

UK is violent crime capital of Europe

The United Kingdom is the violent crime capital of Europe and has one of the highest rates of violence in the world, worse even than America, according to new research.

By Richard Edwards, Crime Correspondent
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Analysis of figures from the European Commission showed a 77 per cent increase in murders, robberies, assaults and sexual offences in the UK since Labour came to power.

The total number of violent offences recorded compared to population is higher than any other country in Europe, as well as America, Canada, Australia and South Africa.

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Opposition leaders said the disclosures were a "damning indictment" of the Government's failure to tackle deep-rooted social problems.

The figures combined crime statistics for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The UK had a greater number of murders in 2007 than any other EU country – 927 – and at a relative rate higher than most western European neighbours, including France, Germany, Italy and Spain.

It also recorded the fifth highest robbery rate in the EU, and the highest absolute number of burglaries, with double the number of offences recorded in Germany and France.

Overall, 5.4 million crimes were recorded in the UK in 2007 - more than 10 a minute - second only to Sweden.

Chris Grayling, shadow home secretary, said: "This is a real damning indictment of this government's comprehensive failure over more than a decade to tackle the deep rooted social problems in our society, and the knock-on effect on crime and anti-social behaviour.

"We're now on our fourth Home Secretary in this parliament, and all we are getting is a rehash of old initiatives that didn't work the first time round. More than ever Britain needs a change of direction."

The figures were sourced from Eurostat, the European Commission's database of statistics. They are gathered using official sources in the countries concerned such as the national statistics office, the national prison administration, ministries of the interior or justice, and police.

A breakdown of the statistics, which were compiled into league tables by the Conservatives, revealed that violent crime in the UK had increased from 652,974 offences in 1998 to more than 1.15 million crimes in 2007.

It means there are over 2,000 crimes recorded per 100,000 population in the UK, making it the most violent place in Europe.

Austria is second, with a rate of 1,677 per 100,000 people, followed by Sweden, Belgium, Finland and Holland.

By comparison, America has an estimated rate of 466 violent crimes per 100,000 population.

France recorded 324,765 violent crimes in 2007 – a 67 per cent increase in the past decade – at a rate of 504 per 100,000 population.

The Home Office says there has been a downtrend in overall violence for the past decade.

But last October it emerged that levels of violent crime in England and Wales had been underestimated for more than a decade because of a blunder in recording methods.

Ministers admitted that some police forces had not been recording offences of grievous bodily harm with intent as serious violent crime. When the offences were included violent crime figures immediately increased by a fifth.

Separate figures disclosed in May showed that the number of people requiring hospital treatment after being seriously hurt in street fights or assaults has risen 50 per cent in five years.

More than 20 people a day were taken to hospital accident and emergency departments in England last year after being hit, kicked, scratched or bitten. Alcohol is blamed as a factor in half of the incidents and raises further questions over 24-hour drinking.

Researchers admit that comparisons of crime data between countries must be viewed with caution because of differing criminal justice systems and how crimes are reported and measured.

A Home Office spokesperson said: "These figures are misleading. Levels of police recorded crime statistics from different countries are simply not comparable since they are affected by many factors, for example the recording of violent crime in other countries may not include behaviour that we would categorise as violent crime.

"Violent crime in England and Wales has fallen by almost a half since a peak in 1995 but we are not complacent and know there is still work to do. "