



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

# **Information Guide**

for families and friends of  
Missing Persons





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# Ministerial Foreword

*Each year in Ireland, the equivalent of the entire population of a small community goes missing. While thankfully the vast majority of missing people are located or return home, tragically the location of a number of people remains unknown and these people remain missing. For families and friends of missing people who find themselves in this devastating position, left to cope with the ambiguous nature of the disappearance, the questions and concerns in relation to the circumstances surrounding the disappearance and the uncertainty about the extraordinarily difficult journey that lies ahead, this information guide is for you.*



The guide seeks to provide you with a signpost to each of the justice sector agencies that can make a critical contribution to missing persons cases. The guide also outlines the important roles performed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and An Garda Síochána in cases where an Irish citizen goes missing overseas. In addition, the guide serves to highlight the valuable work carried out by other bodies, including voluntary organisations. The guide does not seek to provide an exhaustive or highly technical account of the remit of the various organisations but rather provides an outline of each body's core functions relating to missing persons. Key contact information is also provided so that families and friends affected by the ambiguous loss of a missing loved one can make direct contact with a relevant agency or organisation.

Missing Persons Day is an all-Ireland annual day of commemoration which takes place on the first Wednesday in December each year. Missing Persons Day seeks to commemorate Ireland's missing people in a respectful and sensitive way while acknowledging the ongoing and complex trauma

experienced by the families and friends of missing people. Missing Persons Day also provides a nationwide, public platform to raise awareness of unsolved missing persons cases and to provide public information on available support services. It is my hope that this information guide will complement the crucial awareness-raising aspirations associated with our national commemorative day.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend every organisation and individual that works to support the families and friends of Ireland's missing people. Many of those who have made such valuable contributions are working on a solely voluntary basis and I wish to acknowledge your selfless generosity.

Finally, I want to acknowledge families and friends of missing persons that provide immeasurable support to each other on a human and often unseen level and represent a community in its truest and most admirable sense.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Helen McEntee".

Helen McEntee, T.D.  
Minister for Justice

# An Garda Síochána



A missing person is defined as anyone whose whereabouts are unknown and the circumstances of the disappearance presents a risk of harm to the missing person or any other person.

## **Reporting a missing person**

You can contact your local Garda station or any Garda station to report a person as missing.

## **Missing person investigation**

A missing person investigation will commence on receipt of the initial report. An Garda Síochána does not require a person to be missing for a certain period of time before commencing an investigation.

The relevant Superintendent will maintain management responsibility for the missing person investigation in their District or Functional area and will review the investigation to ensure it is reflective of the circumstances of the case and the information available. During the course of a missing person

investigation, a close family member may be asked to provide a familial DNA sample in order to progress the investigation. If any family member has any queries regarding providing a DNA sample they can contact their local investigating Garda member, or, alternatively the Garda Missing Persons Unit.

A full list of all Garda stations nationwide together with their contact details is located at <https://www.garda.ie/en/contact-us/station-directory>





### **Missing Persons Unit**

The Missing Persons Unit has organisational responsibility for the following matters:

- Review, development and implementation of Garda policy;
- Provision of advice, support and assistance to An Garda Síochána, non-governmental organisations and members of the public;
- Development of training material;
- Liaison with police services in other jurisdictions in relation to missing person investigations and unidentified remains.

The Garda Missing Person Unit  
can be contacted at  
[missing\\_persons@garda.ie](mailto:missing_persons@garda.ie),  
or 01-6669476

### **Missing person investigation with an international dimension**

An Garda Síochána contacts Interpol in cases where there is an international dimension to any missing persons investigation. Interpol provides assistance in situations where people living in Ireland are reported missing outside this jurisdiction, or where persons who have been reported missing

in this jurisdiction may have left the jurisdiction. Interpol also assists external police services with international missing persons investigations.

### **Schengen Information System**

An Garda Síochána participates in the Schengen Information System (SIS), the most widely used and largest information-sharing system for security and border management in Europe. SIS enables state authorities, such as police services, to enter and consult alerts on missing persons and other matters.

### **Child Rescue Ireland Alert**

Child Rescue Ireland Alert (CRI Alert) is a system that enables An Garda Síochána to seek the assistance of the general public in cases where a child has been abducted and there is a reasonable belief that there is an immediate and serious risk to the health or welfare of a child.

CRI Alert is an agreement between An Garda Síochána, the media and information broadcasters to alert the public to a child abduction in order to seek their help. Information relating to the CRI Alert will be broadcast via several media, including, but not limited to: Radio, Television, Internet and Electronic Road Signs. The primary goal of the CRI Alert is the safe and early recovery of the child unharmed.

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# National Missing Persons Helpline

The mission of the National Missing Persons Helpline is to provide practical and emotional support for families and friends of missing persons via a team of trained volunteers.

The Helpline also seeks to raise awareness of missing persons through a variety of activities, including the publication of photographs of missing persons on its website, [www.missingpersons.ie](http://www.missingpersons.ie), launching public appeals for information and engaging with relevant state agencies, such as An Garda Síochána.

The Helpline is a non-profit organisation and registered charity and receives annual funding from the Department of Justice.

The Helpline also has an active Facebook page: 'Missing Persons Helpline Ireland'.

The Helpline provides important and helpful advice on what to do when a family member or close friend goes missing and also how affected family

members and friends can take care of their own wellbeing in such challenging circumstances.

The Helpline runs a Family Peer Support Group programme which enables family members and friends affected by ambiguous loss to meet in-person and share their experiences in a supportive and empathetic space.

The Helpline also provides a confidential 24/7 service called Message Home for people who are not in contact with their families and wish to pass a message to a family member or friend. People can ring the freephone number, 1800 911 999, and leave a voice message and the Helpline will act as an intermediary and pass the message to the intended recipient.

National Missing  
Persons Helpline:  
1800 442 552



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# Forensic Science Ireland

*Forensic Science Ireland (FSI) is an associated office of the Department of Justice and Equality and was established in 1975 to provide a scientific service to the criminal justice system.*

FSI has been based in Garda Headquarters in the Phoenix Park in Dublin, however our new fit-for-purpose building on the scientific campus at Backweston in Celbridge, Co. Kildare was completed this year. The new facility is due to be officially opened in the New Year and work is ongoing to transition operations from the Phoenix Park to Backweston.

## **National DNA database**

A very significant development in body identification in Ireland occurred in November 2015 with the establishment of the national DNA database. The DNA database contains DNA profiles from unidentified remains, missing persons (for example, DNA from clothing of missing people) and relatives of missing persons.

DNA samples from more distant relatives such as uncles, aunts or cousins are not currently processed by the current DNA technology in use, however these samples can be stored at FSI.

## **How to give a DNA sample**

An easy way to get a sample of your DNA is to use a swab (i.e. a clean sponge on a stick) to collect cells from the inside of your mouth. The swab is gently wiped against the inside of your cheeks and is then pressed against a piece of card that has been chemically treated to store the DNA. This card can then be sampled at a FSI laboratory and a DNA profile can be generated.

Sometimes you may be asked to provide a DNA sample more than once. This could be because FSI is unable to obtain a DNA profile from your initial sample and may need to try again.

## **What happens to your DNA?**

A forensic scientist extracts DNA from the card and a DNA profile is generated. After your DNA profile has been uploaded to the DNA database, your original DNA sample is destroyed. The database will then compare your DNA profile with all other DNA profiles contained on the database to confirm if there is a DNA match. If there is a match, FSI will inform An Garda Síochána and your profile will be removed. If there is no match your profile will be retained on the database for future comparisons.

An easy way to get a sample of your DNA is to use a swab to collect cells from the inside of your mouth

If you are a parent, child or sibling of a missing person, you can submit a DNA sample to FSI through An Garda Síochána for uploading to the DNA database. As profiles are generated and uploaded onto the database they will be regularly checked against all profiles of unidentified remains in the hope of locating a DNA match and establishing an identification.



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DNA analysis focuses on examining specific sections of DNA that are known to be particularly variable between individuals in order to create a DNA profile. The sections of DNA tested do not reveal information about an individual's physical characteristics, such as eye or hair colour or about genetic diseases..

**FSI cooperation with An Garda Síochána and other organisations**

FSI works closely with the Garda Missing Person Unit and with Interpol to enable the exchange of DNA profiles with other countries.

When FSI holds DNA profiles from two or more relatives of a missing

person these can be submitted via Interpol for inclusion in the International I-Familia Database where they can be searched as a family.

**New technologies used in body identifications**

In 2020, FSI invested in Next Generating Sequencing (NGS) technology. NGS use in forensic science is still in its infancy and describes a suite of emerging DNA sequencing technologies, where sensitive tests can be performed that maximise the information obtained from limited amounts of DNA or in cases where biological material is limited.

You can submit DNA samples to FSI through An Garda Síochána for uploading to the DNA database



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# Coroner Service

*In Ireland, the coroner is required by law to inquire into the cause of a range of reportable deaths, including unexpected, unexplained, violent or unnatural deaths.*

This inquiry is an independent inquiry to determine the cause of death of the person and to ensure that a death certificate can be issued. In some circumstances, coroners may need to direct a pathologist to carry out a post-mortem on the deceased and, in certain cases, may also need to hold an inquest.

The coroner's inquest is an important public service, particularly for the family and friends of the person who has died.

A full list of all coroners in Ireland and their contact details can be found on [www.coroners.ie](http://www.coroners.ie)

For further information  
please visit the website:  
[www.coroners.ie](http://www.coroners.ie)

## **Information on unidentified remains in Ireland**

In June 2021, the Minister for Justice wrote to each coroner, requesting information on all unidentified human remains within their coronial districts. These results were collated by the Department of Justice and shared with An Garda Síochána.

From 2022 onwards, coroners are obliged by law to provide details of any unidentified human remains reported to them in the preceding year to the Minister for Justice, as part of a new statutory annual return to the Minister.

In 2023, the Unidentified Remains database was published following an analysis of Coroners records. While the data made available comprises the first full list of unidentified remains, additional cases may come to light each year. As a result the department intends to publish updates to the unidentified remains data on an annual basis.

Work is ongoing between the Department of Justice, An Garda Síochána and Coroners to enhance the functionality of the database and to incorporate other information, which may result in the inclusion of certain images and additional details in relation to remains which may come to light over time.





# Office of the State Pathologist

The Office of the State Pathologist is a non-statutory agency, which provides independent expert advice on matters relating to forensic pathology and performs post mortem examinations for criminal, suspicious or unusual deaths. In addition, forensic pathologists deal with cases of skeletonised and/or concealed remains, which may require the additional expertise of a forensic anthropologist or forensic archaeologist.

Forensic pathologists are qualified medical doctors who have specialised in forensic pathology. Forensic pathologists perform post mortem examinations and provide post mortem reports to the relevant coroner. They also attend inquests or court proceedings, which may arise from Garda investigations.

In missing persons' cases, the primary aims of the Office of the State Pathologist are to help with identification and to assist families

in understanding the fate of their loved one.

## **Post mortem examination (PME)**

A PME is the medical examination of a body after death. It is also referred to as an autopsy. Forensic pathologists specialise in diagnosing disease and identifying conditions that can lead to death.

Forensic pathologists receive specialist training to perform PMEs in cases where the death is thought to have

A post mortem examination is the medical examination of a body after death





## Forensic PME's conducted by the Office of the State Pathologist are also attended by Gardaí for the purpose of evidence collection

occurred as a result of criminal activity. In addition, forensic pathologists are trained in the interpretation of injuries and injury patterns.

Forensic PME's conducted by the Office of the State Pathologist are also attended by An Garda Síochána for

the purpose of evidence collection and photographic documentation of all the external and internal findings.

### **Identification of person**

The role of the forensic pathologist in the identification of a person is to ensure the collection of the appropriate evidence at PME and to work closely with other experts and An Garda Síochána in establishing the identity.

The body may be identified in three key ways: visually, by circumstantial evidence (for example, clothing or forms of identification found on the body) and by scientific methods (for example, DNA analysis or fingerprint analysis). DNA is the gold standard for identification.

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# Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains

The Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains was jointly established in 1999 by the Irish and British Governments. The purpose of the Commission is to obtain information, in confidence, which may lead to the location of the remains of victims of paramilitary violence (known as 'The Disappeared') who were murdered and buried in secret arising from the conflict in Northern Ireland, commonly referred to as 'the Troubles'.

In order to recover the remains of those victims still missing, the Commission depends on the provision of information by the public. If you have any information which may lead to the location of the remains of any of the Disappeared, please contact the Commission with the assurance that your information will be received in the strictest confidence.

All information received is also legally privileged which means it cannot be passed on to other state agencies, other bodies, or used in a court of law. Information can only be used to attempt to locate the remains of the Disappeared.

At the time of publication of this information guide, the remains of 13 of the 17 Disappeared have been

recovered and 4 people remain to be located: Joseph Lynskey, Columba McVeigh, Robert Nairac and Seamus Maguire.

If you wish to contact the Commission to provide information on any of the Disappeared, you can:

- Email [Secretary@iclvr.ie](mailto:Secretary@iclvr.ie)
- Send information by post to: ICLVR, PO Box 10827, Dublin 2
- Leave a confidential voice message on a free-phone number:
  - Britain and Ireland: 00800-55585500
  - International: +353 1 602 8655



The purpose of the ICLVR is to obtain information in confidence



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# Missing abroad – Consular support from the Department of Foreign Affairs

The Department of Foreign Affairs is regularly contacted by families and friends of Irish citizens who are concerned for the whereabouts of their loved ones abroad. The Department advises family members or friends who may have particular concerns to make a missing person report at their local Garda station.

An Garda Síochána engages with Interpol which transmits missing person reports to the Interpol Central Bureau of the country in which the individual is presumed missing and liaises with the relevant authorities of that country - investigations into missing persons in other jurisdictions are generally the responsibility of police services.

with the relevant authorities of other jurisdictions to make enquires about the progress of case, where appropriate. Many missing person cases are resolved quickly, however a small number of missing person cases abroad may result in full investigations.

The Department of Foreign Affairs can be contacted for consular assistance Monday to Friday, from 09:00-17:00, or, in case of emergency, outside office hours on 01 408 2000.

Additional information is available at [www.dfa.ie/travel/assistance-abroad/missing-person/](http://www.dfa.ie/travel/assistance-abroad/missing-person/)

The Department of Foreign Affairs' Consular Charter outlines the type of help the Department can provide and is available at [www.dfa.ie/travel/our-services/consular-assistance-charter](http://www.dfa.ie/travel/our-services/consular-assistance-charter)

The Department of  
Foreign Affairs can be contacted  
for consular assistance on  
01 408 2527

## How to access consular support

The Department of Foreign Affairs and its diplomatic offices abroad can liaise



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# Key contact organisations

The following list of key support organisations is by no means exhaustive but seeks to include many wonderful organisations, national and local, frontline and voluntary, that have provided support to families and friends of missing persons. Several of the organisations listed below have supported Ireland's Missing Persons Day for many years.

It is hoped that this information will serve as a starting point for families and friends of missing persons. There are numerous community groups and collectives across the country that provide varied and welcome supports and it is open to you to make contact with your own local community organisations in addition to organisations from the list below

Organisation	Website/Email	Phone
Abbeyfeale District Search and Rescue	adsarhq@gmail.com	
Alzheimer Society of Ireland	info@alzheimer.ie	1800 341 341
National Ambulance Service Ireland	www.nationalambulanceservice.ie	112 / 999
Barnardos	info@barnardos.ie	01 453 0355
Boyne Fishermen's Rescue and Recovery Service	committee@boynerescue.net	041 980 4876 086 844 0993
Civil Defence	civildefence@defence.ie	0505 25310
Cork City Missing Persons Search & Recovery	ccmpsar@gmail.com www.missing.ie	087 960 9885
Crimestoppers	crimestoppers@garda.ie	1800 250 025
Fire Services	Visit your local authority website	
Focus Ireland	help@focusireland.ie	018815900
Human Remains Services Ireland	forensic@hrsi.ie	085 711 2399
Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains	Secretary@iclvr.ie Post to: ICLVR, PO Box 10827	GB & IRL 00800-55585500 International +353 1 602 8655
Irish Cave Rescue Organisation	info@caving.ie	
Irish Coast Guard	admin@irishcoastguard.ie	112 / 999
Irish Search Dogs	suzanne@irishsearchdogs.com	
Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children	info@ispcc.ie	116000
Irish Underwater Council	info@diving.ie	01 284 4601
Mountain Rescue Ireland	www.mountainrescue.ie secretary@mountainrescue.ie	
National Missing Persons Helpline	www.missingpersons.ie	1800 442 552
Royal National Lifeboat Institution	www.rnli.org	
Searching for the Missing	toshlavery@yahoo.co.uk	
Simon Communities of Ireland	communications@simoncommunity.com	01 671 1606
Tusla	info@tusla.ie	01 771 8500

Website: [gov.ie/justice](http://gov.ie/justice)



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