

“You will never truly understand, until it happens to you!”

Anyone, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity or educational background, may become a missing person, however. A missing family member or friend is a hugely traumatic event, the fact that it happens suddenly and without warning means that those left behind are totally unprepared and reliant upon Gardai and whatever other supports are available.

As the case moves into the realm of "long term missing" - a sector where adults are more likely to be listed - the initial panic can be replaced by a feeling of despair and hopelessness, this phase is often described as Ambiguous Loss. For all of us, we are programmed to follow and accept the circle of life – from birth, through the lived experience and death, which comes with a sense of finality. We get a chance to say goodbye, mourn and eventually move on. But not when someone you love goes missing. When this happens, the process comes to a grinding halt and we find ourselves in a vacuum for which we have not prepared.

Going missing is not a criminal act and there are many reasons why people do so. No matter what the circumstances of their going, there will be one constant and that is a family who must deal with all of the trauma and pain that it brings. A missing loved one hurts- it hurts a lot and unless you actually live through the experience it is impossible to know the pain and heartache that is felt by those who are left behind. It is important that the trauma not be added to by the actions or inactions of the investigation.

Our Organisation has been in existence since 2003 and operating the National Missing Persons Helpline since 2008, thanks to a small band of dedicated volunteers – 9 in total - we provide a service 7/52. We are there to provide information, advice, emotional support, advocacy and also to educate and inform the public on Missing Persons. Besides our telephone Helpline, we use Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn to post Missing Persons alerts, as they are published by the Garda Press Office. We also have a website www.missingpersons.ie with a wide range of advice sheets on what to do etc.

We hold Family Peer Support meetings on a quarterly basis at which families of the missing meet in a friendly and confidential setting to discuss issues and provide mutual support for each other.



One feedback which is constant in our dealings with families, is a complaint about the lack of a viable line of communication or feedback between affected families and various official entities dealing with all aspects of missing persons. The Garda FLO system is in many cases, simply not living up to people's expectations.

Communication should happen regularly and not taper off as years pass. Those mourning a missing loved one need constant reassurance that their case has not been forgotten – regular contact from their FLO can be a huge source of comfort.

In 2009, the Garda Inspectorate issued a document with a set of recommendations on best practice for Garda handling of Missing Persons cases. One of the recommendations was a close working relationship with the National Missing Persons Helpline. Our relationship with Gardai has waxed and waned over the years. A system of regular meetings had been set up, in 2022 we held quarterly online meetings at which various aspects of Missing Persons were discussed. Unfortunately this arrangement is no longer in place and no meetings have taken place in 2023. There is regular contact with individual members within the Garda Missing Persons Unit, on specific issues, but no formal meetings with Garda Management as before.

There is simply no clear and dependable line of communication between families, ourselves as their representatives and those tasked with investigation. This cannot be allowed to continue – there is an obvious and urgent need for families to have access to those dealing with their cases, that is the main reason behind our being here today.

Missing persons statistics

1800 442 552

I would like to share some statistics with you. Up to 2015, the Garda Annual Report contained a detailed breakdown of missing persons cases by Garda Division, risk category and unsolved at year end. This level of breakdown is no longer published.

While there are in excess of 10k Missing Persons reports made to Gardai each year, this figure includes those who go missing on a regular basis. The actual number of individuals is in or around the 4,000 mark. The number of unsolved cases continues to grow annually.

We have no access to official Garda stats but do keep our own, based on published alerts – note that with in excess of 10k reports, only a small number of these result in a published Media Alert – usually between 200 – 300. It is from these published cases that our stats are compiled.



Garda Statistics published July 2023

2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 (July)

Missing Person Reports	9,506	8,497	9,599	10,510	8,840
Persons Reported					
Missing (<i>Unique persons - one or more times per year</i>)	4,095	3,337	3,505	4,265	2,518

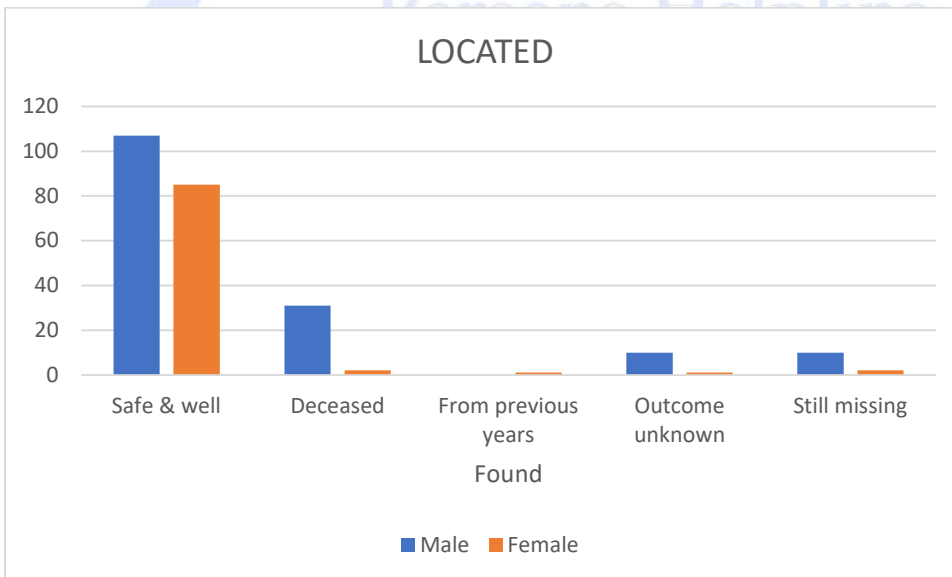
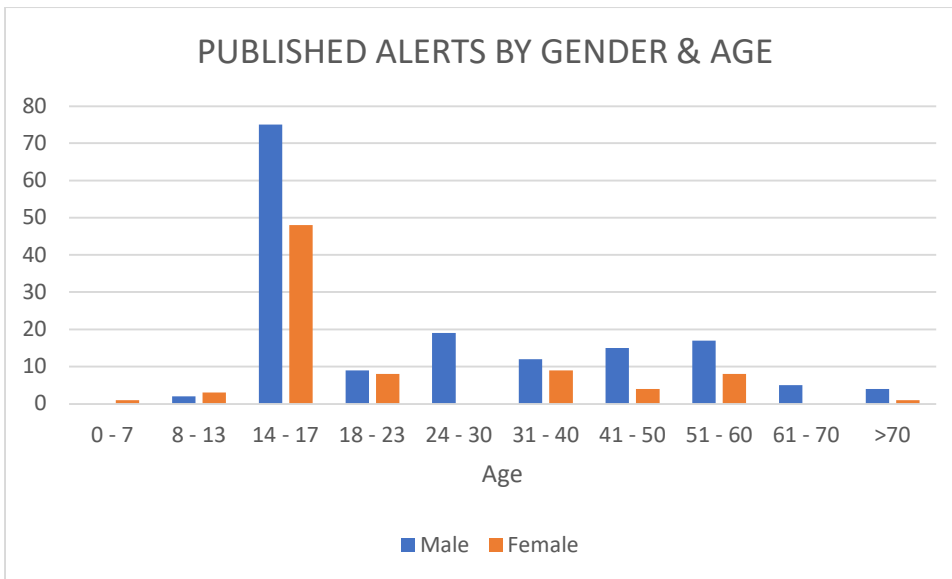
If we take an average figure of 3,500 Missing Persons per annum, since we set up the Helpline in 2008 over 52,500 individuals have gone missing. With studies showing that each Missing Person directly affects an average of 12 others, we have a figure of 630,000 who have to various degrees, suffered the trauma associated with a missing loved one.

Let us not forget also, those with a loved one missing abroad, this surely is the worst possible scenario.

Published cases Feb – end Sep 2023

Age	Male	Female
0 – 7		1
8 – 13	2	3
14 – 17	75	48
18 – 23	9	8
24 – 30	19	
31 – 40	12	9
41 – 50	15	4
51 – 60	17	8
61 – 70	5	
>70	4	1
Total reports	158	90
Found	Male	Female
Safe & well	107	85
Deceased	31	2
From previous years		1
Outcome not stated	10	1
Still missing @ end Sept	10	2



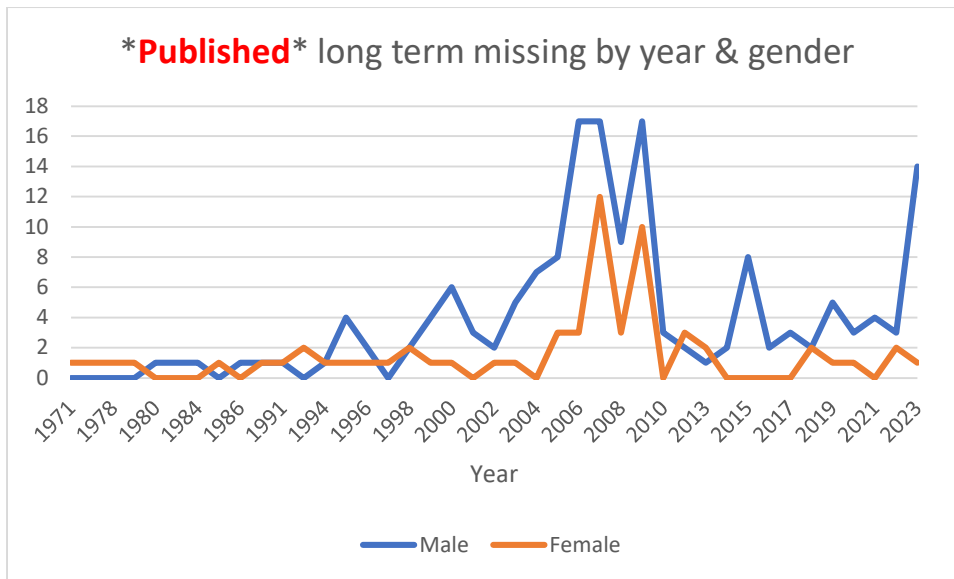


I think you will agree that there are obvious patterns emerging from the graphs, these are broadly in line with published reports from other International Police Services.

Long term missing

The number of long term/unsolved cases is we understand, in excess of 800. A scan of the Garda website reveals that only 228 are published (as of last week!). Who are the other 600? We don't know.

For your information, here is a graph of **published** long term missing, broken down by year and gender. Again, eye opening detail.



Unidentified Remains

The Dept of Justice established a Forum in July 2021 alongside An Garda Síochána's Missing Persons Unit and Forensic Science Ireland (FSI) to facilitate information exchange on unidentified remains.

Advancements in DNA profiling have led to a number of case breakthroughs in recent years. The provision of a DNA profile to Forensic Science Ireland by family members of a missing person can assist in solving unidentified bodies and missing person cases.

With this in mind, in December 2022, Coroners were asked to return updated details of any unidentified remains for their coronial district as part of their annual statutory returns to the Minister for Justice. An Unidentified Remains database has been compiled following an analysis of Coroners records and the department intends to publish updates to the unidentified remains data on an annual basis.

I would strongly recommend that you view the latest dataset which was published in September, there are some disturbing details outlined, that I will not go into now.

In closing my presentation, I would like to stress that we have an ongoing and increasing incidence of people going missing in this Country – by this I mean the 26 Counties, we do not have any access to PSNI records or Liaison.

We must begin to address the cause and consequences as a matter of urgency. I hope that my presentation has in some small way, served to inform and stir you into action.

Thank you.

ENDS

