

Water Safety Scotland United Nations Resolution on Global Drowning Prevention

Background

In April 2021, at the 75th session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, [drowning was affirmed as a preventable global public health issue](#). The UN noted seven key points needed for an effective and coordinated response to drownings.

Water Safety Scotland supports the resolution and its endeavour to reduce drowning fatalities globally.

Drowning Fatalities in Scotland

The WHO Global Health Estimates indicate that around 236,000 people lost their lives to drowning in 2019 – this mostly occurred in low and middle income countries. Drowning is the sixth leading cause of death worldwide for children.

Scotland is a high income country but still sees a significant amount of drowning fatalities each year relative to its small population. For example, when considering the rate of drowning per 100,000 in comparison to several neighbouring European countries – Scotland carries a high drowning rate (see Table 1)

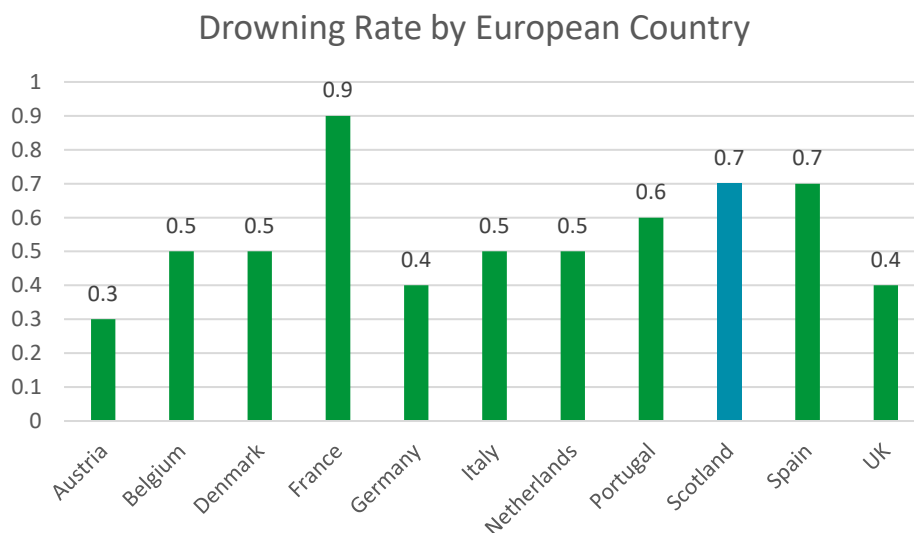


Table 1: Drowning Rate by European Country - 2019¹

¹ Rate for Scotland is based on 2019 WAID data and NRS population figures. European country data is from the Global Health Estimates 2019: Deaths by Cause, Age, Sex, by Country and by Region, 2000-2019. Geneva, World Health Organization; 2020.

Scotland's progress towards the UN's actions

In recognition of the actions the UN has suggested, WSS have looked at our current progress on each of the ten points in order to see what we have achieved and where we need to improve.

- **Appoint a national focal point for drowning prevention** – Water Safety is a key focus area of the Community Safety Minister at The Scottish Government. From there, Water Safety is managed via the Building Safer Communities Team and then via Scottish Fire and Rescue Service for rescue capability and RoSPA and Water Safety Scotland for prevention.
- **Develop a national drowning prevention plan, containing a set of measurable targets according to their needs and priorities, including as part of wider national health plans, policies and programmes** – Scotland has [Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy](#) which has two overall targets:
 - To Reduce accidental drowning deaths in Scotland by 50 per cent by 2026 and reduce risk among the highest-risk populations, groups and communities
 - Contribute to the reduction of water-related suicide.

Additionally the strategy includes specific aims, objectives and activities to help meet these targets. Over 40 organisations in Scotland have endorsed and signed up to this strategy including Local Government, Search and Rescue organisations and Charities. Performance against the strategy is measured every two years and work is underway to help develop a relationship with Public Health Scotland to improve links with Health.

- **Develop drowning prevention programming in line with World Health Organization recommended interventions, namely, barriers, supervision, swim skills, rescue and resuscitation training, boating regulation and managing flood risk and resilience;** Scotland is working towards the World Health Organization's intervention recommendations relating to drowning prevention. Specifically:
 - The controlling of interventions and barriers form part of a water safety policy that asks local government to risk assess their waterways and mitigate any hazards. Many local authorities are developing policies and this is tracked via [research by RoSPA](#) and Water Safety Scotland
 - Legislation for Swimming Pools is covered by the UK government as outlined in HSG 179
 - Safe spaces are available for young children via the Scottish Government and its policy to provide free child care for early learning and up to 600 hours childcare for children aged 3 – 4.

- Education Scotland has produced a learning resource in conjunction with Save a Life for Scotland, aimed at primary and secondary practitioners looking to deliver first aid as part of the curriculum
 - Public awareness is being strengthened via national campaigns including: [#RespectTheWater](#), [Drowning Prevention Week](#) and the [Year and Coasts of Water 2020/21](#)
 - Boating regulations and shipping laws are maintained by the UK government via the Maritime and Coastguard Agency
 - Flood Risk and Resilience is managed by SEPA and via the Scottish Government's Resilience team who coordinate and manage flood risks for Scotland
- **Ensure enactment and effective enforcement of water safety laws, across all relevant sectors, in particular in the areas of health, education, transportation and disaster risk reduction, where appropriate, and consider establishing appropriate and proportionate regulations where they do not yet exist;**
 - Maritime regulations are the responsibility of The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA). The MCA enforces the rules to which vessels in UK territorial waters and under UK registration must adhere. These rules are legislated through the Merchant Shipping Regulations, which apply to all vessels under the UK flag and vessels in UK waters or operating from UK ports
 - The British Waterways Board was established by the Transport Act 1962 to manage and maintain the inland waterways. By virtue of the Scotland Act 1998, responsibility for the inland waterways in Scotland was devolved to the Scottish Parliament and was designated as a cross-border public authority under the Scotland Act 1998 (Cross-Border Public Authorities) (Specification) Order 1999. Scottish Canals is the operating name of the British Waterways Board.

Scottish Canals' core statutory duties are set out in: –
 Transport Act 1962 and Transport Act 196.
 - Reservoirs are maintained and run by Scottish Water who also runs campaigns with partners to prevent access/swimming in dangerous areas.
 - RNLI & HMCG work together on numerous safety campaigns which are shared and utilised with partners and stakeholders.
- **Include drowning within civil registration and vital statistics registers and aggregate all drowning mortality data into national**

estimates;

Drowning as a cause is included in the National Records of Scotland which keeps all civil registration and vital statistics. Water Safety Scotland also feeds into the Water Accident Database (WAID) which is owned by the National Water Safety Forum (NWSF). Data has been compared and validated between NRS and WAID previously in a pilot project. Additionally, a voluntary drowning review process is also underway and being led by Water Safety Scotland's Data Subgroup and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. This follows on from a paper which highlights the challenges surrounding data intelligence in Scotland. Accessible [here](#).

- **Promote drowning prevention public awareness and behaviour-change campaigns;** Water Safety Scotland has a campaigns and communication plan and has focused on a number of campaigns which seek to raise awareness and focus on behaviour change for the safe enjoyment of water:
 - Year of Coasts and Waters 20/21 Water Safety Code: <https://watersafetyscotland.org.uk/information/>
 - [#RespectTheWater](#)
 - [Drowning Prevention Week](#)
 - [Inflatables](#)
- **Encourage integration of drowning prevention within existing disaster risk reduction programmes, especially in communities at risk of flooding and coastal inundation, including through international, regional and bilateral cooperation;**
 - The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) is Scotland's environmental regulator and national flood forecasting, flood warning and strategic flood risk management authority. Its main role is to protect and improve Scotland's environment. SEPA also runs and supports safety campaigns to prevent drowning.
 - The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) work with partners and communities to support prevention campaigns and strategies to improve water safety throughout Scotland. To support this we have a SFRS working group dedicated to addressing Water Safety Issues
- **Support international cooperation by sharing lessons learned, experiences and best practices, within and among regions –** Although WSS shares best practice with other countries in the United Kingdom, we are always looking for ways in which to share best practice (as well as learn) and this is something that we are hoping to develop over the next few years by attending conferences and looking at ways to help other countries in drowning prevention

- **Promote research and development of innovative drowning prevention tools and technology, and to promote capacity-building through international cooperation, in particular for developing countries;** - Smart technology for drowning prevention is still in its infancy in Scotland. However there are potential plans to use the RoSPA Smart Buoy (funding dependent) project which is a smart Public Rescue Equipment project.
- **Consider the introduction of water safety, swimming and first aid lessons as part of school curricula, consistent with the Member State's governance framework for education;** -Although swimming is not part of the Curriculum for Excellence due to the way in which the Curriculum is set up in Scotland - Swimming lessons are available via local authorities and leisure centres. Additionally funding is provided to Scottish Swimming by Scottish Government to help improve child swimming. Scottish Water also provides funding for swimming lessons.

Water Safety Scotland is currently developing a water safety lesson plan to be used in all Scottish Schools. This plan will provide consistent messaging from all 40+ organisations in Water Safety Scotland and is hoped to be supported by Scottish Government and Education Scotland.

Additionally, Water Safety Scotland – through its Education Subgroup- is creating a national toolkit for any organisation to use (school and outwith) that focuses on drowning prevention messages for young people. The toolkit is currently developing and has just had its first major focus group (in line with the UNCRC) to gather the view points and ideas of young people on what works.

Future plans

Scotland is committed to developing the actions outlined above and ensuring a role in drowning reduction.

Water Safety Scotland will focus on growing its membership as well as providing support for any local, national or international groups (where appropriate).

Scotland's Drowning Prevention strategy will soon have its four year review where the targets, aims and objectives will be analysed and evidenced.

Water Safety Scotland and partners remain committed to the UN resolution and World Health Organization guidance.

Water Safety Scotland - Steering Group



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