

## CRIME AND JUSTICE

# Drug Seizures and Offender Characteristics, 2020-21 and 2021-22

This bulletin presents Official Statistics on drug seizures made by the police in Scotland and the characteristics of those found in possession of drugs. These statistics relate to drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, which divides drugs into three classes, namely A, B and C. For the purpose of this bulletin, the drug classifications at the end of the reporting periods, to 31 March 2021 and 2022 respectively, have been applied to the data.

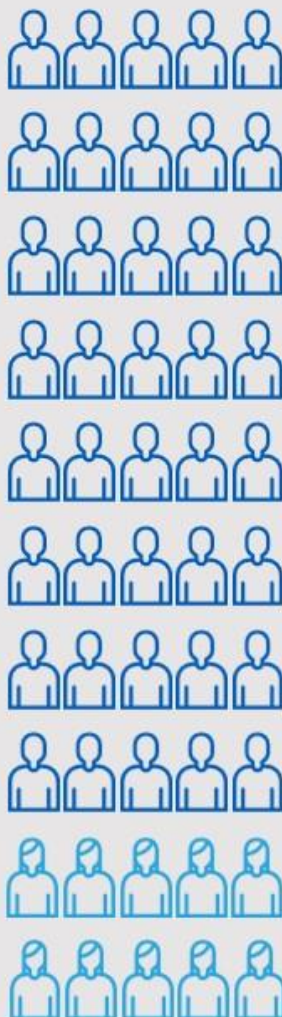
## Key Points

- The quantity of drugs seized can fluctuate considerably each year and does not necessarily move in line with the number of seizures made. Whilst most drug seizures consist of relatively small quantities (usually possession-related crimes), annual quantities of drugs seized can be greatly influenced by a small number of large seizures (usually from supply-related crimes).
- For crimes of drug supply, the main Class A drugs seized by Police Scotland in 2021-22 were heroin (127 kilograms) and cocaine (64 kilograms). Police Scotland also seized approximately 12,200 ecstasy-type tablets.
- Again, for crimes of drug supply, the main Class B drugs seized by Police Scotland in 2021-22 were herbal cannabis (1,467 kilograms), cannabis resin (86 kilograms) and amphetamines (50 kilograms). They also seized nearly 34,000 cannabis plants.
- For Class C drugs, the main drugs seized were 4.8 million benzodiazepine tablets.
- A sample of drug possession crimes for 2021-22 estimated that 57% involved herbal cannabis, with 11% for etizolam, 10% for cocaine and 4% for heroin.
- In 2021-22, around four out of every five drug possession offenders were male (81%). The median age of an offender was 30 years old, with three-fifths (60%) being between 20 and 39 years old.

# DRUG POSSESSION CRIME IN SCOTLAND, 2021-22



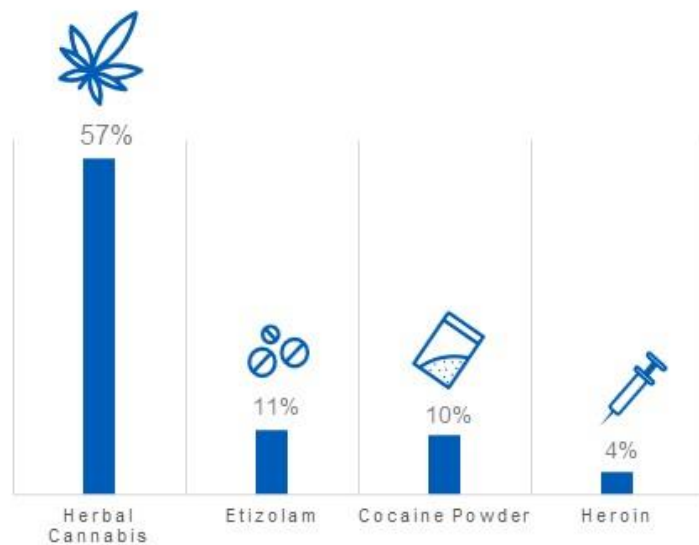
## ► Who were the offenders



**81%**  
Were male

**30**  
Average  
(Median) age

## ▼ What type of drugs were seized?



## ► Where were the drugs seized?



**61%**

In the street or  
other open space



**21%**

At home

## ► How it came to police attention



**30%**

On patrol and suspicion of drugs

**28%**

Responding to a report of a drugs or  
non-drugs related activity

**16%**

On patrol and dealing with another  
incident

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# Background

This bulletin presents Official Statistics on the number and type of drug seizures made by Police Scotland during 2020-21 and 2021-22. It does not include information on drugs seized by the UK Border Force or British Transport Police, or as a result of Police Scotland activity which led to drugs being seized out-with Scotland. The associated tables referenced throughout this bulletin can be downloaded from [Drug seizures and offender characteristics statistics - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/drug-seizures-and-offender-characteristics-statistics-2020-21-2021-22/pages/2.aspx).

It should also be noted that the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and associated measures to limit social contact, may have had an impact on the number of drugs crimes recorded (both supply and possession) and the quantity of drugs seized. A larger impact is likely to have been seen during 2020-21 (the first full year of the pandemic), whereas the reporting year of 2021-22 will have been affected to a lesser extent.

The data collection process for this bulletin is split into two parts, looking at seizures relating to drug supply and drug possession crimes separately. Police Scotland manually check drug supply-based crimes each year, with these records accounting for the clear majority of drugs seized in terms of quantity. This is supplemented by a sample led by Scottish Government statisticians of the remaining and far more numerous crimes of drug possession. The sample consists of a random selection of 400 crime records per year, stratified by police division to reflect the distribution of drug possession crimes across Scotland. This sample-based approach avoids the need to manually extract data for every crime record relating to a drugs possession crime, which would be a very resource intensive process. The information from the sample is then used to estimate the number of seizures and quantities seized in relation to possession crimes for the most commonly identified drug types for Scotland as a whole. This is done by multiplying the average quantity seized per crime by the estimated total number of seizures for that drug type.

For the drug types where quantities seized from possession-related crimes can be estimated, a figure for total amount seized has been produced by adding the quantity seized from supply crimes to the estimated quantity seized from possession crimes. For those drug types where the possession amount cannot be reliably estimated, only the quantity seized from supply crimes is available. However, as these drug types only appear in very small numbers within the sample, it can be assumed that the quantity seized from possession crimes is relatively low.

As well as using the sample to record information on the drugs seized from crimes of possession, information about the offender and the circumstances of the crime has also been recorded so that additional analysis on offender characteristics can be presented.

It should be noted that care must always be taken when making comparisons on this topic as there can be very large fluctuations in the quantity of drugs seized from one year to the next. Data on the quantities of drugs seized prior to 2014-15 can be found in the [2013-14 publication](#).

There are two statutory requirements for the UK to provide data on drug seizures, which are managed by the [UK Focal Point on Drugs](#), based at Public Health England. The UK Focal Point on Drugs collate drug seizure statistics from England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland for the UK Focal Point's annual report. This is then submitted to the [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#) (UNODC). These data inform the UNODC's annual World Drugs Report.

The minimum data requirements to satisfy these two obligations are to submit data on the number of drug seizures and the quantity of drugs seized for each of the following types of drugs: cocaine, crack, ecstasy-type substances, heroin, LSD, methylamphetamine, amphetamines, herbal cannabis, cannabis resin and cannabis plants. In addition to these ten drugs, this bulletin contains seizures data on methadone, morphine, barbiturates, ketamine, mephedrone, anabolic steroids, GHB, temazepam and benzodiazepines. Benzodiazepines include etizolam, a 'designer' benzodiazepine, which was classified as a Class C drug under a [2017 amendment to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971](#).

The statistics on drug seizures are used to inform the [Communities National Outcome](#) – 'We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe' as well as the Scottish Government's [Justice Vision](#). These statistics are also used by a wide range of stakeholders to monitor trends, for policy research and development, and for research purposes.

The 'Drug Seizures and Offender Characteristics' annual statistical bulletin series forms part of a series of bulletins produced by the Scottish Government on the criminal justice system which can be found at: [Scottish Government statistics - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#).

# **Number of seizures and quantities of drugs seized**

The quantity of drugs seized can fluctuate considerably each year and does not necessarily move in line with the number of seizures made. Whilst most drug seizures consist of relatively small quantities (usually possession-related crimes), annual quantities of drugs seized can be greatly influenced by a small number of large seizures (usually supply-related crimes).

## **Drug supply crimes**

Intelligence-led operations against known drug dealers tend to result in a low number of seizures, but conversely the quantity of drugs seized and their value will be high. These high profile operations may result in greater disruption to the illicit drugs trade which, whilst having a positive effect, may reduce the number of seizures made. As such, care should be taken when comparing quantities of drugs seized over time.

A significant proportion of drugs seized in terms of quantity come from seizures related to supply crimes, despite making up a relatively small proportion of the overall number of seizures.

This section covers drugs seized where the crime was one of drug supply, drug production or illegal importation of drugs.

### **Class A drugs seized from drug supply crimes**

Table 1b shows that in 2020-21, Police Scotland reported that they seized 110 kilograms (kg) of heroin, 406 kg of cocaine powder and 6.5 kg of crack cocaine from drug supply crimes. In 2021-22, Police Scotland seized 127 kg of heroin, 64 kg of cocaine powder and 11 kg of crack cocaine.

Approximately 7,300 ecstasy-type tablets were seized in 2020-21 and approximately 12,200 were seized in 2021-22.

1 litre of methadone was seized by Police Scotland in 2020-21, with just over 1 litre seized in 2021-22.

Compared to other types of Class A Drugs, relatively small amounts of LSD and morphine were seized in 2020-21 and 2021-22.

In addition to the information in Table 1a, there were 17 supply-based seizures of 'Other' Class A drugs in 2020-21 and 15 in 2021-22.

### **Class B drugs seized from drug supply crimes**

Table 2b shows the quantities of Class B drugs seized in 2020-21 and 2021-22.

The quantity of cannabis-related drug seizures from drug supply crimes in 2020-21 included 1,128 kg of herbal cannabis, 12.7 kg of cannabis resin and 43,862 cannabis plants. In 2021-22, Police Scotland seized 1,467 kg of herbal cannabis, 86 kg of cannabis resin and 33,813 cannabis plants.

There were 81 kg of amphetamines seized in 2020-21 and 50 kg in 2021-22. There was just under 3 kg of ketamine seized in 2020-21 and 12 kg seized in 2021-22. There was one small mephedrone seizure from drug supply crimes in 2020-21 and none in 2021-22.

In addition to the information in Table 2a, there were 52 supply-based seizures of 'Other' Class B drugs in 2020-21 and 48 in 2021-22.

### **Class C drugs seized from drug supply crimes**

Table 3b shows the quantities of Class C drugs seized from drug supply crimes.

Most Class C seizures were benzodiazepines, with over 3.2 million tablets seized in 2020-21 and over 4.8 million tablets in 2021-22.

It is likely that a significant proportion of those benzodiazepines will be Etizolam. Etizolam is a 'designer' benzodiazepine, which was classified as a Class C drug under a [2017 amendment to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971](#).

There were less than 100 anabolic steroid tablets seized from supply crimes in 2020-21 but approximately 3,000 tablets were seized in 2021-22. There were also no temazepam tablets seized from supply crimes in 2020-21, with less than 10 tablets seized in 2021-22.

In addition to the information in Table 3a, there were 37 supply-based seizures of 'Other' Class C drugs in 2020-21 and 41 in 2021-22.



## **Drug possession crimes**

The majority of seizures of controlled drugs are from drug possession crimes (in terms of the number of seizures), however by their nature these incidents involve a relatively small quantity of drugs being seized. As a result, drug possession crimes account for only a small proportion of all drugs seized in terms of quantity, despite accounting for the vast majority of seizures.

The data presented below for drug possession crimes is based on a sample of 400 records per year. As this analysis is drawn from a sample of records, users should treat the following information as a broad indication of the characteristics of drug possession rather than as an exact measure. All figures are presented at a national level as the sample size is too small to provide robust estimates for geographies below this.

### **Number of drug possession crimes by drug classification**

Recorded crime statistics show that in total, there were 23,747 drug possession crimes recorded by the police in 2021-22, compared to 30,344 drug possession crimes in 2020-21 and 30,469 in 2019-20. Further information can be found in [Recorded Crime in Scotland, 2021-22](#).

Table 4a shows the distribution of the classification of drugs seized in the sample for 2014-15 to 2021-22. Table 4b shows the resulting estimate of the total number of possession crimes involving each class of drug.

In both 2020-21 and 2021-22, more than half of all drug possession crimes were estimated to involve Class B drugs (56% in 2020-21 and 62% in 2021-22). A further 17% of all drug possession crimes in 2020-21 were estimated to involve Class A drugs, with an equivalent figure of 16% for 2021-22. Almost a quarter of all drug possession crimes involved Class C drugs in 2020-21 (24%) and a fifth involved Class C drugs in 2021-22 (20%). It should be noted that the changes in proportions between 2020-21 and 2021-22 were not statistically significant.

Between 2014-15 and 2021-22, the proportion of drug possession crimes that were estimated to involve a Class B drug fell from 68.0% to 61.8%. The changes for Class A and Class C possession crimes (between 2014-15 and 2021-22) were not statistically significant.



### **Quantity of drugs seized from drug possession crimes**

In 2020-21, cocaine powder, heroin, herbal cannabis and etizolam accounted for 83% of all drug possession seizures. They accounted for 82% of all drug possession seizures in 2021-22.

In both 2020-21 and 2021-22, herbal cannabis was the most commonly seized drug by a considerable margin, with etizolam the second most commonly seized drug. In 2020-21, 69% of all possession-related seizures involved these two drug types, with the equivalent figure of 68% for 2021-22.

Table 5c provides estimates of the quantity of drugs seized from 2014-15 to 2021-22 for particular drug types. To ensure the value of these estimates, they have only been carried out where there were at least 15 observations of a drug found in the sample. Following decreases between 2014-15 and 2017-18, diazepam has not reach this required level to be reported since 2017-18. Likewise, after year-on-year decreases between 2016-17 and 2019-20, cannabis resin did not reach the required level to be reported in 2020-21 and 2021-22. This suggests that in the latest four and two years respectively, diazepam and cannabis resin accounted for only a very small proportion of seizures for drug possession crimes.

The quantity has been estimated by multiplying the average quantity seized in the sample by the estimated number of drug possession seizures involving that drug.

## **Overall quantity of drugs seized**

Table 6 shows the total quantity of drugs seized for the drug types where an estimate of the quantity seized from possession crimes has been made. The figures shown in the table are the sum of the quantities seized from supply-related crimes and the estimated quantity seized from possession crimes.

For those drug types not shown in Table 6, there were fewer than 15 observations in the sample of possession crimes for each year, and therefore the total quantity seized from possession crimes is likely to be very small. Due to this the quantity seized from supply-related crimes shown in Tables 1b, 2b and 3b should provide a reasonable estimate of the total quantity seized.

For all of these drug types the quantity of drugs seized from possession crimes is relatively small when compared to the quantity seized from supply crimes.

In 2020-21, 411 kg of cocaine powder was seized in total, with 70 kg seized in 2021-22. There were also 115 kg of heroin seized in 2020-21, with 131 kg seized in 2021-22.

In total, 1,270 kg of herbal cannabis was seized in 2020-21, with 1,622 kg seized in 2021-22.

Approximately 3.6 million benzodiazepine tablets were seized in 2020-21, with approximately 5 million seized in 2021-22.

# **Analysis of the characteristics of drug possession crimes**

Information about the offenders of drug possession crimes and how they came to the attention of the police was also recorded in the sampling process.

## **Characteristics of offenders**

- In both 2020-21 and 2021-22, the vast majority of drug possession crimes were committed by one offender. Only 6% of crimes had multiple offenders in 2020-21, compared to 4% in 2021-22 (these situations can occur where offenders collectively admit to ownership of the seized drugs, or if no one admits to ownership).
- The clear majority of drug possession crimes were committed by males or all male groups (83% in 2020-21 and 80% in 2021-22).
- The median age of a drug possession offender was 30 years old in both years and almost two thirds (65%) of offenders were in the 20-29 and 30-39 years age groups in 2020-21, with 60% coming from these two age groups in 2021-22. Offenders are far more likely to come from these two age groups than would be expected based solely on their size within the general population (27% for 2020-21, 26% for 2021-22). Tables 7a and 7b show the age distribution of the offenders in the sample for each year.

## **How Police Scotland became aware of drug possession crimes**

The circumstances leading to a drug possession seizure have been recorded based on the details of the event within the crime record. As crime records have not been created specifically for this purpose, it has been necessary on occasion to make assumptions around certain aspects of what happened. As such this information should be seen as a broad illustration, rather than a precise measure.

In 2020-21, it is estimated that just over half (54%) of drug possession crimes in the sample were detected by police while on routine patrol. The majority of these were cases where police officers on patrol had a suspicion or observed that the offender was in possession of drugs, with this category accounting for 34% of all records reviewed. A further 20% of records involved police on patrol dealing with another crime, offence or incident and finding drugs while doing this.

Just under a quarter (24%) of drug possession crimes were detected as a result of police responding to a report of a crime, offence or another reported incident, either in relation to the drugs offence or for another matter (either criminal or non-criminal). Just under one-in-ten drug possession seizures (9%) were made by police whilst carrying out a search warrant (likely due to the receipt of intelligence that an individual was involved in drugs crime).

In 2021-22, it is estimated that nearly half (47%) of drug possession crimes in the sample were detected by police while on routine patrol. The majority of these were cases where police officers on patrol had a suspicion or observed that the offender was in possession of drugs, with this category accounting for 30% of all records reviewed. A further 16% of records involved police on patrol dealing with another crime, offence or incident and finding drugs while doing this.

Just over a quarter (28%) of drug possession crimes were assessed to be found as a result of police responding to a report of a crime, offence or another reported incident, either in relation to the drugs offence or for another matter (either criminal or non-criminal). A further 13% of drug possession seizures were made by police whilst carrying out a search warrant (likely due to the receipt of intelligence that an individual was involved in drugs crime).

## **Other information about the drug possession crimes**

- In 2020-21, the most common day of the week for drug possession crimes to take place was a Friday, when 17% of seizures occurred. The least common day was a Monday, with only just under a tenth (9%) of seizures occurring on this day of the week.
- In 2021-22, the most common days of the week for drug possession crimes to take place were a Saturday and a Friday, with 20% and 19% occurring on these days respectively. The least common days were a Monday and a Sunday with only a tenth of seizures occurring on each of these days.
- In both 2020-21 and 2021-22, the most common location for drug possession crimes to take place was the street or other open space with 56% of records reviewed having this locus in 2020-21 and 61% in 2021-22. Dwellings were the next most common locus in both years, where 26% and 21% of drug possession crimes took place in 2020-21 and 2021-22 respectively.

# Annexes

## Data Quality Statement

To produce this annual release on drug seizures, the Scottish Government requests data on drug supply-related crimes from Police Scotland's Analysis and Performance Unit (APU). APU, in turn, requests this information from divisions across Police Scotland which still maintain aspects of their own Crime Management Systems defined by the previous legacy force areas.

It was not possible to obtain data for every drug supply crime in the latest two years presented in this bulletin. One division was unable to provide a return for 2020-21 and two were unable to provide a return for 2021-22. As such, the figures provided for drug supply crimes relate to an estimated 93% of drug supply-related crimes in 2020-21 and 80% in 2021-22. It should be noted that as with any data collection that requires the manual review of a significant volume of administrative records, there is always a risk that a degree of human error may occur in the transferring of this information to an analysable form. To ensure the data is as accurate as possible, we have combined the figures for etizolam within the benzodiazepines category (for crimes of drug supply), rather than present them separately.

The current collection process for drug seizures data remains a transitional one. We will re-visit this in future years, in line with Police Scotland's plan to roll out a new national IT system for recording crime, which may offer opportunities to further improve the data collection process for these statistics.

Data from drug possession crimes is collected via a random sample of 400 drug possession crime records per year. This sample is stratified by police division so that the sample's geographic distribution reflects the distribution of drug possession crimes across Scotland. These records are reviewed by Scottish Government statisticians.

We always welcome feedback on the content of our statistical bulletins and users are welcome to submit their comments to: [JusticeAnalysts@gov.scot](mailto:JusticeAnalysts@gov.scot).

## Police Scotland Management Information

In addition to the Official Statistics on drug seizures, Police Scotland publish management information on drug crimes recorded by the police (including the number of recorded crimes of drug supply & production, possession of drugs and other drug crimes). This is presented within their Quarterly Management

Information Reports, which are available from the '[How we are performing](#)' section of Police Scotland's website.

These reports are produced to demonstrate Police Scotland's commitment to transparency (alongside other regular reporting activity to the Scottish Police Authority). The information within these reports is presented on a cumulative quarterly basis, with the first quarter of a reporting year containing 3 months of data (from April to June), the second containing 6 months of data (from April to September) etc. The reports are typically published within 2 months of the period to which they refer.

## **Other notes**

In addition to drugs controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, the Psychoactive Substance Act 2016 made it an offence to produce, supply, offer to supply, possess with intent to supply, possess on custodial premises, import or export psychoactive substances. The number of crimes of production, supply or possession in custody of a psychoactive substance was 2 in 2018-19, 10 in 2019-20, 8 in 2020-21 and 3 in 2021-22.

An [amendment](#) was made to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 which means that from 1st April 2019, gabapentin and pregabalin are controlled as Class C drugs under this act. Due to the low number of seizures involving these drugs in 2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22 they are not presented separately within the publication.

Clearly, only a limited selection of tables can be included in any statistical bulletin. Further analysis of Drug Seizures in Scotland can be supplied on request. In certain cases a fee is charged. For details of what can be provided, please contact [JusticeAnalysts@gov.scot](mailto:JusticeAnalysts@gov.scot).

## **An Official Statistics publication for Scotland**

Official and National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Both undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs and are produced free from any political interference.

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### **How to access background or source data**

The data collected for this statistical bulletin

☐ are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics

■ are available on the Scottish Government website

■ may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact [JusticeAnalysts@gov.scot](mailto:JusticeAnalysts@gov.scot) for further information.

☐ cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.

### **Complaints and suggestions**

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