

Missing Children in London Report

2 children or type unknown

Key information

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1. Missing Children in London Report

Families and carers are facing frustrating delays when reporting a missing child in London and sometimes receive inaccurate information from call handlers, a report by the **London Assembly Police and Crime Committee** has warned.

It found that low trust and confidence in the Metropolitan Police Service may make parents and carers reluctant to report children missing and for them to search for their children themselves.

Every incident of a missing child requires a full safeguarding response, but an investigation by the Committee has found that this is not always being delivered.

Children are missing if their whereabouts cannot be established and the circumstances are out of character, or the context suggests they may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.

In 2022-23, 9,370 children went missing in London. Many of these children went missing more than once, resulting in 29,455 separate missing incidents recorded by the Met Police.

But charity Missing People said that the true number of missing children is probably much higher, as up to two in three missing incidents are not reported to the police.

The investigation found that 17-year-olds are the most likely to go missing, following by 16 and 15-year-olds. However, the Committee heard that the average age of children going missing is decreasing and that younger children are being increasingly affected by exploitation.

Children most at risk of going missing are those who have experienced significant instability or challenges in their lives, such as conflict, abuse or neglect at home, while the cost-of-living crisis has made poor children vulnerable to missing incidents and exploitation.

The Committee's findings are published, highlighting:

- Families face delays and inaccurate information when reporting missing incidents to the Met Police. Low trust and confidence in the police may make parents and carers reluctant to report children missing and for them to search for their children themselves.
- Not all children who return home after a missing episode receive an effective response from services and information gathered from the return home process is not effectively used to inform long-term safeguarding plans.
- The collection of data on the underlying reasons why children go missing is poor. There is also little understanding of what drives the overrepresentation of Black children in missing child figures.
- Children who are missing and have been exploited into criminal activity should be seen first and foremost as victims and everything should be done to avoid the criminalisation of a child. Evidence received by the Committee suggests this is not always happening.
- The provision of Met's Safer Schools Officers is inconsistent, and they do not always work effectively enough with partners to safeguard children at risk of going missing.

The report makes **17** recommendations to the Mayor, the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and the Met Police, including:

- MOPAC should conduct a review of the experiences of parents, carers and staff in reporting children missing in London. This should be used to shape a joint MOPAC-Met strategy to improve the process for reporting missing children.
- MOPAC should conduct research to understand the overrepresentation of Black children in reported missing children figures.
- The Met Police should attend all multi-agency strategy meetings for children who are missing, at risk of going missing or have a history of missing incidents.
- The Mayor should explore the opportunity to declare City Hall a Safe Haven for all children who feel at risk, threatened or in danger.

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