

CRIME AND JUSTICE

Recorded Crime in Scotland: December 2020

This Official Statistics bulletin presents information on the number of crimes and offences recorded by the police in Scotland during December 2020. It also includes a comparison with the equivalent month of the previous year.

These Official Statistics were introduced from April 2020 to inform users about the volume and type of crimes and offences recorded in Scotland during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Whilst the restrictions put in place to limit the spread of the virus will have had an impact on the number of crimes and offences recorded by the police, some caution is advised before necessarily attributing all of the changes to this situation. For example, longer term trends in some types of offending, which existed prior to the pandemic, may remain a factor.

The annual [Recorded Crime in Scotland bulletin](#) remains the primary source of information on crimes and offences recorded by the police, and has been designated as National Statistics by the Office for Statistics Regulation. The most recent update, covering the 2019-20 reporting year, was published on 29th September 2020.

Statistics on crimes and offences recorded by the police provide a measure of the volume of criminal activity with which the police are faced. Crimes recorded by the police do not reveal the incidence of all crimes committed as not all crimes are reported to the police.

Summary

The number of crimes recorded by the police in Scotland was 5% lower in December 2020 than in December 2019, decreasing from 19,209 to 18,229.

Over the same time period:

- Non-sexual crimes of violence were 3% lower (decreasing from 723 to 698 crimes).
- Sexual crimes were 9% lower (decreasing from 968 to 885 crimes).
- Crimes of dishonesty were 9% lower (reducing from 8,502 to 7,767 crimes).
- Fire-raising, vandalism etc. were 8% lower (reducing from 3,930 to 3,605 crimes).
- Other crimes were 4% higher (increasing from 5,086 to 5,274 crimes).
- Fewer crimes were recorded by the police in 18 (56%) out of 32 local authorities.

The number of offences recorded by the police in Scotland was 11% lower in December 2020 than in December 2019, decreasing from 20,597 to 18,374.

Over the same time period:

- Miscellaneous offences were 14% lower (decreasing from 10,938 to 9,382).
- Motor vehicle offences were 7% lower (decreasing from 9,659 to 8,992).

Overall, the number of crimes recorded by the police between April and December 2020 was 6% lower than the same period in 2019. In April 2020 recorded crime was 18% lower than April 2019. For the most recent month - December 2020 - recorded crime was 5% lower than in December 2019. As outlined above, the annual [Recorded Crime in Scotland bulletin](#) remains the primary source of information on crimes and offences recorded by the police in Scotland, including longer-term analysis of changes to each of the crime and offence groups detailed above.

Main findings

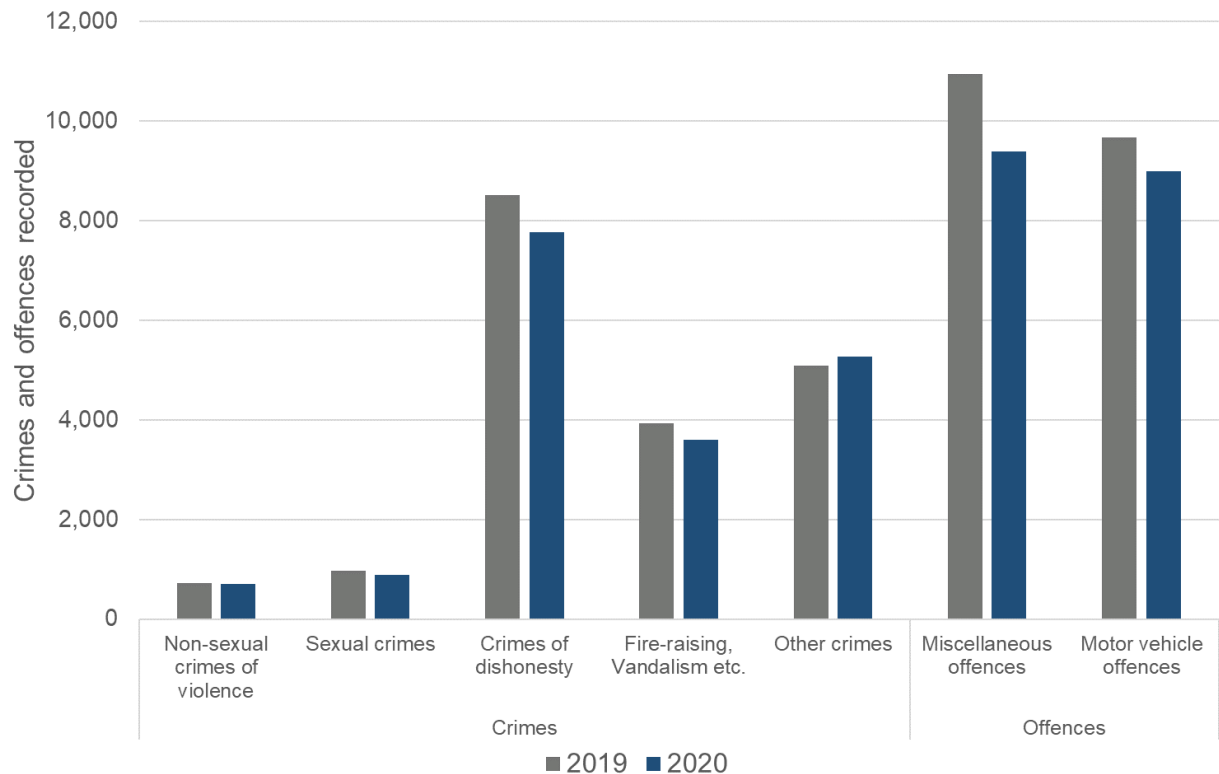
Crimes recorded by the police

In December 2020, the police recorded 18,229 crimes. This is 5% lower (or 980 crimes) than the 19,209 crimes recorded in the same month of 2019. There were variations in the year-on-year trends between different crime types. ([Table 1](#), [Chart 1](#)).

Between December 2019 and December 2020:

- Non-sexual crimes of violence were 3% lower (or 25 crimes), decreasing from 723 to 698. The most marked decrease was in Attempted murder and serious assault, which decreased by 75 crimes (22%), from 335 to 260. Crimes recorded under the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 decreased by 6 crimes (4%), from 134 to 128. Other violence increased by 51 crimes (41%), from 125 to 176.
- Sexual crimes were 9% lower (a decrease of 83 crimes), decreasing from 968 to 885 crimes. The main contributor to this decrease by volume was Sexual assault, which decreased by 18% (or 63 crimes), from 341 to 278.
- Crimes of dishonesty were 9% lower (or 735 crimes), reducing from 8,502 to 7,767 crimes. All categories experienced a decrease with the exception of Fraud (which increased by 65%, from 905 to 1,497 crimes). The [Changes in levels of recorded fraud](#) section below provides users with further background on what may be contributing to this change. The overall decrease in Crimes of dishonesty was driven by decreases in Shoplifting (which decreased by 23% from 2,377 to 1,829 crimes), Other theft (which decreased by 16% from 3,090 to 2,591 crimes) and Housebreaking (which decreased by 15% from 1,019 to 862 crimes).
- Fire-raising, vandalism etc. decreased by 8%, from 3,930 to 3,605 crimes. Within this, crimes of Fire-raising decreased by 17% from 217 to 181 crimes, and Vandalism etc. decreased by 8% from 3,713 crimes to 3,424 crimes.
- Other crimes were 4% higher (or 188 crimes), increasing from 5,086 to 5,274 crimes. The main contributor to this increase by volume was Crimes against public justice (which rose by 12% or 200 crimes).

Chart 1. Crimes and offences recorded by the police, by crime group, December 2020 compared with December 2019



Offences recorded by the police

In December 2020, the police recorded 18,374 offences. This is 11% lower (or 2,223 offences) than the 20,597 offences recorded in the same month in 2019. There was a 14% decrease in Miscellaneous offences, and a 7% decrease in Motor vehicle offences, as detailed below ([Table 2](#)).

Between December 2019 and December 2020:

- Miscellaneous offences decreased by 14% (or 1,556 offences), from 10,938 to 9,382. All categories experienced a decrease with the exception of Other miscellaneous offences (which increased 13% or 139 offences). The most prominent decreases were in Common assault (which decreased by 19% from 5,175 to 4,185 offences), Breach of the peace etc. which decreased by 12% (from 4,197 to 3,703) and Urinating etc., which decreased by 83% (from 222 to 37).
- Motor vehicle offences were 7% lower (or 667 offences), decreasing from 9,659 to 8,992. The main contributor to this decrease was Other motor vehicle offences, which fell by 16% (or 341 offences).

Local Authorities

Compared to December 2019, a decrease in recorded crime was seen in 18 (56%) out of 32 local authorities, with 14 showing an increase ([Table 3](#)). The largest increase was seen in the Shetland Islands (up 63%) and the largest decrease was in Na h-Eileanan Siar (down 35%). It should be noted that the relatively small number of crimes recorded in some of Scotland's local authorities can fluctuate over time - leading to large percentage changes. This is particularly relevant in this release, where monthly data is being presented rather than the annual information provided in the National Statistics.

The biggest contributors by volume to the overall decrease in crimes recorded by the police were Glasgow City (down 17% or 568 crimes), Edinburgh City (down 13% or 295 crimes) and South Ayrshire (down 24% or 94 crimes).

April to December 2020 compared with April to December 2019

Overall, in April to December 2020 the police recorded 176,562 crimes, a reduction of 6% (or 10,951 crimes) compared to the same period in 2019 (187,513 crimes) ([Table 4](#)). The biggest drivers of this reduction by volume were Shoplifting (down 32% or 7,590 crimes), Other theft (down 18% or 5,753), and Vandalism etc. (down 11% or 3,830 crimes). Fraud saw the biggest increase over this period, growing by 64% (or 5,028 crimes) from 7,879 to 12,907 crimes. Crimes against public justice were also higher, increasing by 32% (or 4,648 crimes) from 14,720 to 19,368.

Over the same period, the number of offences recorded by the police was 6% lower (or 12,072 offences), with Miscellaneous offences decreasing by 3% (or 3,106 offences) and Motor vehicle offences falling by 10% (or 8,966 offences) ([Table 5](#)).

Changes in levels of recorded fraud

Fraud was 65% higher (or 592 crimes) in December 2020 than in December 2019. Further to the note of caution provided in the introduction to these statistics, there are two reasons why some care is advised before attributing all of this change to the specific circumstances of the COVID-related lockdown.

The first is that the [Recorded Crime National Statistics](#) have highlighted an increasing trend in recorded fraud over a number of years (up 73% between 2014-15 and 2019-20), which may be continuing. The second is that a procedural change was made in April 2020 to how some crimes of fraud (and other types of crime which could involve a victim and a perpetrator in different physical locations) are recorded.

Prior to the 1st April 2020, these statistics excluded any crime with a victim in Scotland and a perpetrator who was confirmed by the police to be outside the United Kingdom when the crime took place. Following a recommendation by Her Majesty's Chief Inspectorate for Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) to review recording practice in this area¹, the Scottish Crime Recording Board approved a change so that from the 1st April these crimes are now included in the statistics. It should be noted that those cases with only a suspicion or insufficient evidence to confirm that the perpetrator was outside the UK were always included.

This change is likely to have led to additional crimes of fraud being recorded, with a similar impact possible for other types of crime which could be committed using digital technologies. At this early stage we are unable to say to what extent this procedural change has increased levels of recorded fraud, though the 2020-21 National Statistics (to be published in September 2021) will provide users with an estimate of the number of additional crimes that were recorded as a result of this change.

¹ <https://www.hmics.scot/publications/crime-audit-2016>

Crimes recorded under coronavirus legislation

It is important to note that these Official Statistics currently exclude crimes recorded under coronavirus legislation such as the [Coronavirus Act 2020](#) and [Health Protection \(Coronavirus\) \(Restrictions\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2020](#). These were implemented on 25th March and 27th March respectively and resulted in new crimes being recorded - for example where someone, who had left the place they were living, did not have a reasonable excuse for this when asked by a police officer, and failed to comply with police advice or instruction to return there.

Given the rapid pace of these changes, Police Scotland have used an interim and bespoke data collection to capture information on the number of new crimes recorded under the coronavirus legislation. This is why figures for this legislation are currently presented separately to the overall totals provided for recorded crime in this bulletin. The bespoke data collection suggests that 1,540 such crimes were recorded during December 2020. This month's figure is lower than the previous month and considerably lower than April (see Table A below). Users should treat these figures as broadly indicative, and may be subject to further revision in future releases. In due course the annual National Statistics will include this activity within the overall crime total for Scotland.

Table A: Number of crimes recorded under coronavirus legislation, April to December 2020

Month	Number of crimes recorded
April	2,741
May	1,654
June	219
July	17
August	21
September	189
October	588
November	1,811
December	1,540

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Notes for these tables

- The symbol 'n/r' is used to denote where a percentage change figure is not reported. This is done if the denominator is less than ten as any resulting figure may be misleading.
- Please note that tables 1, 2, 4 and 5 can be accessed at local authority level online via the following link: <http://www.gov.scot/ISBN/978-1-80004-594-1>

Table 1: Crimes recorded by the police, Scotland, December 2019 and December 2020

Crime group	December		% Change since December 2019
	2019	2020	
Total crimes¹	19,209	18,229	-5%
Non-sexual crimes of violence	723	698	-3%
Homicide etc.	6	9	n/r
Attempted murder & serious assault	335	260	-22%
Robbery	123	125	2%
Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018	134	128	-4%
Other violence	125	176	41%
Sexual crimes	968	885	-9%
Rape & attempted rape	175	142	-19%
Sexual assault	341	278	-18%
Crimes associated with prostitution	6	7	n/r
Other sexual crimes	446	458	3%
Crimes of dishonesty	8,502	7,767	-9%
Housebreaking	1,019	862	-15%
Theft by opening a lockfast place (OLP)	154	115	-25%
Theft from a motor vehicle by OLP	200	173	-14%
Theft of a motor vehicle	381	346	-9%
Shoplifting	2,377	1,829	-23%
Other theft	3,090	2,591	-16%
Fraud	905	1,497	65%
Other dishonesty	376	354	-6%
Fire-raising, vandalism etc.	3,930	3,605	-8%
Fire-raising	217	181	-17%
Vandalism etc.	3,713	3,424	-8%
Other crimes	5,086	5,274	4%
Crimes against public justice	1,728	1,928	12%
Handling offensive weapons	716	656	-8%
<i>Not used in other criminal activity</i>	313	326	4%
<i>Used in other criminal activity</i>	403	330	-18%
Drugs	2,627	2,677	2%
Other	15	13	-13%

1. The total figure for recorded crime excludes the new crimes being recorded under the recently enacted coronavirus legislation. Please see the [Crimes recorded under coronavirus legislation section](#) for more information.

Table 2: Offences recorded by the police, Scotland, December 2019 and December 2020

Crime group	December		% Change since December 2019
	2019	2020	
Total offences	20,597	18,374	-11%
Miscellaneous offences	10,938	9,382	-14%
Common assault	5,175	4,185	-19%
Breach of the peace etc.	4,197	3,703	-12%
Drunkenness and other disorderly conduct	280	254	-9%
Urinating etc.	222	37	-83%
Other miscellaneous offences	1,064	1,203	13%
Motor vehicle offences	9,659	8,992	-7%
Dangerous and careless driving	1,009	893	-11%
Driving under the influence	693	578	-17%
Speeding	1,733	1,561	-10%
Unlawful use of vehicle	3,306	3,602	9%
Vehicle defect offences	568	436	-23%
Seat belt offences	125	83	-34%
Mobile phone offences	131	86	-34%
Other motor vehicle offences	2,094	1,753	-16%

Table 3: Crimes recorded by the police by local authority, Scotland, December 2019 and December 2020

	December		Change since December 2019
	2019	2020	
Aberdeen City	934	929	-1%
Aberdeenshire	521	491	-6%
Angus	202	279	38%
Argyll & Bute	149	190	28%
Clackmannanshire	178	142	-20%
Dumfries & Galloway	462	504	9%
Dundee City	805	804	0%
East Ayrshire	489	452	-8%
East Dunbartonshire	215	230	7%
East Lothian	292	352	21%
East Renfrewshire	177	139	-21%
Edinburgh City	2,259	1,964	-13%
Falkirk	563	534	-5%
Fife	1,052	1,175	12%
Glasgow City	3,300	2,732	-17%
Highland	655	590	-10%
Inverclyde	322	268	-17%
Midlothian	320	344	8%
Moray	227	240	6%
Na h-Eileanan Siar	65	42	-35%
North Ayrshire	475	543	14%
North Lanarkshire	1,480	1,394	-6%
Orkney Islands	25	18	-28%
Perth & Kinross	382	396	4%
Renfrewshire	619	586	-5%
Scottish Borders	311	322	4%
Shetland Islands	24	39	63%
South Ayrshire	390	296	-24%
South Lanarkshire	1,121	1,041	-7%
Stirling	315	243	-23%
West Dunbartonshire	325	335	3%
West Lothian	555	615	11%
Scotland¹	19,209	18,229	-5%

1. The total figure for recorded crime excludes the new crimes being recorded under the recently enacted coronavirus legislation. Please see the [Crimes recorded under coronavirus legislation section](#) for more information.

Table 4: Crimes recorded by the police, Scotland, April to December 2019 and April to December 2020

Crime group	April to December 2019	April to December 2020	% Change since 2019
Total crimes¹	187,513	176,562	-6%
Non-sexual crimes of violence	7,191	6,677	-7%
Homicide etc.	94	75	-20%
Attempted murder & serious assault	3,260	2,681	-18%
Robbery	1,279	1,300	2%
Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018	1,300	1,167	-10%
Other violence	1,258	1,454	16%
Sexual crimes	10,159	9,469	-7%
Rape & attempted rape	1,849	1,676	-9%
Sexual assault	3,803	2,989	-21%
Crimes associated with prostitution	71	36	-49%
Other sexual crimes	4,436	4,768	7%
Crimes of dishonesty	83,717	72,804	-13%
Housebreaking	9,524	7,906	-17%
Theft by opening a lockfast place (OLP)	1,328	941	-29%
Theft from a motor vehicle by OLP	2,065	1,681	-19%
Theft of a motor vehicle	3,694	3,372	-9%
Shoplifting	23,715	16,125	-32%
Other theft	31,933	26,180	-18%
Fraud	7,879	12,907	64%
Other dishonesty	3,579	3,692	3%
Fire-raising, vandalism etc.	36,649	32,760	-11%
Fire-raising	2,092	2,033	-3%
Vandalism etc.	34,557	30,727	-11%
Other crimes	49,797	54,852	10%
Crimes against public justice	14,720	19,368	32%
Handling offensive weapons	7,413	7,875	6%
<i>Not used in other criminal activity</i>	3,408	3,639	7%
<i>Used in other criminal activity</i>	4,005	4,236	6%
Drugs	27,503	27,481	0%
Other	161	128	-20%

1. The total figure for recorded crime excludes the new crimes being recorded under the recently enacted coronavirus legislation. Please see the [Crimes recorded under coronavirus legislation section](#) for more information.

Table 5: Offences recorded by the police, Scotland, April to December 2019 and April to December 2020

Crime group	April to December 2019	April to December 2020	% Change since 2019
Total offences	192,039	179,967	-6%
Miscellaneous offences	99,848	96,742	-3%
Common assault	44,474	40,112	-10%
Breach of the peace etc.	39,162	39,023	0%
Drunkenness and other disorderly conduct	4,440	4,730	7%
Urinating etc.	1,822	717	-61%
Other miscellaneous offences	9,950	12,160	22%
Motor vehicle offences	92,191	83,225	-10%
Dangerous and careless driving	8,773	8,670	-1%
Driving under the influence	4,926	6,361	29%
Speeding	22,301	16,150	-28%
Unlawful use of vehicle	28,974	29,664	2%
Vehicle defect offences	5,278	4,813	-9%
Seat belt offences	2,262	1,382	-39%
Mobile phone offences	1,887	1,304	-31%
Other motor vehicle offences	17,790	14,881	-16%

Annexes

Annex 1: Background

As outlined on page one, these monthly Official Statistics have been introduced to inform users about the volume and type of crimes and offences recorded in Scotland during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Their role is to provide more recent information on this topic - in a product that has been produced by Scottish Government statisticians, in line with the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#).

Scottish Government statisticians will continue to publish these bulletins each month. In due course, the Scottish Crime Recording Board (which oversees the production of Official Statistics on recorded crime in Scotland) will review whether this process should continue, including user feedback on the value of these statistics.

The annual [Recorded Crime in Scotland](#) bulletin remains the primary source of information on crimes and offences recorded by the police, and has been designated as National Statistics by the Office for Statistics Regulation. The most recent update, covering the 2019-20 reporting year, was published on 29th September 2020. Users should refer to the National Statistics for more detailed information on the production of the recorded crime statistics - including governance arrangements, a description of their quality, background methodologies and changes to recording practice.

Annex 2: Data Sources

Since 2013-14, the National Statistics on Recorded Crime in Scotland have been produced using data extracted from a single Police Scotland IT system called the Scottish Operational and Management Information System (ScOMIS). This data is then provided to the Scottish Government for the production of the National Statistics.

In 2019, Police Scotland developed a new data repository called the Source for Evidence Based Policing (SEBP). The intention is that this will, in due course, become the official source of information for the recorded crime National Statistics, replacing ScOMIS.

A preliminary review, looking at how changing from ScOMIS to SEBP impacts on the production of the Recorded Crime National Statistics, suggests that there is good alignment between both of these administrative systems.

Before the Scottish Crime Recording Board (SCRB) approves this transition, a final confirmatory check of the full 2019-20 reporting year has been carried out. This involved a comparison of trends in recorded crimes, offences and clear up rates for all local authorities and Scotland as a whole between 2018-

19 and 2019-20. A technical report detailing the results of this analysis and highlighting any implications for data interpretation will be published in due course.

In order to produce the new monthly Official Statistics included in this bulletin in the necessary shorter time frames, the information supplied by Police Scotland has been extracted from SEBP. As such, the figures provided in this publication use a different source from the most recent National Statistics on Recorded Crime in Scotland – and are therefore not directly comparable (notwithstanding the preliminary finding noted above that there is good alignment between the two systems).

In addition, amendments to crime and offence records will always arise after data has been submitted by Police Scotland to the Scottish Government. Some crime or offence records may, on further investigation by the police, be redesignated to not constitute a crime or offence (a process known as ‘no-criming’). In other cases the original crime or offence may be re-classified, which could shift the record between different crime or offence groups (for example if a common assault was found on further investigation to be a serious assault it would switch from Group 6 Miscellaneous Offences to Group 1 Non-sexual Crimes of Violence).

The data for this bulletin was extracted in January 2020. The information for December 2019 is unlikely to change as more than a year has passed since the crimes were originally recorded and the vast majority of amendments are likely to have taken place. In contrast, there has been a much shorter time for amendments to have been made to the information for December 2020 and so this information is likely to change to a greater extent as more time passes. Some caution should therefore be taken in interpreting the changes between 2019 and 2020, as outlined in these monthly bulletins, which should be seen as providing a broad indication of changes over the period in volumes and types of specific crimes and offences.

The annual National Statistics for 2019-20 and 2020-21 (when published) will provide the most robust source of information on crimes recorded by the police, and how these have changed over time.

For further background information (e.g. classification of Crimes and Offences and comparisons with England & Wales and Northern Ireland) please see Annex 1 in the latest National Statistics on Recorded Crime in Scotland: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/recorded-crime-scotland-2019-2020/>

Annex 3: Feedback

We are always keen to hear users' views on our products and as this is a new series of monthly recorded crime publications we would welcome feedback. If you have any comments or suggestions please contact us at:

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An Official Statistics publication for Scotland

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How to access background or source data

The data collected for this statistical bulletin:

- are available in more detail through statistics.gov.scot.
- some limited additional information may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact statistics.enquiries@gov.scot for further information.
- detailed information cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.

Complaints and suggestions

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