

Police deal with nearly 22,000 missing person reports each year



Nearly 22,000 individual investigations into missing people are carried out by Police Scotland every year.

Over half of those who go missing do so repeatedly. In one instance, the same person was the focus of over 170 investigations in a year. And around one per cent of people who go missing never return.

Of those who went missing in the year from April 2016-Mar 2017:

- 58 per cent were male,
- 53 per cent were in the 13 -16 year old age group
- 54 per cent were a repeat missing person
- 76 per cent of those who are reported missing return with returned within 24 hours
- 99 per cent of all missing people were traced or returned home safe and well.
- 78 out of the 87 people traced deceased in 2016/17 were adult men, the majority of whom had not been missing before.

This latest data was presented by Police Scotland officers at the 3rd International Conference on Missing Children and Adults taking place at Abertay University, Dundee from 14 – 16 June.

Speaking at the event, Assistant Chief Constable Andy Cowie, said:“Police Scotland undertakes nearly 22,000 full-fledged missing person investigations each year and records around

40,000 missing person incidents.

“Since April 2016, we have been compiling data on missing persons and the first full year of information provides us with a very clear picture of who goes missing and the locations from which they go missing. It is also illustrative of the non-crime related demand on Scotland’s police service.

“People go missing for a broad range of reasons and usually voluntarily. But we also know that the majority of people who go missing are vulnerable.

“What our data tells us is that we need to do more, working with partners, to understand why people go missing, to prevent people going missing and to protect the most vulnerable people in our communities.

“Our Policing 2026 strategy is looking at how we can transform our service to meet the changing, future demands on policing more effectively focusing on the five key areas of prevention, protection, communities, knowledge and innovation. The work we are doing around missing persons already reflects this focus.

“Our primary purpose will always be to improve the safety and wellbeing of people, places and communities in Scotland. While missing person investigations are police-led they are not police-only.

“This international conference is an opportunity to meet with partners nationally and internationally to discuss approaches to dealing missing people and to share best practice. We are all working hard to prevent people going missing, looking at best practice nationally and internationally, to support us in developing how we prevent people going missing.

“We recognise we simply cannot do that alone. We need our partners and communities to work with us to protect those most at risk of going missing and prevent missing person episodes wherever possible.”

Dr Penny Woolnough, based at the division of psychology at Abertay University and an expert adviser to the police on missing people, said:

“Working in partnership with Police Scotland and the Scottish Institute for Policing Research this is the first time this important event has been hosted in Scotland. It is the only international conference which sees multi-disciplinary academics, practitioners and policy makers come together to explore and discuss the full range of issues associated with the challenges faced by those who are missed, those who are charged with responding to missing and those who are affected by missing in its broadest sense.

“It reiterates Scotland’s commitment to leading development of policy and practice in this area. We will be welcoming 150 delegates from across the world including Australia, China, Canada and many European countries as we come together to share international best practice, but also to challenge our ways of working and to identify gaps in knowledge and opportunities for future collaborative work to address these.”