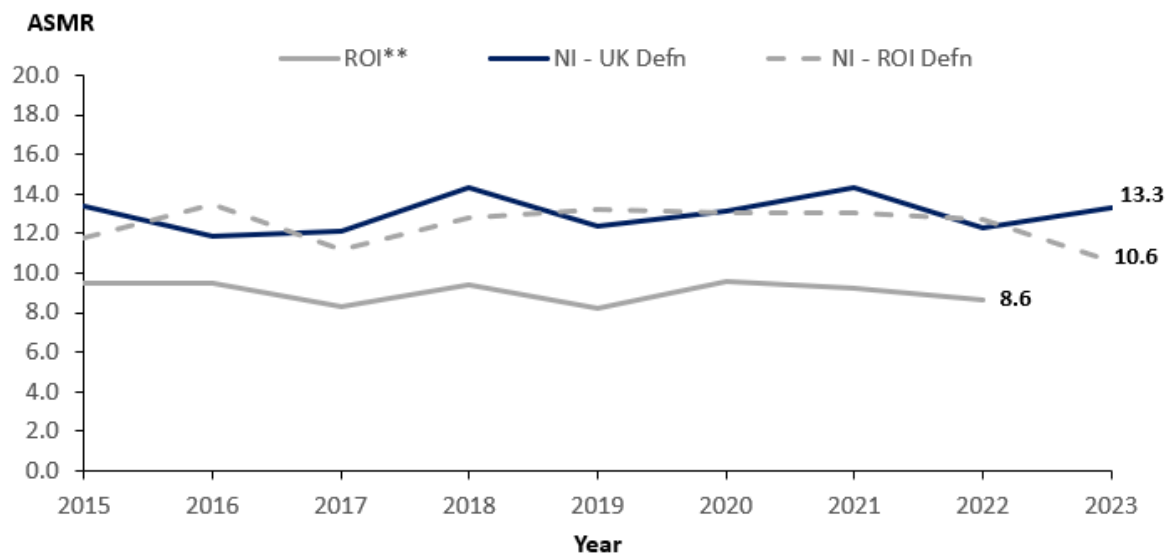
ROI Definition

Across the UK, the National Statistics definition of suicide includes deaths of 'undetermined intent', as well as deaths where the underlying cause is 'intentional self-harm'. However, in the Republic of Ireland deaths of undetermined intent are not included in the national definition.

The ROI definition also differs from the UK definition in that it is based on the year that the death **occurred** and not the year that the death was **registered**.

Figure 11 below looks at the NI mortality rate for suicide calculated using both definitions and allows a direct comparison with ROI.

Figure 11: Age-Standardised Mortality Rate for Suicide Deaths, based on Republic of Ireland definition, 2015 to 2023



Regardless of the definition used for comparison, NI's mortality rate for suicide is consistently higher than that in ROI. The mortality rate for suicide in ROI in 2022 (latest available) was 8.6 deaths per 100,000 and the comparative figure for Northern Ireland in 2023 was 10.6 deaths per 100,000.

Occurrence Year Analysis

A death which is suspected to be suicide must be referred to the coroner and can only be registered after the coroner has completed his/her investigation. Registration of a suicide death can therefore take many months or even years.

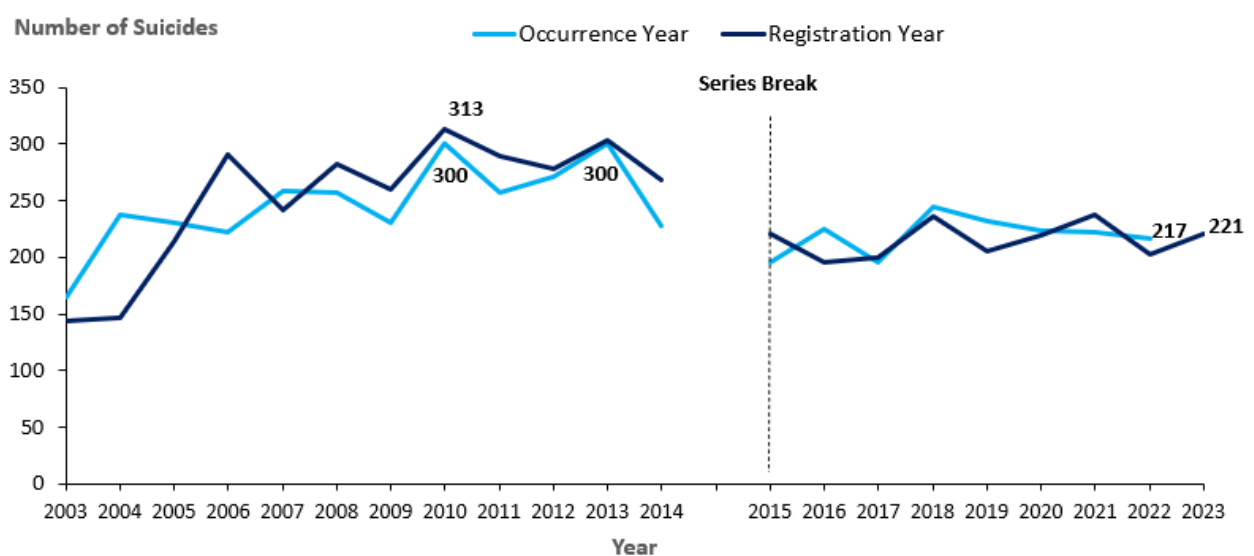
NISRA is only notified that a death has occurred once it is registered with the GRO and a significant number of suicide deaths registered in any year will have occurred in earlier years. For example, of the 221 such deaths registered in 2023, 67 occurred in 2023, 127 in 2022, 15 in 2021, with the remaining 12 occurring in 2020 or earlier.

Suicide death statistics and mortality statistics more generally are published by NISRA as the number of deaths **registered** within a calendar year, as opposed to the number of deaths that **occurred** in that period. This method ensures timely, finalised data but introduces a limitation to the statistics as they can be impacted by delays in procedural systems and do not enable occurrence-based analyses which may be important in informing operational and policy responses.

While annual data based on the date of occurrence are accurate if enough time has lapsed, for more recent years they will be incomplete as more registrations will follow. Most suicide deaths (98 per cent) are registered within three years of the death occurring.

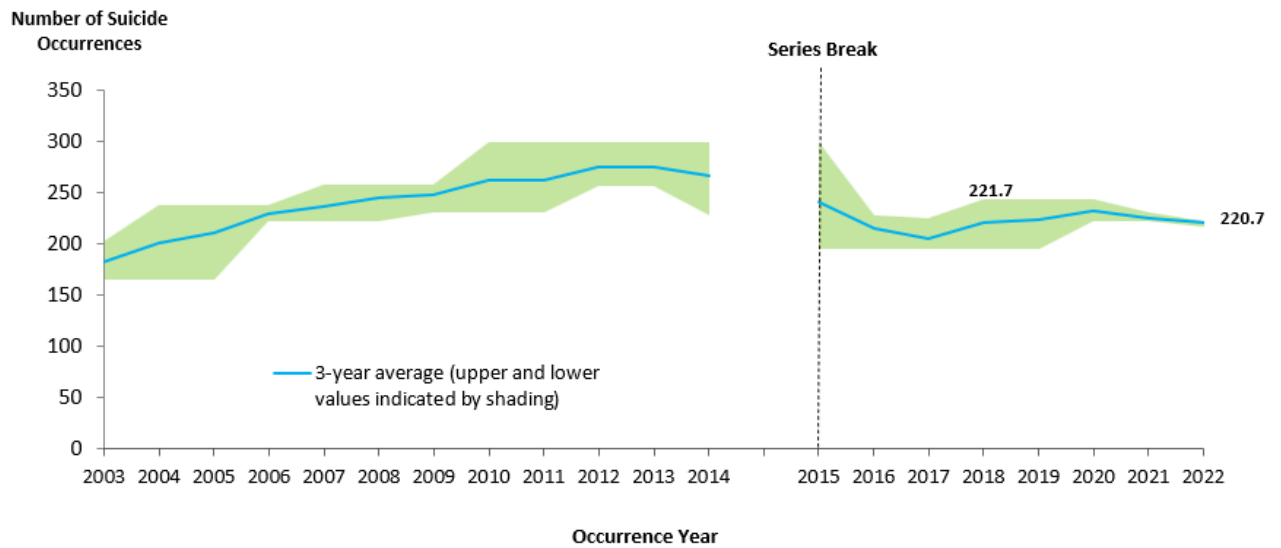
Figure 12 presents a comparison of the number of suicide deaths registered in Northern Ireland and the number based on the year of occurrence up to 2022 only, given the issues outlined above. Annual fluctuations are expected between these two series, given the median time from death to registration is constantly changing. Users are therefore cautioned against drawing inferences based on one-year changes.

Figure 12: Number of Suicide Deaths by Registration and Occurrence Year, 2003-2023



Information is presented in Figure 13 on occurrence trends based on a '3-year rolling average' approach. The three-year rolling average of suicide deaths has fluctuated, rising from 205.3 in 2017 to 232.7 in 2020, falling to 220.7 in 2022 (2020-22).

Figure 13: Number of Suicide Deaths (3-year rolling average) by Occurrence Year, 2003-2022



Annex A - Definitions and further information

National Statistics definition of suicide deaths

The National Statistics definition of suicide was revised in January 2016 to include deaths from intentional self-harm in children aged 10 to 14 years. Previously, suicides in young children were not included due to the very small numbers involved. However, after discussions with public health agencies and the constituent countries of the UK, it was decided that it was appropriate to include them.

Deaths from an event of undetermined intent in 10 to 14-year-olds are not included in these suicide statistics, because although for older teenagers and adults we assume that in these deaths the harm was self-inflicted, for younger children it is not clear whether this assumption is appropriate.

ICD-10 Code	Description	Notes
X60-X84, Y87.0	Self-inflicted Injury	Persons aged 10 years and above
Y10-Y34, Y87.2	Events of Undetermined Intent	Persons aged 15 years and

Underlying cause: underlying cause of death is the disease or injury that initiated the train of morbid events leading directly to death, or the circumstances of the accident or violence that produced the fatal injury.

Age-standardised mortality rates (ASMRs): Age-standardised mortality rates adjust for differences in the age structure of populations and therefore allow valid comparisons to be made between geographical areas, the sexes and over time. In this bulletin, age-standardised mortality rates are presented per 100,000 people and standardised to the 2013 European Standard Population.

Mortality Rate: Mortality rate is a measure of the number deaths from suicide scaled to the size of that population.

Urban/Rural Eight Settlement Bands (A-H) based on the 2011 Census population were used to classify settlements². Settlements with a population of greater than or equal to 5,000 people were classified as 'urban' while settlements with a population of less than 5,000 people were classified as 'rural'.

² <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/settlement15-guidance.pdf>

Links to relevant publications

[Probable Suicides in Scotland](#)

[Suicides in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics](#)

[Suicide Statistics - CSO - Central Statistics Office](#)

List of Tables

Data accompanying this bulletin are available from the NISRA website in Excel format. The [spreadsheet](#) includes the following tables.

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Accredited Official Statistics publication

This is an Accredited Official Statistics publication. Accredited Official Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are produced free from any political interference.

This accredited official statistics, were independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation in April 2012. They comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) and should be labelled 'accredited official statistics.'

Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR sets the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics that all producers of official statistics should adhere to.

[View the full assessment of Demography and Vital Events Statistics for Northern Ireland.](#)

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