



DRAWING THE LINE 2025

United Kingdom

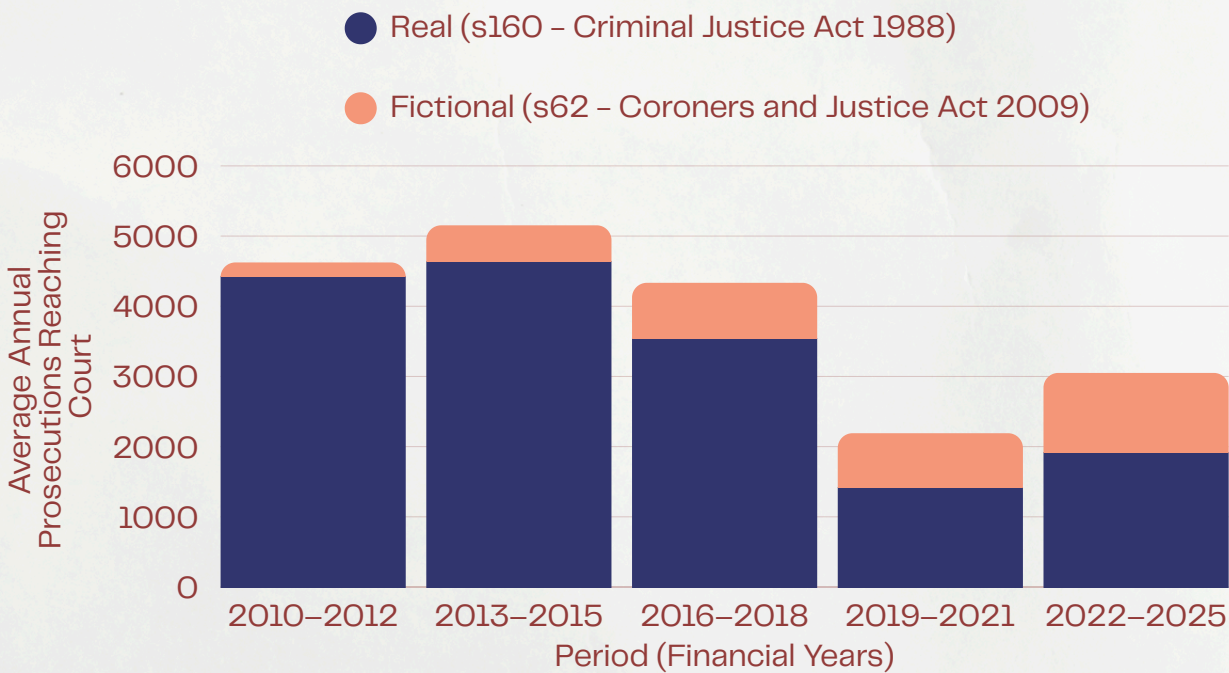
How moral panic and technological change have reshaped UK child protection law, expanding prosecution from real to fictional depictions.

Legal Evolution

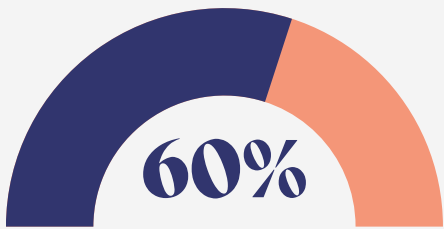
- **1978–1988:** Real image offences established under Protection of Children Act and Criminal Justice Act.
- **2009:** Coroners and Justice Act extended offences to fictional and AI depictions.
- **2015–2025:** Later laws expanded reach to written, digital, and AI content.



Trends in UK Prosecutions for Real and Fictional Imagery (2010–2025)



Shift in Enforcement



Between 2010–2017 and 2017–2025, prosecutions for real child sexual abuse material fell by 60%, while cases involving fictional or AI-generated depictions surged—now making up about 40% of all image-related prosecutions.

Penalty Comparison

Real imagery (IIOC) – up to 5 years imprisonment (Criminal Justice Act 1988, s.160)

Fictional imagery (PIOC) – up to 3 years imprisonment (Coroners and Justice Act 2009, s.62)

Upcoming Reform

The Crime and Policing Bill (2025) would criminalize the possession or adaptation of AI tools capable of generating prohibited images, extending UK law even further into the digital and creative sphere.

What this means

As real offences decline, prosecutions increasingly target imagined depictions.

The data suggests enforcement priorities are shifting from child protection to moral regulation.

