We don’t know exactly how many children in the UK are victims of child abuse. Child abuse is usually hidden from view and children may be too young, too scared or too ashamed to tell anyone about what is happening to them.

However, there are a number of different sources of information, including official government statistics and academic research. These give us an indication of the number of children who are affected by abuse.
There were over 58,000 children identified as needing protection from abuse in the UK in 2016.

Source: Child protection register and plan statistics for all UK nations for 2016.

Explanation: There were 58,239 children in the UK on child protection registers or the subject of child protection plans on 31 March 2016 (or 31 July 2016 in Scotland). This is based on figures from each UK nation.

For the source of these figures please see our summary of child protection register and plan statistics in the UK (PDF).

See also Indicator 13 in How safe are our children? 2017.
Reports of sexual offences against children have increased in the UK.

Explanation: There were a total of 54,898 sexual offences against children recorded by the police in the UK in 2015/16. Due to data availability, offences for England and Northern Ireland are against children under 18 and offences for Scotland and Wales are against children under 16.

In 2015/16 police in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales recorded the highest number of sexual offences against children in the past decade.

All 4 nations saw an increase in 2015/16 possibly due to an increased willingness to report abuse following recent high profile sexual abuse cases in the media combined with improved police recording.

See also Indicator 4 in How safe are our children? 2017.
Numbers of children in the child protection system are increasing.

Explanation: In the 2015/16 the total number of children subject to child protection plans (CPPs) or on child protection registers (CPRs) increased in the UK from 57,335 in 2014/15 to 58,239 in 2015/16. The number of children subject to CPPs or added to CPRs increased in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, but decreased slightly in Scotland.

See Indicator 13 in How safe are our children? 2017 and our summary of child protection register and plan statistics for the UK (PDF).

View the trend graph for Children subject to child protection plans or on registers (rate per 10,000 children) (PNG).

Compiling data for How safe are our children? is part of our commitment to evidence.

It helps us to understand the child protection landscape which helps us start a conversation about what’s working and – more importantly – what isn’t, and what we can do about it.

Find out about what we’re fighting for in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and our UK-wide It’s Time campaign to make sure every child gets support after abuse.

Impact and evidence

Find out how we evaluate and research the impact we’re making in protecting children, get tips and tools for researchers and access resources.

Our impact and evidence

Child abuse and neglect statistics
Online abuse
We do not know exactly how many children experience online abuse. But official statistics, research studies and what children tell us, give us a good idea about the abuse they are experiencing.

View facts and statistics

Sexual abuse
A child is sexually abused when they are forced or persuaded to take part in sexual activities. Official statistics show the amount of child sexual abuse recorded by authorities in the year.

View facts and statistics

Physical abuse
We do not know exactly how many children are physically abused. But official statistics, research studies and what children tell us, give us a good idea about the abuse they are experiencing.

View facts and statistics

Neglect
Neglect is the most common reason for a child to be the subject of a child protection plan or on a child protection register in the UK, but it isn’t always easy to identify.

View facts and statistics
Emotional abuse

Official statistics help show us how many children have been identified as being at risk of harm from emotional abuse and research studies give us a better picture of children’s experiences.

View facts and statistics

Child sexual exploitation

Official statistics tell us how many sexually exploited children have been identified by the authorities - but this is only the tip of the iceberg.

View facts and statistics

Female genital mutilation (FGM)

We don’t know how many girls and women are affected by, or at risk of, FGM in the UK. We can estimate the scale of the problem in the UK by looking at what we know in other countries.

View facts and statistics
Bullying and cyberbullying

There are no official statistics on the number of children who are bullied. But from research studies and from what children tell us, we know that bullying is an issue that affects almost all children in some way.

Domestic abuse

There are no official statistics on the number of children who live with domestic abuse. But research studies tell us about children’s experience of living with violence.

Child trafficking

We don’t know exactly how many children have been trafficked into or within the UK. Trafficking is a hidden crime and recorded statistics are almost certainly an underestimate.
Harmful sexual behaviour

Children and young people who develop harmful sexual behaviour harm themselves and others. There are no official statistics that tell us how many children have harmful sexual behaviour and estimates come from research studies.

View facts and statistics

UK child protection statistics

England
We don't know exactly how many children in England have experienced child abuse. But official statistics do tell us how many children have been identified as needing support or protection.

Northern Ireland
Official statistics help tell us how many children in Northern Ireland have been identified as needing support or protection.

View facts and statistics
Scotland

We don't know exactly how many children in Scotland have experienced child abuse. But official statistics do tell us how many children have been identified as needing support or protection.

Wales

Official statistics help tell us how many children in Wales have been identified as needing support or protection.

Children in care

Each UK nation collects and publishes statistics about looked after children, telling us about where children in care live and why they are in care.
Child protection register and plan statistics

PDF / 82 KB

Our annual summary of child protection register statistics for Northern Ireland.

Number of children on child protection registers, by gender and age group

Children and young persons on the child protection register at 31 March by category of abuse

Child protection plan and register statistics: UK 2012 – 2016
Number of children on child protection registers or subject to a child protection plan at 31 March (or 31 July in Scotland)

Got a question?
Our Knowledge and Information Service answer over a thousand enquiries every year helping professionals find the information and resources they need to keep children safe.

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Read our guide for professionals on what we do and the ways we can work with you to protect children and prevent abuse and neglect.

Read our guide (PDF)

Impact and evidence
Find out how we evaluate and research the impact we're making in protecting children, get tips and tools for researchers and access resources.

Our impact and evidence

Get expert training and consultancy
Grow your child protection knowledge and skills with CPD certified courses delivered by our experts nationwide and online.

Get expert training
Sharing knowledge to keep children safe

Read our guide to the NSPCC Knowledge and Information Service to find out how we can help you with child protection queries, support your research, and help you learn and develop.

Read our guide (PDF)