

DBS Freedom of Information Request Data

Introduction

Unlock is a national independent advocacy charity that supports, speaks up and campaigns for people facing stigma, prejudice and discrimination because of their criminal record. Our mission is to advocate for people with criminal records to be able to move on positively in their lives. We support people with criminal records to navigate their way through challenging times, research and raise awareness of the systemic issues that people are facing, and campaign for changes to legislation, policies and practices of government, employers and others.

Our website provides vital information and guidance for people with criminal records, and we also have a helpline run by dedicated staff and volunteers, which deals with specific queries. People can [contact the helpline](#) in various ways, including via email, WhatsApp or our free phone line.

Via a Freedom of Information Request (which can be viewed [here](#)), we acquired a large set of data from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) regarding DBS checks completed from 2020-2022. This data could be broken down as follows:

- the number of checks completed overall
- the number of each type of DBS check conducted
- the number of checks which ultimately disclosed anything
- breakdowns by year, age and gender for each of the above

We had also requested for data to be provided regarding the ethnicity of applicants for DBS certificates, but DBS advised that they do not hold this data.

It is important to note that, although Enhanced checks and Enhanced and Barring checks are distinct types of DBS checks, the data that was supplied by DBS treated these two checks together. As such, in the data and discussion, “Enhanced” refers to both types of check.

This document shares some of the headline findings from the data.

Data

Overall Figures

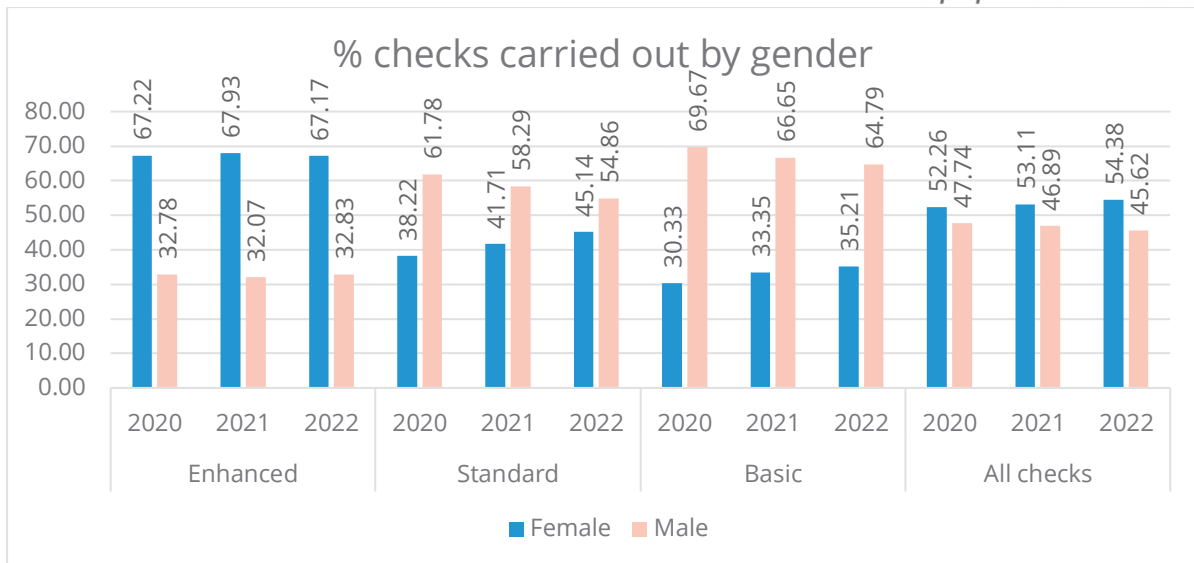
Total checks conducted have risen year on year, with the biggest rise being in enhanced checks:

	2020	% of total	2021	% of total	2022	% of total	% change 2020-2022
Enhanced	3,218,991	58	3,823,038	56	4,446,636	60	38.14
Standard	314,526	6	385,248	6	388,244	5	23.44
Basic	1,993,775	36	2,645,154	38	2,622,537	35	31.54
TOTAL	5,527,292		6,853,440		7,457,417		34.92

Gender

The overall gender balance in checks conducted is as follows:

		Female		Male	
		Number	% of total	Number	% of total
2020	Enhanced	2,163,725	67.22	1,055,266	32.78
	Standard	120,226	38.22	194,300	61.78
	Basic	604,685	30.33	1,389,090	69.67
	TOTAL	2,888,636	52.26	2,638,656	47.74
2021	Enhanced	2,596,859	67.93	1,226,179	32.07
	Standard	160,680	41.71	224,568	58.29
	Basic	882,253	33.35	1,762,901	66.65
	TOTAL	3,639,792	53.11	3,213,648	46.89
2022	Enhanced	2,956,824	66.50	1,489,812	33.50
	Standard	175,257	45.14	212,987	54.86
	Basic	923,378	35.21	1,699,159	64.79
	TOTAL	4,055,459	54.38	3,401,958	45.62
Whole Period	Enhanced	7,717,408	67.17	3,771,257	32.83
	Standard	456,163	41.93	631,855	58.07
	Basic	2,410,316	33.19	4,851,150	66.81
	TOTAL	10,583,887	53.35	9,254,262	46.65



Women are around twice as likely to be subject to Enhanced checks as men are, with that balance remaining broadly stable across the period. However, whilst male Standard and Basic checks are more common, this gap is narrowing over time, though in Basic checks it remains the case that nearly twice as many checks are conducted on male applicants as female.

Age

The following shows the overall total number of checks in the period concerned (2020-22) carried out by age categories, 'working age' highlighted in red. The percentages refer to the percentages of that check type conducted that were done so on the age in question (e.g. 1.30% of all Enhanced checks were conducted on those aged 16 and under).

	Enhanced		Standard		Basic		TOTAL	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
16 & under	149,604	1.30	4,312	0.40	18,083	0.25	171,999	0.87
17-24	2,195,940	19.11	174,080	16.00	1,611,756	22.20	3,981,776	20.07
25-65	8,702,523	75.75	881,202	80.99	5,547,611	76.40	15,131,336	76.27
18-65	10,733,291	93.43	1,048,072	96.33	7,129,775	98.19	18,911,138	95.33
66+	440,598	3.84	28,424	2.61	84,016	1.16	553,038	2.79

The higher the level of check, the more likely it is to have been conducted on those outside of typical working age, though in both cases these numbers are low. In all cases the majority of checks are being done on the (larger) cohort of those 25 and over. Of particular interest is the number of Enhanced checks being done on children, the overwhelming majority of which are conducted on 16-year-olds; across the period, there were 149,604 such checks conducted on those aged 16 and under.

Potential Impact of Changes to Filtering Rules

The percentage of checks that disclosed something has fallen across this period. The following table shows, for each year, the number of checks where information was disclosed along with the percentage of checks where there was information disclosed:

	2020		2021		2022	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Enhanced	176,491	5.48	113,401	2.97	125,662	2.83
Standard	31,016	9.86	21,620	5.61	20,586	5.30
Basic	32,796	1.64	44,206	1.67	40,453	1.54
TOTAL	240,303	4.35	179,227	2.62	186,701	2.50

The drop overall (from 4.35% to 2.5%) is driven mainly by a drop in the proportion of Standard or Enhanced checks that disclose something, whereas the figures for Basic checks have remained stable. In 2021 and 2022 there is a noticeably lower level of disclosure on Standard and Enhanced checks, likely a sign of the impact of the changes to filtering rules taking effect and some convictions being removed from checks they might previously have appeared on¹. This assumption is underlined by the lack of significant change on levels of disclosure on Basic checks, where filtering would not have an impact. It is also worth noting that the fall in the percentage of checks where something is disclosed at both Enhanced and Standard levels is tempered somewhat by the overall increase (see above) in checks being conducted.

The following tables look at the percentage of checks at each level that disclose something by both age and gender across the period. First, the percentage of checks that disclosed something by gender and year is as follows:

	FEMALE				MALE		
	2020	2021	2022		2020	2021	2022
Enhanced	3.40	1.93	1.77		9.75	5.17	4.93
Standard	3.71	2.22	2.30		13.67	8.04	7.78
Basic	0.42	0.44	0.40		2.18	2.29	2.16
TOTAL	2.79	1.58	1.48		6.05	3.79	3.73

Besides the percentages of disclosure being higher for male vs female checks, the trend of a fall in levels of information being disclosed by the checks impacted by the changes to filtering rules is similar for both, with declines of around a half.

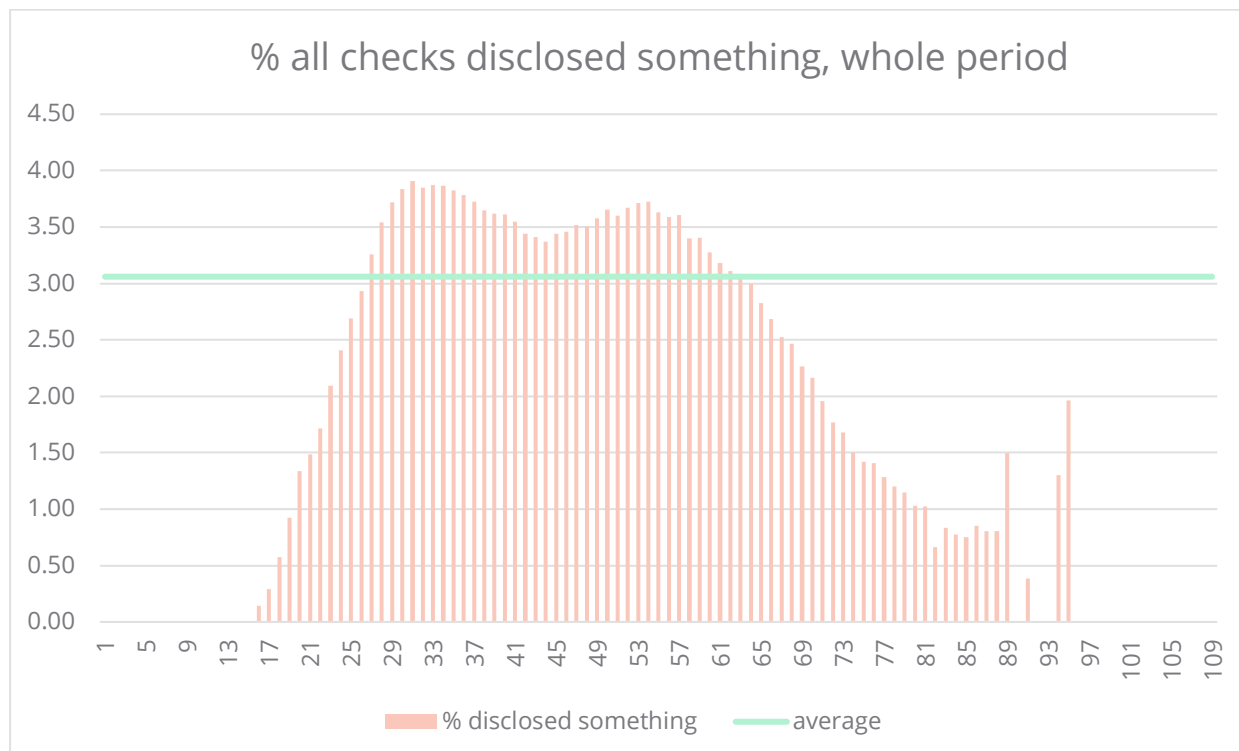
¹ Further information on filtering can be found on our website [here](#).

The following table shows the percentage of checks that disclosed something by age groups for each year, whilst the graphs show trends over time for each type of check.

	Enhanced			Standard			Basic			All		
	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022	2020	2021	2022
16 and under	0.34	0.08	0.10	0.11	0.00	0.16	0.06	0.24	0.09	0.30	0.09	0.10
17-25	2.12	1.38	1.26	4.51	3.00	2.62	1.62	1.69	1.48	2.02	1.59	1.41
26-35	6.27	3.96	3.54	10.62	7.43	6.70	2.25	2.21	2.05	4.79	3.35	3.08
36-45	6.70	3.61	3.43	11.21	6.57	6.54	1.58	1.65	1.61	5.08	3.02	2.96
46-55	7.18	3.38	3.32	11.66	5.58	5.49	1.09	1.12	1.07	5.59	2.78	2.76
56-65	6.36	3.02	3.07	10.81	5.19	5.28	0.80	0.73	0.74	5.23	2.54	2.60
66+	3.63	1.72	1.65	6.94	3.75	3.04	0.52	0.47	0.38	3.38	1.63	1.52

This trend is particularly notable in the 46-55 age group, where the biggest fall is seen on both enhanced (7.18% to 3.32%) and standard (11.66% to 5.49%), and in general it is the older age groups where this trend is most significant.

The following graph shows the percentage of all checks, for each age, across the whole period (2020-2022) that disclosed something, with the overall figure (3.06%) marked with a line for reference.



Conclusion

These data headlines highlight a number of key points that are worthy of further investigation and consideration.

1. It is disappointing that DBS do not hold similar data broken down by ethnicity. The ability to interrogate the data by age and gender has given a picture of areas where DBS checks may be having a disproportionate impact. The inability to do the same with data concerning ethnicity is frustrating.
2. The data has highlighted a number of inferences that can be made with regards to the impact of DBS checks on women. Using this data as a starting point, we have produced a briefing on these issues in more depth, highlighting disproportionalities to which women in the criminal justice system are vulnerable. This can be read in full on our website [here](#).
3. There are some patterns in the data relating to age that require further consideration. Specifically, some of the patterns that show a significant number of Enhanced checks being conducted on those aged 16 and under is worthy of further consideration, and we will be looking into this in due course.
4. There has clearly been a positive impact of the changes to the filtering rules – with a smaller proportion of Standard and Enhanced checks disclosing information, thus allowing a greater proportion of people to seek opportunities without fear of how a past conviction might hold them back. However, the overall rise in the number of checks being conducted dampens this impact noticeably, meaning a significant number of people still feel the harmful impacts of stigma and discrimination as a result of their criminal record.

The criminal record system entrenches other forms of unfairness in the criminal justice system. This data highlights some patterns within this. For people with a criminal record, stigma and discrimination are very real fears. This often manifests itself in the Chilling Effect, whereby fear of being judged negatively discourages people from seeking out opportunities that they otherwise might. This data highlights the numbers of people where this process may engender such fear, as well as highlighting certain demographic trends and discrepancies.