

Suicide Statistics in Northern Ireland, 2002 – 2022

Published: 13th December 2023

This report presents the finalised suicide statistical series in Northern Ireland for 2002 to 2022.

Suicide death 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.

Key points

- There were 203 suicide deaths registered in 2022. While this represents a decrease of 34 (14.3 per cent) from the 237 suicide deaths registered in 2021, it is important to remember that annual fluctuations in registration-based figures build in procedural delays. The three-year rolling average of suicide deaths has remained relatively stable since 2017.
- The age-standardised suicide rate in Northern Ireland reduced from 14.3 deaths per 100,000 in 2021 to 12.3 deaths per 100,000 in 2022.
- 156 (76.8 per cent) of the 203 total suicide deaths in 2022 were males and 47 (23.2 per cent) were females. The rate for males decreased from 21.6 per 100,000 males in 2021 to 19.2 in 2022, while for females, the equivalent rate decreased from 7.2 per 100,000 females in 2021 to 5.7 in 2022.
- The crude death rate per 100,000 population was higher for those suicide deaths in 2022 with a marital status of divorced (20.8) or single (17.7), compared to those recorded as widowed (11.4) or married (9.5).
- The percentage of suicides in 2022 from Northern Ireland's most deprived areas (31.0 per cent) was over three times that of the least deprived areas (9.4 per cent).
- The Northern Ireland 2022 age-standardised rate of 12.3 suicides per 100,000 population was lower than the rate for [Scotland](#) (13.9 suicides per 100,000 population) but higher than the rate for [England and Wales](#) of 10.7 suicides per 100,000 in 2021. 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 Belfast Trust had the highest number of suicides in 2022 (51), followed by Southern Trust (43). The South-Eastern Trust had the lowest number of suicides in 2022 with 34.
- The most common method of suicide in Northern Ireland in 2022 was hanging, suffocation or strangulation, accounting for 70.9 per cent of all suicides; drug poisoning accounted for 13.3 per cent, while the remaining 15.8 per cent used other methods of suicide.

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 reports 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

Suicide deaths in Northern Ireland are defined as deaths due to intentional self-harm as well as events of undetermined intent. This is consistent with the United Kingdom (UK) National Statistics definition, a description of which 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 rates compared with other nations. 79 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 which fall outside the suicide definition, thus reducing the number of deaths classified as suicide in NI between 2015 and 2020.

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 uses updated population estimates from mid-2011 to mid-2021, based on the results of Census 2021. The death rates in this report are based on the updated population estimates and therefore may not match those previously published.

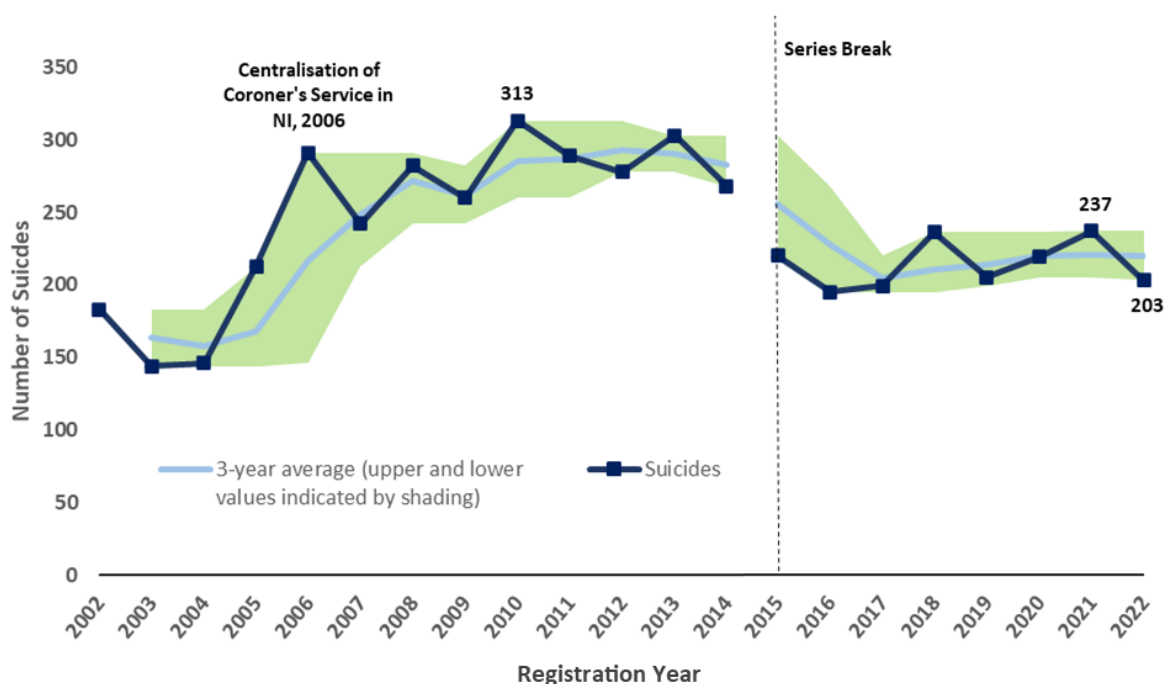
Statistical Series for Suicides in Northern Ireland

Number of Suicide Deaths in Northern Ireland, 2002 to 2022

There were 203 suicide deaths registered in Northern Ireland in 2022. This represents a decrease of 34 (14.3 per cent) from the 237 suicide deaths registered in 2021.

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 2002 to 2022 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.

Figure 1 Number of Suicide Deaths in Northern Ireland, 2002 to 2022



Age & Sex

156 (76.8 per cent) of the total suicide deaths in 2022 were males and 47 (23.2 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 NI, by Age and Sex, 2022

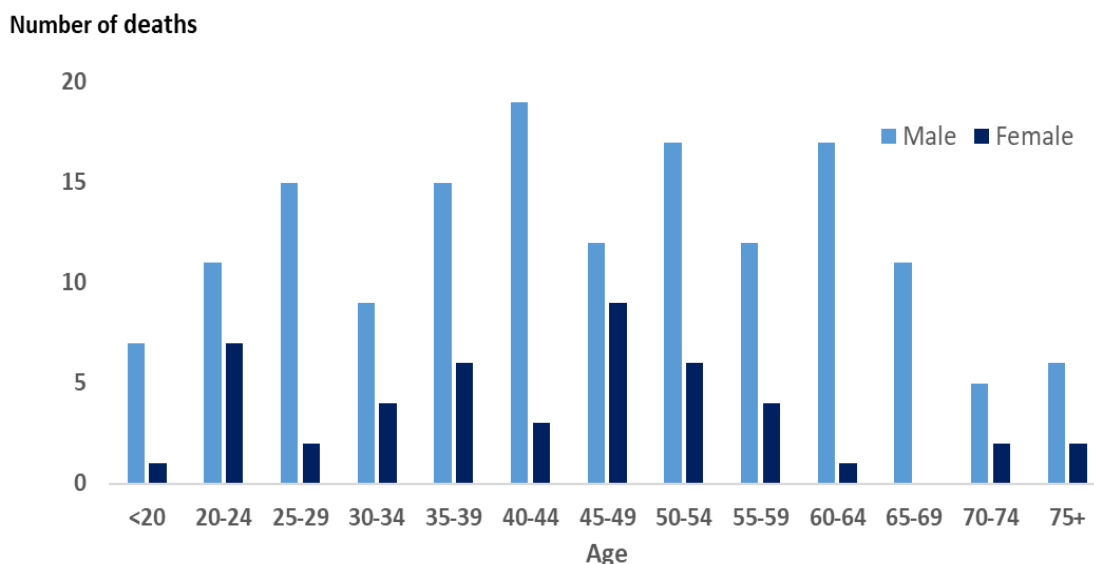


Figure 2 above shows that in 2022, suicide deaths were highest for men between the ages of 40 and 44, while for women the highest number of suicide deaths were between the ages of 45 and 49. Overall in 2022, one in every five suicide deaths was someone under the age of 30. This is similar to previous years.

Suicide remains the leading cause of death in males under 50. Of the 609 male, under 50, deaths registered in 2022, 88 were to suicide (14.4%).

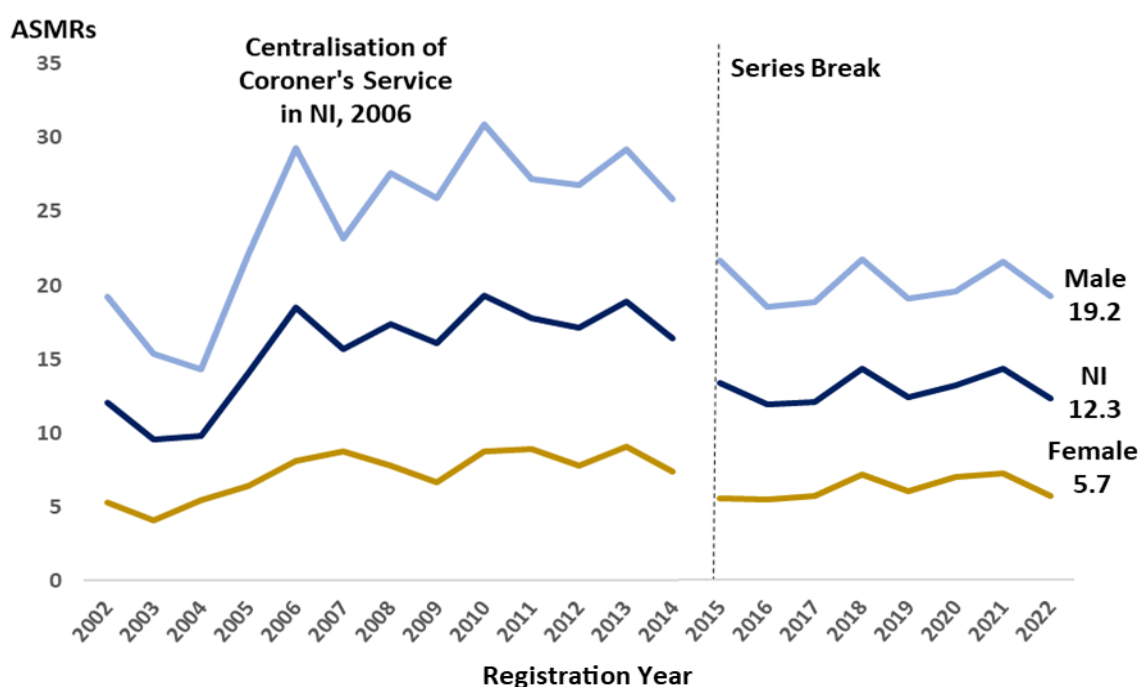
Age-standardised Suicide Rate for NI

The age-standardised suicide death rate in Northern Ireland shown in Figure 3 shows a decrease from 14.3 deaths per 100,000 in 2021 to 12.3 deaths per 100,000 in 2022.

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 Suicide Rate by Sex, Northern Ireland, 2002 to 2022

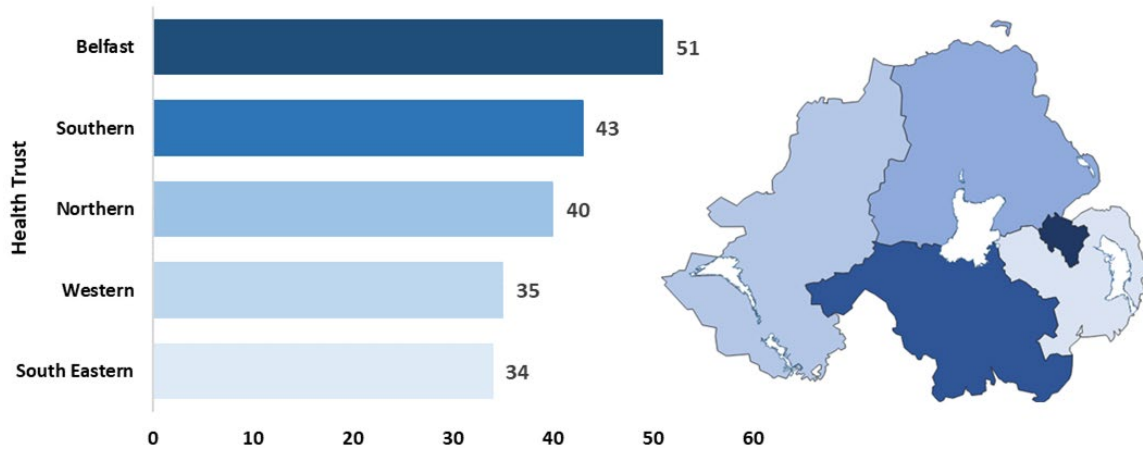


In 2022, the suicide rate for males was 19.2 deaths per 100,000, down from 21.6 deaths per 100,000 in 2021. The corresponding rates among females were 5.7 deaths per 100,000 in 2020, down from 7.2 deaths per 100,000 in 2021.

Health Trust

Figure 4 shows that, of the five Health and Social Care Trusts, Belfast had the highest number of suicides in 2022 (51). This was followed by the Southern Trust (43), Northern Trust (40), and Western Trust (35). The South-Eastern Trust had the lowest number of suicides in 2022 at 34.

Figure 4: Number of Deaths from Suicide in NI by Health Trust, 2022



Crude Suicide Rate by Marital Status

102 (50.2 per cent) of the total suicide deaths in 2022 were of single individuals at the time of their death, and 71 (35.0 per cent) were married, 19 (9.4 per cent) divorced and 11 (5.4 per cent) widowed. In every year since 2014, more than 50 per cent of suicide deaths had a marital status of single.

Figure 5 shows that the crude suicide rate per 100,000 population was higher for those divorced (20.8) or single (17.7) compared to those recorded as widowed (11.4) or married (9.5). While these figures tend to fluctuate year on year, the general trend

What is Crude Mortality Rate?

Crude mortality rate is a measure of the number deaths from suicide scaled to the size of that population. In this bulletin, crude mortality rates are presented per 100,000 people and are sourced from the NI Census.

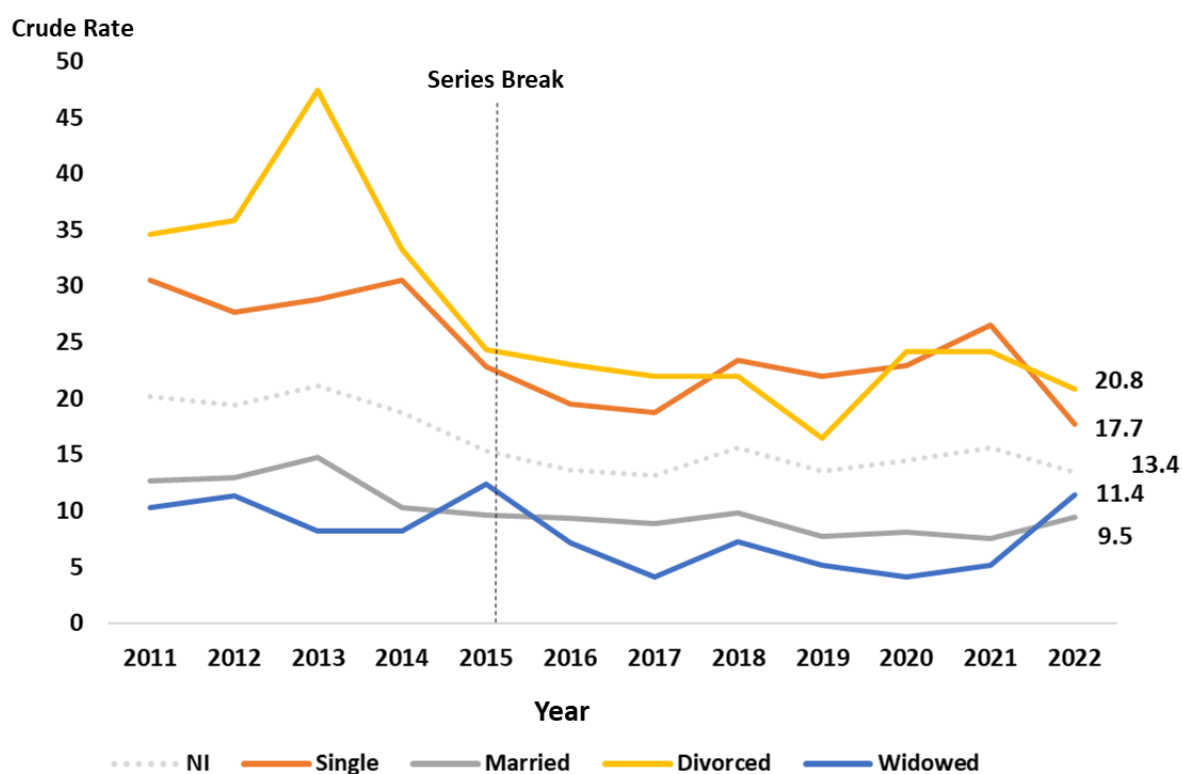
Why use a Crude Mortality Rate?

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](#)

of a higher suicide rate for single and divorced individuals is consistent with other jurisdictions.

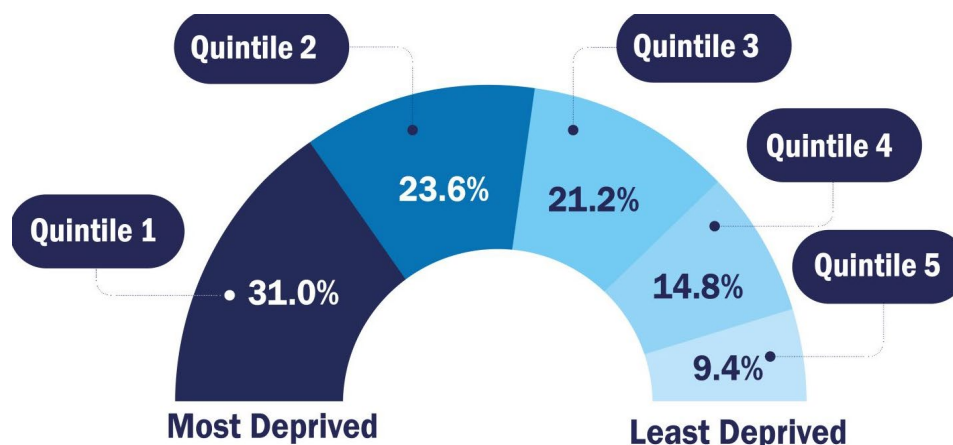
Figure 5 Mortality Rate per 100,000 Population by Marital Status, 2011-2022



Deprivation

Figure 6 shows that the percentage of suicides in 2022 from Northern Ireland's most deprived areas (31.0 per cent) was over three times that of the least deprived areas (9.4 per cent).

Figure 6 Percentage of Suicides by NI Multiple Deprivation Measure (2017), 2022



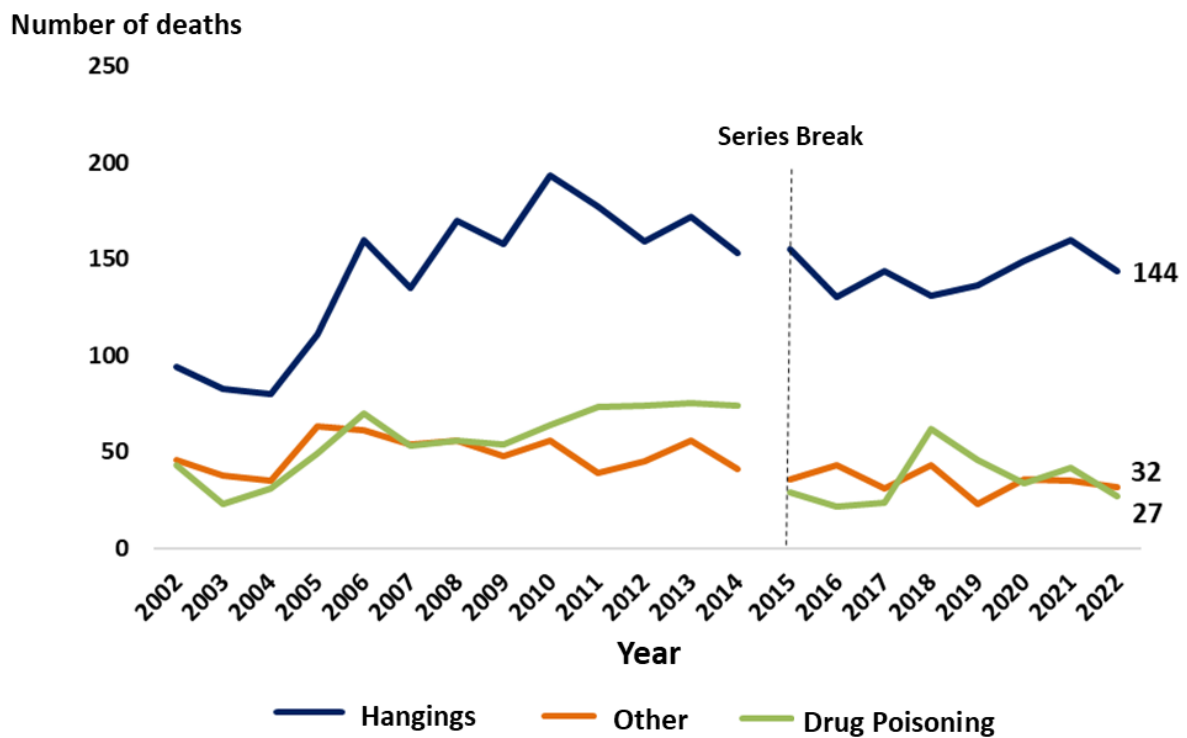
Method of suicide¹

As in previous years, the most common method of suicide in Northern Ireland was hanging, suffocation or strangulation. In 2022, this accounted for 70.9 per cent of all suicide deaths (144 deaths) (see Figure 7).

In 2022 drug poisoning, accounted for 13.3 per cent of all suicides (27 deaths). The remaining 15.8 per cent were made up of other methods of suicide.

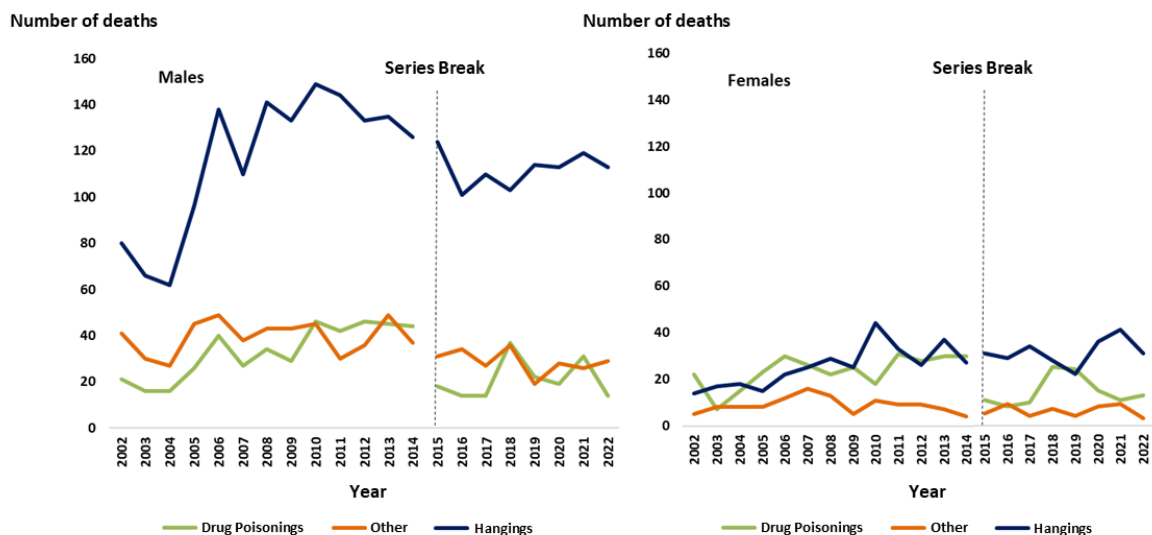
¹ Media professionals should exercise caution on referencing this data in media releases. Please see *Information for the Media* for further information.

Figure 7: Number of suicide deaths by Method, Northern Ireland, 2002 to 2022



When looking further at analysis by sex (Figure 8 & 9), the number of hangings among males dropped notably from 2015 to 2016 after which the numbers have shown a general increase.

Figure 8 & 9: Male and Female suicide deaths in N Ireland by method, 2002-2022

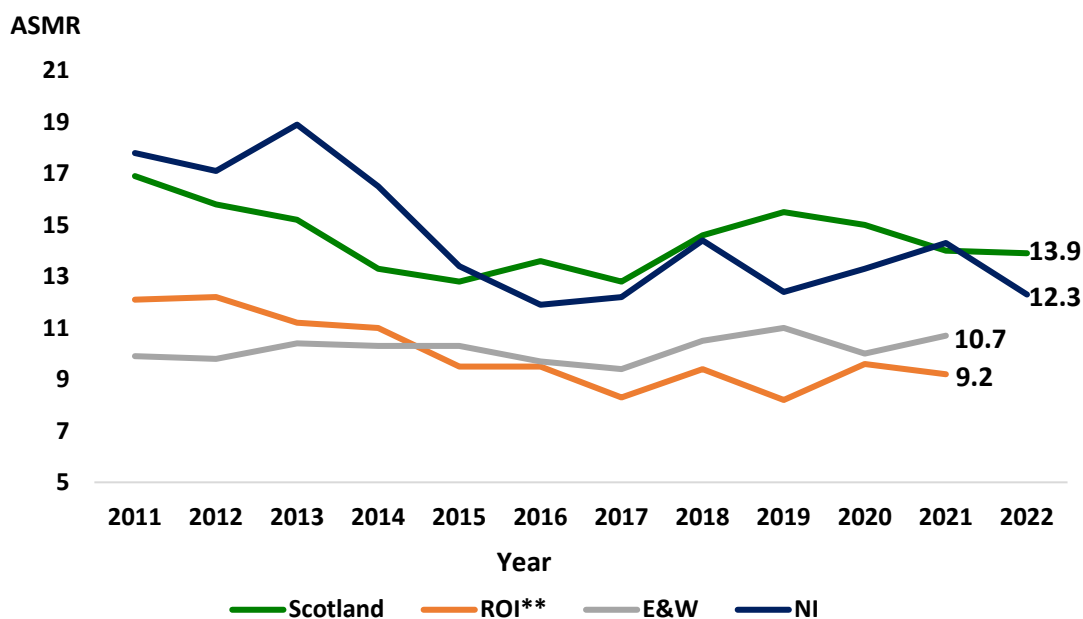


In contrast, the most common method of suicide over time for females varies between hanging and drug poisoning but in recent years hanging is generally the most common method.

Age-standardised Mortality Rates by Country

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 age. Figure 10 shows that after accounting for the age structure of each country across the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland, the suicide ASMRs for Northern Ireland have fluctuated in recent years and are closely aligned 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 rates by country



**ROI ASMR are based on Occurrence year figures

For the latest year, 2022, the Northern Ireland rate was 12.3 suicides per 100,000 population. This is lower than the 13.9 suicides per 100,000 population for [Scotland](#) but notably above the most recent rate for [England and Wales](#) at 10.7 suicides per 100,000 in 2021. 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 are available later in the report.

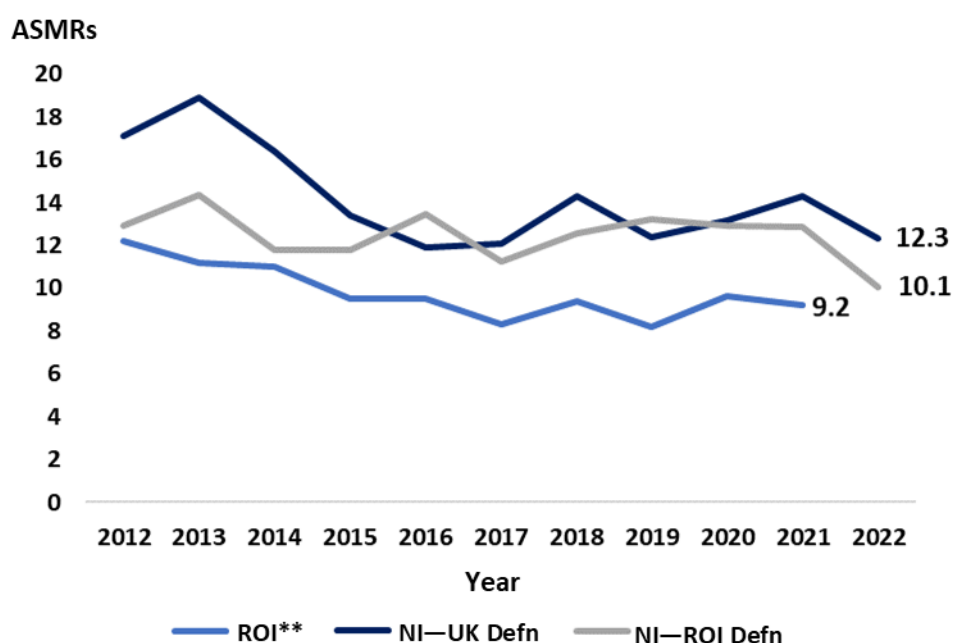
ROI Definition

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 (ROI) 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 suicide rate calculated using both definitions and allows a direct comparison with ROI.

Figure 11: Age-standardised Suicide Rate based on Republic of Ireland Definition, 2012 to 2022



Regardless of the definition used for comparison, NI's suicide rate is consistently higher than that in ROI. The suicide rate in ROI in 2021 (latest available) was 9.2 deaths per 100,000 and the comparative figure for NI was 10.1 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.

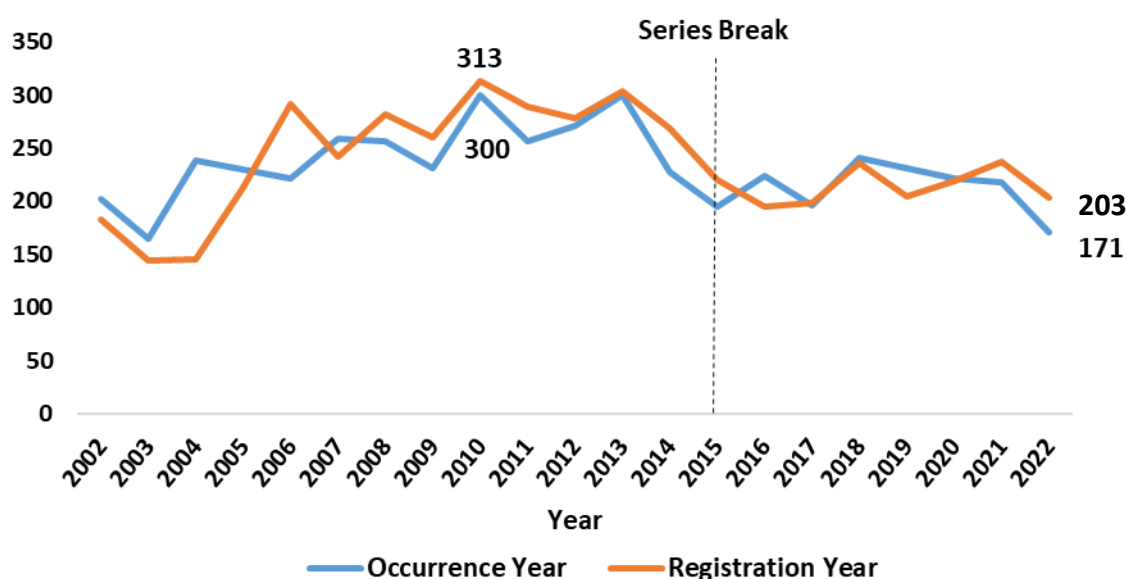
NISRA is only notified that a death has occurred once it is registered with the GRO and a significant number of suicide deaths registered in any year will have occurred in earlier years. For example, of the 203 such deaths registered in 2022, 71 occurred in 2022, 113 in 2021, 8 in 2020, with the remaining 11 occurring in 2019 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 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.

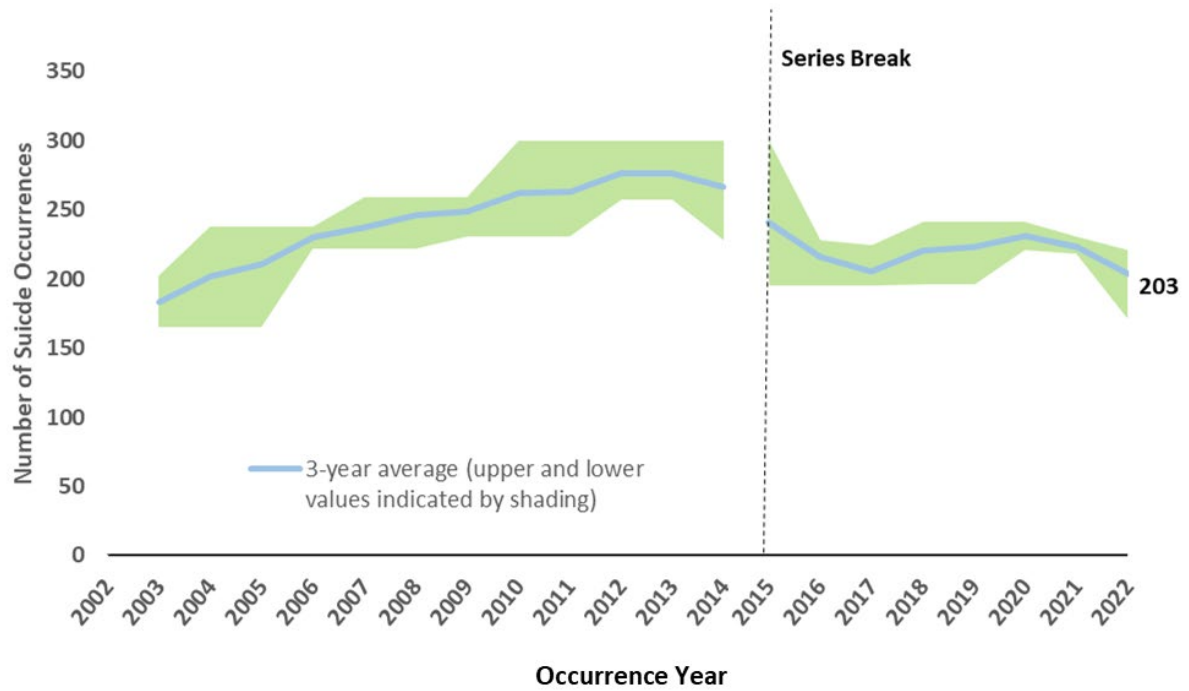
Figure 12 presents a comparison of the number of deaths registered from suicide in Northern Ireland and the number occurring. Annual fluctuations are expected between these two series, given the median time from death to registration is constantly changing.

Figure 12: Number of suicide deaths in NI by Registration & Occurrence Year, 2002-2022



Users are therefore cautioned against drawing inferences based on 1 year changes. Information is presented in Figure 13 on occurrence trends based on a '3-year rolling average' approach.

Figure 13: Number of suicide deaths (3-year rolling average) in NI by Occurrence Year, 2002-2022



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 \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

[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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This is a National Statistics publication.

National 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.

The UK Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs
- are well explained and readily accessible
- are produced according to sound methods
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

NISRA Consultation

NISRA recently consulted on proposed changes to a range of statistical outputs. The consultation, which ended on 15 October, sought views from users and help NISRA to address the financial constraints imposed by the budget settlement for 2023-24, whilst minimising the impact on users and stakeholders. The full the outcome of the consultation, including users' responses, actions planned and mitigations, can be found at <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/outputs-consultation>

Contact Details

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