



# Understanding Hate Crime Statistics: A Guide for Organisations

This information sheet provides guidance for criminal justice professionals, journalists, charities and community organisations on interpreting statistics on hate crime.

Police reporting figures shape public debate about hate crime, but their implications can sometimes be difficult to understand. The first section of this resource discusses the meaning and influence of police data. The second section suggests steps that can be taken to determine why a particular increase or decrease in hate crime reporting has occurred.

## Section 1: The meaning and influence of police data

### What does police data mean?

There are many factors that prevent reporting statistics from giving a 'true' picture of hate crime. One of the biggest is under-reporting. To give some context, an estimated 278,000 hate crimes are committed in England and Wales each year according to Government research, yet just 52,528 hate crimes were recorded by the police in these regions during 2014/15.<sup>i</sup> For that reason, the police aim to increase the number of hate crimes reported.

Any change in police figures can be understood in several ways. If the number of hate crimes recorded by the police increases that could mean more offences are being committed, or that communities affected by hate crime are more prepared to report it. If the number of reports decreases, that could be an indication that fewer hate crimes have occurred or that individuals are less inclined to report it than previously. Alternatively, it could be a combination of two factors, for instance, increased willingness to report and more offences happening simultaneously.

### Community impacts of police data

Communities have a right to scrutinise hate crime data in order to hold authorities to account. As part of that process, media organisations are understandably interested in highlighting increases of incidents reported to the police, but they often conflate these with increases in the number of hate crimes being committed. On the other hand, decreases in reporting rarely get media coverage. That leaves many people with the impression that the number of hate crimes committed is constantly on the rise, even at times when the opposite is true.



- **Expert opinion** - Identity-focused organisations, frontline hate crime professionals and academics may be able to provide insight.
- **Significant events** - Bear in mind the influence of high-profile cases, community events, campaigns, staffing changes or community tensions.
- **Community confidence** - Some police forces and local authorities conduct research about local levels of trust in the police. Where the results are analysed by demographic characteristics, this can provide insights into the reporting behaviour of groups facing hate crime.
- **Victim satisfaction** - Satisfaction or dissatisfaction among people who report can influence their future predisposition to do so. Police forces run regular satisfaction surveys with a sample of people who have reported crime to them. It may be possible for them to analyse the answers from individuals who reported a hate crime.
- **Fear of crime** - Some statutory agencies run surveys about fear of crime, which may provide insight into the impact of hate crime.

## Step 4: Investigate complementary data sources

- **Research** - Academic findings on prevalence, reporting and impact can provide valuable context. Findings related to hate crime within the Crime Survey for England and Wales can be particularly helpful.
- **Comparison across strands** - Examining changes to reporting figures across the five strands of hate crime (disability; gender identity; race, ethnicity or nationality; religion, faith or belief; and sexual orientation) may assist in understanding data on hate-motivated offences against a particular group.
- **Police performance data** - This includes police detections (the percentage of reported hate crimes that are 'solved') and conviction rates (the percentage of cases which go to court that result in a guilty verdict).
- **Crown Prosecution Service performance data** - It may be useful to examine the proportion of hate crime recorded by police that goes on to be prosecuted and the proportion resulting in a guilty verdict.

## Step 5: Draw a conclusion

After considering the evidence, make a judgement about whether the change in reported hate crime is positive, negative, neutral or if it is not possible to know. It can be tempting for statutory agencies to conclude that a particular rise is caused by increased confidence in police, while community activists decide the same rise is caused by more hate crime occurring. In order to avoid that, it is necessary to put preconceptions to one side and think objectively. It is sometimes the case that the reason for a change is not possible to know, in which case an increase in reporting might be cautiously welcomed and a drop could be considered a cause for concern.

