

Online Crime

Home Office Definition and guidance: Online crime (formerly cyber crime) is identified through the use of a 'flag' on the crime recording system. Its aim is to help provide a national and local picture of the extent to which the internet and digital communications technology are being used to commit crimes. An offence should be flagged where the reporting officer believes that on the balance of probability the offence was committed, in full or in part, through a computer, computer network or other computer-enabled device.

Below is an outline of the circumstances in which a crime should be flagged as 'online':
a crime was committed *online or through internet-based* activities, such as: sending or receiving emails, use of social media or networking sites, use of internet forums or blogs, online auction or retail sites, communication via online video game networks or communications platforms; and
a 'computer, computer network or other computer-enabled devices were used to commit a crime. This includes desktop computers or laptops in the home or in the workplace, smartphones, tablets and other telecommunications devices linked to computer networks, or any other identifiable computer system or network that produces, processes and transmits data.

In the following circumstances a crime should not be flagged as 'online':
the crime has already been recorded by Action Fraud (ie in the case of fraud and computer misuse offences).
the crime only involved a phone network to make phone calls or send/receive text messages, rather than an internet network. Some use of a computer network or internet technology is required.
the computer was used to make or design fraudulent items such as fake gift or shopping vouchers.
the offence involved theft of computers or other internet-enabled devices.
the crime was committed using a machine but the intention was not to interact with the computer e.g. theft at an ATM or self-service tills.

The first complete financial year for which online crimes are available is 2014/15. As Action Fraud took over responsibility for the central recording of fraud and cyber crime previously recorded by PSNI from 1 April 2015, the figures provided here exclude Action Fraud.

Data quality: While crimes included within the police recorded crime statistics for Northern Ireland are individually checked for compliance with the Home Office Counting Rules, the identification of an online crime is derived from a motivation 'tick box' on the system used by PSNI to record crime. The motivation is identified and completed by a police officer or member of police staff for each such reported incident or crime. The correct application of an online motivation for all such incidents/crimes is not quality assured by the PSNI's Statistics Branch. As Online Crime has not been assessed as a National Statistic it is being presented here as an Official Statistic.

Key points to note

Crimes: As there may be more than one crime recorded within an individual incident, it is possible for the number of crimes with a particular hate motivation to be higher than the number of incidents with that motivation.

Incidents and Crimes: Hate-motivated crimes and hate-motivated incidents should not be added together as crimes for each motivation strand are included in the incident count for each hate motivation strand.

Revisions to incidents and crimes with a faith/religion or racist motivation recorded during 2016/17: Additional data quality checks on faith/religion motivations identified a number of incidents requiring a faith/religion motivation that had not previously been included in the figures. A small number of incidents were also found to have been incorrectly allocated a racist motivation and were subsequently amended to faith/religion.

These checks were completed for the financial years 2016/17 and 2017/18. Similar checks will be conducted for the years prior to 2016/17 and any revisions to these figures will be incorporated in the next annual trends publication. As the data quality checks have not yet been completed for all financial years, any comparison of the faith/religion motivations provided in this publication with previously published figures should be avoided until the annual trends bulletin is published, the date for which will be pre-announced in due course.

Hate Motivations

Hate Motivation Definitions

Hate crime is defined as any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone based on a personal characteristic. PSNI also use the principles of this definition to record non-crime hate incidents. Within PSNI there are six strands of hate motivation that are monitored; Race, Homophobia (sexual orientation), Sectarianism, Faith/religion (non-sectarian), Disability and Transphobia.

Race

A racial group can be defined as a group of persons defined by reference to race, colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins (this includes UK National origins i.e. Scottish, English, Welsh and Irish) and references to a person's racial group refer to any racial group into which he/she falls. Racial group includes the Irish Traveller community.

Homophobia (sexual orientation)

Homophobia can be defined as a fear or dislike directed towards lesbian, gay or bisexual people, or a fear or dislike directed towards their perceived lifestyle, culture or characteristics. Sexual orientation can be defined as an individual's preference for a particular sex (be it the opposite or the same), or an individual's view of their own sexuality.

Sectarianism

The term 'sectarian', whilst not clearly defined, is a term almost exclusively used in Northern Ireland to describe incidents of bigoted dislike or hatred of members of a different religious or political group. It is broadly accepted that within the Northern Ireland context an individual or group must be perceived to be Catholic or Protestant, Nationalist or Unionist, or Loyalist or Republican. However sectarianism can also relate to other religious denominations, for example, Sunni and Shi'ite in Islam.

Faith/Religion (non-sectarian)

A faith or religious group can be defined as a group of persons defined by reference to religious belief or lack of religious belief. This would include Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and different sects within a religion. It also includes people who hold no religious belief at all.

Disability (or Disablist)

Any disability including physical or sensory disability, learning disability, long-term illness and mental health.

Transphobia

Includes people who are transsexual, transgender, transvestite and those who hold the gender recognition certificate under the Gender Recognition Act 2004.

The Perception Test

Evidence is not the test when reporting a hate incident; when an incident or crime has been reported to police by the victim or by any other person and they perceive it as being motivated by prejudice or hate, it will be recorded and investigated as a hate incident or crime. The perception of the victim, or any other person is the defining factor in determining whether an incident is a hate incident, or in recognising the hostility element of a hate crime. Perception-based recording refers to the perception of the victim, or any other person.

It would not be appropriate to record a crime or incident as a hate crime or hate incident if it was based on the perception of a person or group who had no knowledge of the victim, crime or the area, and who may be responding to media or internet stories or who are reporting for a political or similar motive. The other person could, however, be one of a number of people, including: police officers or staff; witnesses; family members; civil society organisations who know details of the victim, the crime or hate crimes in the locality, such as a third-party reporting charity; a carer or other professional who supports the victim; someone who has knowledge of hate crime in the area – this could include many professionals and experts such as the manager of an education centre used by people with learning disabilities who regularly receives reports of abuse from students; a person from within the group targeted with the hostility, eg, a Traveller who witnessed racist damage in a local park.

¹A crime will be recorded as having a hate motivation where it meets the relevant definition provided above. Not all hate motivated incidents will result in the recording of a crime, as what has occurred in the incident may not be of the level of severity that would result in a notifiable offence being recorded. Where crimes with a hate motivation are recorded they are classified according to the Home Office Counting Rules and form a subset of the overall police recorded crime statistics. Further details of the background and recording practice in relation to police recorded crime statistics are available in the [User Guide to Police Recorded Crime Statistics](#). An explanation of what constitutes an incident and a crime is provided in Section 2.1 of this guide, while reference to hate motivated incidents and crimes is

Hate Motivations

Hate Motivation Definitions

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Race

A racial group can be defined as a group of persons defined by reference to their ethnic or national origins (this includes UK National origins i.e. Scottish, Welsh, Irish, etc.). References to a person's racial group refer to any racial group into which they fall, including the Irish Traveller community.

Homophobia (sexual orientation)

Homophobia can be defined as a fear or dislike directed towards lesbian, gay or bisexual people or dislike directed towards their perceived lifestyle, culture or characteristics. It is defined as an individual's preference for a particular sex (be it the opposite sex or their own view of their own sexuality).

Sectarianism

The term 'sectarian', whilst not clearly defined, is a term almost exclusively used to describe incidents of bigoted dislike or hatred of members of a different religious denomination. It is broadly accepted that within the Northern Ireland context an individual's religious denomination is Catholic or Protestant, Nationalist or Unionist, or Loyalist or Republican. It also includes incidents that relate to other religious denominations, for example, Sunni and Shi'ite.

Faith/Religion (non-sectarian)

A faith or religious group can be defined as a group of persons defined by their shared belief or lack of religious belief. This would include Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, etc. It also includes people who hold no religious belief at all.

Disability (or Disablist)

Any disability including physical or sensory disability, learning disability, mental health, etc.

Transphobia

Includes people who are transsexual, transgender, transvestite and transsexuals who have a Gender Recognition Certificate under the Gender Recognition Act 2004.

The Perception Test

Evidence is not the test when reporting a hate incident; when an incident is reported to the police by the victim or by any other person and they perceive it as being motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone based on a personal characteristic, it will be recorded and investigated as a hate incident or crime. The perception of the person reporting the incident is the defining factor in determining whether an incident is a hate incident. Perception-based recording refers to incidents where the person reporting the incident was based on the perception of a person or group who had no knowledge of the incident and who may be responding to media or internet stories or who are responding to a hate crime for a number of reasons. The other person could, however, be one of a number of people who are likely to witness crimes in the locality, such as a third-party reporting charity; a carer of a victim; someone who has knowledge of hate crime in the area – this could be a police officer, a teacher, a manager of an education centre used by people with a learning disability who receives reports of abuse from students; a person from within the group who witnessed racist damage in a local park.

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2.1 of this guide, while reference to hate motivated incidents and crimes is available, the methods of counting outcomes and allocation of crime types apply equally to crimes motivated by hate.

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transsexual, lesbian, gay or bisexual people, or a fear of them. Sexual orientation can be different to the victim's (opposite or the same), or an individual's

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incident or crime has been reported to the police and it is determined to be motivated by prejudice or hate, it is a hate crime. The perception of the victim, or any other person, or in recognising the nature of the incident, or in recognising the nature of the perception of the victim, or any other person, as a hate crime or hate incident if it is motivated by prejudice or hate. Examples include: police officers or staff; family members of the victim, the crime or hate crime; or other professional who supports the victim. This could include many professionals and staff, including those with learning disabilities who regularly work with the group targeted with the hostility, eg, a

definition provided above. Not all hate crimes are recorded. Only those where the incident may not be of the level of a hate crime are recorded they are included in the overall police recorded crime statistics. Recorded crime statistics are available in the [User Guide](#) and a crime is provided in Section

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