



GARDA
INSPECTORATE
PROMOTING EXCELLENCE & ACCOUNTABILITY

Report of the Garda
Síochána Inspectorate

MISSING PERSONS
REVIEW AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

MARCH
09

THE OBJECTIVE OF THE GARDA SÍOCHÁNA INSPECTORATE IS:

‘To ensure that the resources available to the Garda Síochána are used so as to achieve and maintain the highest levels of efficiency and effectiveness in its operation and administration, as measured by reference to the best standards of comparable police services.’

(s. 117 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005)

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

In introducing the objectives of this report, it may be valuable to establish the context in which any successful missing persons programme will operate in today’s globalised world. Unlike the scenes depicted in the media, locating a missing person is much more complicated than assembling a police squad, a team of volunteers, and a few well-trained search and rescue dogs. In fact, the missing persons issue is extraordinarily complicated. An investigation may span an urban or suburban neighbourhood, miles of rural countryside, or stretch across several nations and every possible type of transport. It may involve multiple categories and subcategories of missing persons – from children to vulnerable adults, from those who wish to remain missing to those whose lives are endangered until they are found. It requires partnerships between government entities (including other countries and international organisations), voluntary organisations, the public, and the media. It encompasses not only the recovery of the missing person but the support and compassionate treatment of family members during and after the investigation. In short, the expansion of our global universe, coupled with the unique circumstances surrounding each missing person case, make it challenging to develop effective, all-inclusive policies and procedures.

The table below shows the number of missing persons reports made to the Garda Síochána each year and the number of missing persons outstanding at year-end. What the table cannot show, however, is the immense cost to the families and communities of those reported missing.

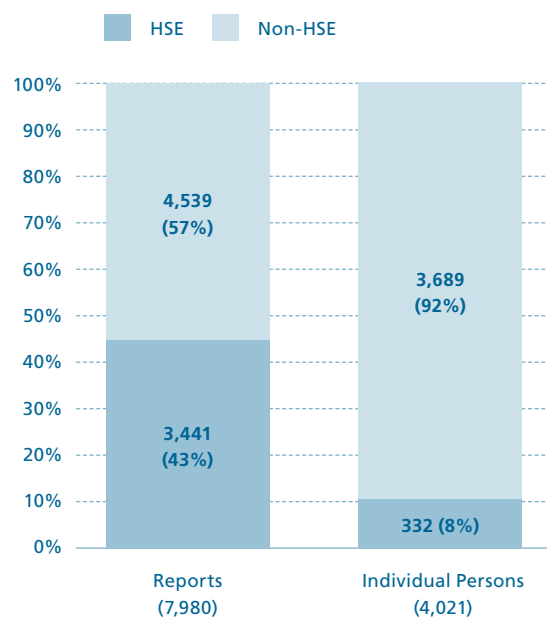
Missing Persons 2003–2009

Year	Number of Reports of Missing Persons	Number of Persons Reported Missing	Number of Persons still Missing (17/3/09)
2009 (to 17/03/09)	1,672	986*	123*
2008	7,980	4,021	67
2007	7,992	4,317	66
2006	6,811	3,988	63
2005	5,997	3,722	43
2004	5,060	3,495	62
2003	3,987	3,217	65
Total Number of Missing Persons as of 17 March, 2009			489*

*Provisional figures

Of particular interest is the relationship between missing persons reports and those in Health Service Executive (HSE) care. The chart below indicates that while persons in HSE care represent only 8% of persons reported missing, they account for 43% of all missing persons reports filed with the Garda Síochána. This indicates that many are reported missing on numerous occasions.

2008 Missing Persons Report



Throughout the course of this review, the Garda Inspectorate was struck by the complexity of the missing persons issue and the significant resources that are required to address cases effectively and compassionately. The Inspectorate reached one stark conclusion early in its review – the police cannot address this complex challenge alone. Coordination and communication are essential. Strong partnerships are required, not only within the State but in the international arena as well.

The Inspectorate was impressed by the commitment and efforts of the Garda Missing Persons Bureau on this very important issue. They have worked with extraordinary perseverance to develop risk assessment criteria for missing persons. After two years of intense effort, their discussions with the Health Service Executive are close to producing a Joint Protocol that is expected to greatly increase the safety of children in care. It is the Inspectorate's hope that implementation of the recommendations in this report will further enhance the handling of missing persons investigations by the Garda Síochána.

Inspection Objectives

The Programme for Government 2007–2012 includes a specific requirement for the Garda Inspectorate to study and report on the subject of missing persons.

Against this backdrop, on July 15, 2008, the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform directed the Garda Inspectorate to conduct a review and advise the Government on the need to establish a dedicated missing persons unit within the Garda Síochána and a response network similar to 'Amber Alert' in the USA.¹ In particular, the Minister requested that the Garda Inspectorate's report include an examination of:

- The current practice in Ireland regarding missing persons;
- The arrangements needed to deal with missing children or with particular children groups;

- Alert systems operating in other countries – including Amber Alert in the USA – and how effective such systems would be in an Irish context; and
- The use of existing international mechanisms to assist in tracing missing persons, such as Europol, Interpol, the Schengen Information System (SIS) and the European Union proposal currently under consideration.

The Inspectorate has concluded that the Garda Síochána has laid a solid foundation in the establishment of its Garda Missing Persons Bureau. The Garda Missing Persons Bureau is currently working to align itself with international best practices in this area. At the same time, there is scope for improvement. The Missing Persons Bureau should receive an expanded mandate and resources to strengthen coordination of missing persons investigations and services across the Garda Síochána. Front-line gardaí and their supervisors must receive clear guidance and expanded training on missing persons procedures. There is also scope for improved communication, support, and collaboration with the families of missing persons, other state agencies, non-governmental organisations and external policing organisations. This report puts forward eighteen recommendations for further development in these areas.

Inspection Methods

The methods used during this study were similar to that of previous work undertaken by the Garda Inspectorate.

Members of the inspection team conducted a desktop review of relevant legislation, data, and literature published by the Garda Síochána, other police organisations, non-governmental organisations and the media.

Fieldwork commenced with briefings on current missing persons practices by the Garda Missing Persons Bureau. The inspection team then consulted three Garda districts in Dublin (Tallaght, Coolock and Ballymun) and the Galway West Division. The Garda Professional Standards Unit provided a briefing on its assessment of policies

¹ Press Release, Minister Ahern announces Missing Persons Study, July 15, 2008.

and procedures relating to the subject of missing persons. The inspection team also met with representatives of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Garda National Immigration Bureau for an understanding of the issues regarding unaccompanied minors arriving in the country.

The team consulted with families who have missing loved ones and with Missing in Ireland Support Service (MISS), an Irish non-governmental organisation that provides services and advocates on behalf of missing persons and their families. The team also met with public representatives and a member of the media who have taken particular interest in the issue.

The Inspectorate undertook international benchmarking by meeting with and sourcing materials from a number of other police services and agencies. These services included the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), West Yorkshire Police, French National Police, Belgian Federal Police, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ontario Provincial Police, U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the National Police Improvement Agency in the United Kingdom. The team consulted with Europol and Interpol. The Inspectorate also reviewed 'Amber Alert' type systems and guidelines in France, Belgium, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada.

The Inspectorate thanks all who contributed their knowledge, expertise and suggestions to this important review.

CHAPTER

01

STRUCTURES

Overview

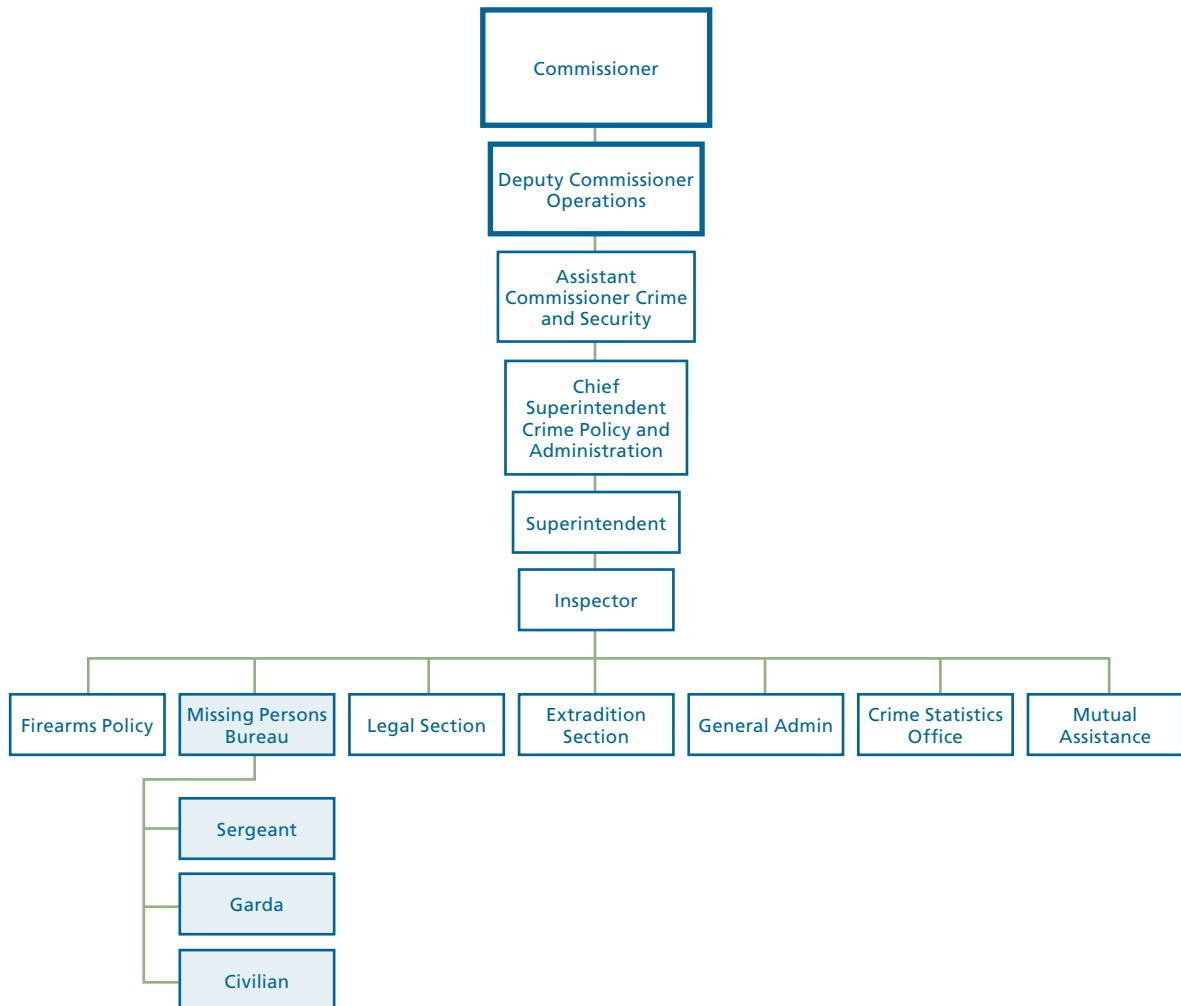
An organisation is best placed to carry out its functions effectively when it has appropriate structures in place. The current organisational structure of the Garda Missing Persons Bureau is insufficient to provide the service expected of it.

Discussion

Established in 1982, the Garda Missing Persons Bureau is currently located under Crime Policy and Administration within the Crime and Security Division at Garda Headquarters. An Assistant Commissioner leads the Crime and Security Division. The Assistant Commissioner, in turn, reports to the Deputy Commissioner Operations.

Crime Policy and Administration is headed by a Chief Superintendent, who is responsible for the Missing Persons Bureau and a range of other functions. At present, the Missing Persons Bureau is staffed with one sergeant, one garda and one civilian. These three personnel are fully dedicated to the missing persons function. The chart below depicts the current organisational structure.

Garda Síochána Organisational Structure Showing Garda Missing Persons Bureau



The Missing Persons Bureau's primary responsibility is to maintain accurate and up-to-date records on missing persons within Ireland.² It assists district superintendents in local investigations of missing persons incidents. However, the Missing Persons Bureau has no primary operational role in leading missing persons investigations. Instead, within each district, superintendents have the operational responsibility for missing persons incidents. They are assisted by teams of officers at the local level. The responsibility for liaising with the family of the missing person is held by the locally appointed Family Liaison Officer.

In reviewing other countries' approaches to missing persons, the Garda Inspectorate observed two best practices in the area of structure. One best practice is the use of a central missing persons unit to oversee organisation-wide policies and procedures, training, and technology. The central unit helps ensure organisational practice is reviewed for improvement in light of emerging best practices. The central unit also helps implement changes in policy and procedure consistently across the organisation. A second best practice is the appointment of a missing persons coordinator in each local jurisdiction within a country. These missing persons officers act as local subject matter experts. They also liaise with the central unit to ensure local practice is consistent with national standards. The Inspectorate points in particular to West Yorkshire and Leicestershire in the U.K., Northern Ireland, and Belgium as examples where these two practices are showing value.

The Garda Missing Persons Bureau currently serves as a central hub for missing persons policies, procedures, training, coordination, and technology. It also has responsibility for the identification of human remains. The Inspectorate is in agreement with the Missing Persons Bureau that it should continue its roles in these areas. However, the Missing Persons Bureau currently lacks the resources required to fulfil these responsibilities

properly. The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána resource the Missing Persons Bureau to enable it to more fully discharge its duties as a central coordinating unit. In particular, a limited number of additional personnel would enable the Missing Persons Bureau to fulfil the Inspectorate's recommendations in subsequent chapters in this report. These additional personnel should include both sworn police officers as well as non-sworn administrative and analytical personnel. In these times of economic challenge, resource allocation decisions must be made prudently, taking risk assessments into careful consideration. The risks associated with missing persons, particularly children, are of such significance that they must be accorded priority.

While some jurisdictions have centralised both coordination and operational responsibilities, the Inspectorate has concluded that a centralised operational approach would not be consistent with broader Garda Síochána goals of placing operational responsibility at the local level. For this reason, the Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Missing Persons Bureau continue to advise and assist in high-risk missing persons cases leaving direct, day-to-day responsibility to personnel in local Garda districts.

The Garda Missing Persons Bureau believes that local superintendents should continue to be responsible for missing persons investigations. The Inspectorate agrees. The Inspectorate is aware, however, that the investigation of missing persons is just one of a vast array of responsibilities held by local superintendents. The Inspectorate recommends that each district superintendent identify a particular individual to assist with day-to-day responsibilities for missing persons. The Garda Síochána is developing a similar approach to strengthen its partnership with the Health Service Executive. Each District will have a sergeant identified as the primary liaison to all children-in-care facilities in that district. This officer will develop rapport with Health Service Executive staff in those facilities. This is intended to improve joint efforts by the Garda Síochána and the Health Service Executive to minimise the risk of children in care going

² Garda Síochána webpage, <http://www.garda.ie/Controller.aspx?Page=85> (accessed February 4, 2009).

missing. (In Chapter 2, Policies and Procedures and Chapter 5, Partnerships, the joint initiative between the Garda Síochána and the Health Service Executive are discussed in more detail.)

The Inspectorate views the appointment of a sergeant with these responsibilities as a positive step. The Inspectorate suggests that Garda management consider expanding this role to include day-to-day responsibility for all missing persons issues. The Inspectorate recognises that, in very busy districts, handling issues relating to children in care may be a full-time job. In such a case, the district superintendent may be required to designate someone else to handle the broader category of missing persons. On the other hand, in quieter districts, the designated responsibility for missing persons may be a part-time job. In conclusion, the district superintendent should be ultimately accountable for missing persons investigations. At the same time, he or she should assign at least one individual, full or part time, as set out above, who will be responsible for day-to-day issues relating to missing persons.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Missing Persons Bureau continue to advise and assist in high risk missing person cases leaving direct, day-to-day responsibility to district superintendents and their personnel in local police districts.

Recommendation 2

The Inspectorate recommends that Garda Síochána management supplement the current resources of the Garda Missing Persons Bureau with a limited number of additional personnel, including sworn police officers and non-sworn administrative and analytical staff.

Recommendation 3

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána designate personnel in each police district who will be responsible for all missing persons cases and coordinate as necessary with the central Garda Missing Persons Bureau and external partners.

CHAPTER
02

POLICIES AND
PROCEDURES

Overview

Policies and procedures provide an organisation and its personnel with a shared understanding of how each component and individual will act in a particular circumstance. They are important because they help ensure that the organisation and its members act effectively, appropriately and with due regard for the law. They are also important because they provide a 'best practice' guide for organisational and individual response during stressful and time-constrained situations. Policies and procedures that are well constructed and widely disseminated help minimise delays and maximise the opportunity for a well-orchestrated response consistent with the desired outcome. There is a need for both high-level policy guidance that establishes the overall organisational approach and identifies unit and individual responsibilities and detailed procedural guidance that front-line officers can rely on in 'real time' during a particular incident.

Discussion

The Garda Síochána currently relies on the Garda Code, the Crime Investigation Techniques (CIT) Manual, and a variety of H.Q. Directives for guidance on its approach to missing persons. The relevant section of the Garda Code provides a definition of a missing person and criteria for assessing the risk associated with a particular missing person. The H.Q. Directives typically add to or amend the Garda Code with additional information. For example, the H.Q. Directive clarifying the Garda Code on the risk assessment criteria adds instructions on how to create a missing person incident on PULSE (Police Using Leading Systems Effectively – the Garda Síochána information system). Other directives discuss the Irish Missing Children's webpage, the National Missing Persons Helpline, and the role of juvenile liaison officers. Both the Garda Code and the H.Q. Directives are written as high-level guidance. They do not include a discussion of the specific procedures to be followed by front-line officers during a missing person incident, in the investigation which may follow, or about the continuing services to be provided to families of missing persons.

Other police agencies have supplemented police code and directives with specific procedural guidance for front-line officers who are responding to a missing person report. This procedural

guidance is simplified into easy-to-read formats, often including checklists that help guide the officer through the process of taking an initial report, applying risk assessment criteria, and developing the appropriate response. In France, the National Police and the Gendarmerie partnered to create a field-ready guide suitable for front-line officers to carry with them in a variety of environments. In Belgium, the Federal Police established a shared checklist for all police services to use when responding to a missing person report. In the United Kingdom, the West Yorkshire Police developed a very detailed set of guidelines that lay out the police responsibilities and specific steps to be taken under a variety of circumstances and categories of missing persons. These guidelines include a risk assessment flow chart that has great value in guiding front-line officers through the initial steps of taking a report and assessing the appropriate response. The Police Service of Northern Ireland is in the final stages of drafting a similar document, which is based in large part on Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) guidelines.

The Garda Síochána has indicated it intends to place updated guidelines for risk assessment, developed in a recent pilot programme, on its PULSE information system. This is a step in the right direction and complements other enhancements to PULSE, which will be discussed later in

this report (in Chapter 4, Technology). Placing these guidelines on PULSE will help ensure this guidance is available to front-line officers throughout the country. The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána take its plan one step further and supplement existing code and directives with specific procedural guidance for front-line officers. In doing so, the Garda Síochána can build on the work the Garda Missing Persons Bureau and Professional Standards are undertaking to develop approaches consistent with the updated risk assessment criteria and PULSE enhancements. The Garda Síochána may wish to review the content and approach of other jurisdictions, such as the UK, France, and Belgium in undertaking this task. The decisions and actions undertaken immediately following the initial receipt of the missing person report are often critical to the safe recovery of the individual. The Garda Síochána should place special emphasis on providing specific guidance to front-line officers.

Similarly, when the Garda Síochána and Health Service Executive implement the Joint Protocol regarding children in care, they should develop detailed instructions for their respective employees to enable them to carry out the terms of the Protocol. The Garda Missing Persons Bureau should also place these instructions on PULSE to ensure all front-line officers and supervisors can access them in a timely fashion. This will help ensure consistency in implementing any new procedures. The same recommendation holds true for other partnerships the Garda Síochána may establish, such as with Civil Defence, Mountain Rescue, sub-aqua or other organisations.

Recommendations

Recommendation 4

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána develop specific missing persons procedural guidance for call takers, front-line officers and supervisors.

Recommendation 5

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána provide detailed instructions to front-line officers and supervisors on their responsibilities when new agreements regarding missing persons are reached with partner organisations.

CHAPTER
03

TRAINING AND
EDUCATION

Overview

Training and education are critical to any profession. Training typically serves to help individuals gain particular skills. Police officers are trained not only when entering the service but throughout their careers. This approach to training is critical to the individual's continued professional development. It also contributes to the retention and currency of important skills, including many used infrequently on the job. Because of the serious nature of missing persons incidents, effective training in this subject area is necessary for personnel at all levels of the organisation.

Discussion

Training is essential for the successful investigation and recovery of missing persons for two reasons. First, as noted in the introduction, missing persons is an extraordinarily complex issue. There are numerous categories and subcategories of missing persons, each of which requires making choices about the most effective approach for investigation and recovery. Training provides the mental framework and understanding required to perform the cognitive tasks associated with missing persons cases. Second, time is of the essence in these cases. Front-line officers must be able to respond quickly to the report of a missing person, perform an assessment of the risk, and decide what action, if any is appropriate in the circumstances. Training can provide a solid foundation upon which front-line officers and supervisors can rely when facing the high stress and time-constrained circumstances that exist in missing persons cases.

The Garda Síochána has established a training approach on missing persons. The Garda College has introduced relevant training in its Phase I and Phase III student training, in its Senior Investigating Officer Programme, and in some specialist training. The Inspectorate was particularly impressed with the introduction of the Hydra Minerva system in place for the Senior Investigating Officer Programme. Hydra Minerva is an immersive learning environment. It begins with a missing person report and follows the investigation in a thorough and detailed manner. Similarly, the Inspectorate was impressed by the investment made by the Garda Síochána to train personnel in the Missing Persons Bureau.

The Missing Persons Bureau has taken advantage of international training opportunities and used these experiences to bring current best practices to Ireland. As the Garda Síochána enhances its missing persons services through the introduction of additional policies, procedures and technology (for example, as it moves forward with online risk assessment using PULSE), its new student, in-service, supervisory, and specialist training programmes must reflect the changes.

The Garda Missing Persons Bureau must continue to work with the Garda College to revise training for all personnel to ensure it is up to date with Garda and international best practices. The Garda Missing Persons Bureau has already taken steps to ensure it is learning from current international best practices in missing persons. It needs to complement its own learning by incorporating these new practices into the broader Garda Síochána training programme. As part of its enhanced role, the Garda Missing Persons Bureau should share responsibility with the Garda College for maintaining up-to-date training that reflects current policies and procedures. Other police services, such as the Belgian Federal Police, have benefited from making their missing persons units accountable for ensuring the currency of missing persons training.

In conjunction with placing missing persons policies and procedures on a PULSE portal, the Garda Inspectorate recommends that Garda management consider offering online continuous professional development on the subject of missing persons. This continuous professional development should bring front-line officers and

their supervisors up to date with changes and help them to understand the full role of the Garda Missing Persons Bureau. Other jurisdictions throughout the world have experienced great success in delivering missing persons and other training components online. This is a low-cost method of training delivery and it has great potential for ensuring that training is available to all front-line officers. Online training also provides the additional benefit of quickly disseminating updated policies and procedures. In this manner, the Garda Missing Persons Bureau and the Garda College can keep front-line officers up to date and these officers' skills will be continually refreshed to reflect best practices. Similarly, the Garda Missing Persons Bureau must continue to invest in its own professional development. This investment should focus both on maintaining its in-house expertise and on refreshing the Missing Persons Bureau's knowledge base with new developments in international best practices.

The Garda Síochána should also develop and conduct joint training with key partners, to include the Health Service Executive as well as Civil Defence, Mountain Rescue, sub-aqua and other voluntary search organisations. Joint training with the Health Service Executive should include a focus on procedures dealing with children in care. Partnership opportunities with Civil Defence, Mountain Rescue and other voluntary search organisations should draw on these organisations' vast experiences and expertise in search and rescue and search management training. It will be helpful if any agreements between the Garda Síochána and these partner organisations include provisions for joint training and information sessions. This joint training will help institutionalise the shared expectations and practices necessary to a successful partnership during a missing person incident. Joint training may also provide the additional benefit of sharing or reducing overall training costs.

In the international arena, the Garda Síochána should partner with the Police Service of Northern Ireland to develop joint training and exercises emphasising the need to work together seamlessly in those missing person incidents with cross-border implications.

Recommendations

Recommendation 6

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Missing Persons Bureau continue to invest in training its personnel to ensure they remain subject matter experts on missing persons issues.

Recommendation 7

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Missing Persons Bureau work continually with the Garda College to develop updated training on the subject of missing persons for new students, in-service and specialist personnel.

Recommendation 8

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána develop joint training with its partners, including the Health Service Executive, Civil Defence, Irish Mountain Rescue Association, sub-aqua and other voluntary search organisations, non-governmental organisations, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

CHAPTER
04

TECHNOLOGY

Overview

Technology tools are crucial to the operation and administration of modern police services. In previous reports, the Inspectorate has emphasised the significant technology requirements of the Garda Síochána. In reviewing the Missing Persons Bureau's initiatives, the Inspectorate was pleased to see that the Bureau had spent a great deal of time analysing technology needs and looking at best practices in other jurisdictions.

Discussion

There are three key technology tools contributing to missing persons best practices around the world: missing persons databases, online risk assessment tools, and missing persons webpages. Missing persons databases include all information about each missing person incident. They provide the information needed to analyse incidents, identify trends, and build strategies to reduce the number of persons in high-risk groups who go missing. Online risk assessment tools provide practical guidance to police officers in the field. This ensures that an organisation consistently applies risk assessment criteria. Missing persons webpages enable members of the public to view information about missing persons. They heighten public awareness of missing persons and provide direction to the public for reporting important information, including sightings.

Missing Persons Database

The Garda Síochána places all information on missing persons incidents on its PULSE information system. PULSE is the Garda Síochána database of all incidents (burglary, theft, assault, murder, public disturbance, etc.) reported to and investigated by the police. Placing missing person incidents on PULSE helps gardaí identify any other information that the Garda Síochána holds, which may assist in successfully responding to a missing person report. For example, when a police officer enters a missing person incident on PULSE, he / she can immediately search to determine if there are any other incidents or intelligence reports with relevant information (for example, another incident involving the same person or the address where they were reported last seen).

Other jurisdictions are using dedicated missing persons databases. These missing persons databases have the advantage of being specifically constructed for this particular incident type and provide additional tools to assist missing persons investigators. UK police services have used such a database which is highly praised for its functionality and ease of use. However, a frequent drawback of dedicated missing persons databases is the lack of connectivity to police services' greater information holdings. This makes it more difficult to draw on information that may be relevant to the missing person incident but is stored in another database. This can lead to missed connections, leads, and opportunities. The Garda Missing Persons Bureau has investigated such databases used in the UK police services and concluded that the strengths of including missing persons incidents on PULSE outweigh the benefits of the greater functionality a specialised missing persons database might provide.

Missing persons incidents have unique characteristics and requirements. The Inspectorate sees value in using an IT database tailored to this purpose. However, the Inspectorate also recognises the value of having the missing person incidents integrated into a police service's broader information holdings. For this reason, the Inspectorate is satisfied that the Garda Missing Persons Bureau has adequately assessed alternative best practices and made a sound business case for using PULSE. Moreover, the Inspectorate recognises that planned enhancements to the way missing persons incidents are recorded on PULSE will further strengthen the system's ability to support missing persons investigations. These PULSE enhancements have been pending since 2007. The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána proceed with them without further delay.

Risk Assessment Tool

The Garda Missing Persons Bureau conducted a pilot programme of risk assessment criteria in the spring of 2006. This pilot required completion of a paper form for every missing person report taken in four Garda divisions for a period of three months. The primary purpose of the pilot was to validate draft risk assessment criteria. This was successful. A secondary outcome was the discovery that it was not possible to operate a paper-based risk assessment process across the organisation. The administrative support required to operate in just four divisions greatly exceeded that which could be provided organisation-wide. The results of this pilot conclusively demonstrated that an electronic solution is required to consistently and effectively deploy the desired risk assessment approach across Ireland.

The Inspectorate is pleased to recognise the subsequent work by the Missing Persons Bureau to develop an online risk assessment tool in response to the findings. The Missing Persons Bureau studied the use of technology in other jurisdictions to develop its own approach. In particular, the Bureau found the Leicestershire Police Service to have one of the best systems in the United Kingdom. After reviewing the system in Leicestershire, the Garda Síochána concluded a similar outcome could be achieved through an update to its PULSE information system. The Garda Missing Persons Bureau developed an online risk assessment tool, which will be integrated with its PULSE information system. This risk assessment tool guides an officer through the criteria as the first step in entering a missing person incident on PULSE. In fact, when this tool becomes operational, it will be impossible to enter a missing person incident on PULSE without first answering each segment of the risk assessment. This new tool on PULSE will be a major step forward in instituting a consistent risk assessment approach across the organisation.

In order to introduce the risk assessment tool, relevant PULSE enhancements must take place. This initiative was planned but has been delayed since 2007. The Inspectorate was advised the enhancements will now be completed by June 2009. The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána adhere to this date and if possible improve on it.

Public Missing Persons Webpage

There are two missing persons webpages managed by the Garda Síochána that are accessible to the public in Ireland. One webpage, <http://www.garda.ie/MissingPersons/Default.aspx>, is currently managed by the Garda Síochána Press Office. It displays photographs of some of the persons reported missing to the Garda Síochána and still not located. A second webpage, <http://www.missingkids.ie/>, is managed by the Garda Missing Persons Bureau. This second webpage displays information on missing children. Non-governmental organisations also maintain missing persons webpages.

The Inspectorate recommends that both official Garda Síochána missing persons webpages become the responsibility of the Garda Missing Persons Bureau. The Inspectorate further recommends that the Garda Síochána bring clarity to its missing persons webpages including what is shown on each and why. At present, there is no explanation as to why some individuals are profiled and others who are missing are not. The Inspectorate also recommends that the Garda Síochána work with web search providers, such as Google, Yahoo, etc., to make its missing persons webpages easier to locate when using search tools.

Recommendations

Recommendation 9

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána expedite the release of enhancements to its PULSE information system that will improve the quality of its missing person incident records and introduce the online risk assessment tool.

Recommendation 10

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána make the Garda Missing Persons Bureau responsible for both official missing persons webpages. The Inspectorate further recommends that the Garda Síochána improve these webpages to increase the ease with which they can be found and understood by the public.

Recommendation 11

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána ensures missing persons technology allows for collaboration and coordination with the Police Service of Northern Ireland and other police services across Europe.

CHAPTER
05

PARTNERSHIPS

Overview

As noted in the introduction, the Inspectorate reached one stark conclusion early in its review – the police cannot address the complex challenge of missing persons alone. In the past, the prevention and resolution of missing persons incidents were viewed solely in terms of police responsibilities. Today's world requires a new approach. This approach recognises the importance of coordination, cooperation and communication between the police and its partners. In particular, strong partnerships are required with State agencies, non-governmental organisations, other volunteer organisations, and the media. Partnerships with other jurisdictions, particularly Northern Ireland and Britain are also important.

Discussion

There are varying degrees of partnership between the Garda Síochána and other entities to address missing persons issues. Currently, the viability of and investment in local partnerships depend on the commitment of local Garda Síochána personnel. The Garda Síochána is progressing beyond the informal approach to more formal agreements with its key partners. These agreements should include clear statements of shared objectives and procedures, provisions for joint training and exercise opportunities, and periodic reviews of the partnerships. In some instances, the Garda Síochána and its partners should supplement these national agreements with regional or local amendments providing further specificity relating to expectations and resources.

To its credit, the Garda Missing Persons Bureau recognises the importance of partnerships to the successful recovery of missing persons. This is especially evident in the very comprehensive Joint Protocol it drafted with the Health Service Executive. The implementation of this Protocol is pending signature by both organisations. The Garda Síochána is also pursuing formal agreements with several other partners, including Civil Defence and Mountain Rescue. The Inspectorate strongly recommends that the Garda Síochána and its partners expedite these agreements. When signed, these agreements will form a solid foundation for collaboration. As a result, a more standardised approach to missing persons will exist throughout the country.

Health Service Executive

The safety of children in care is a significant challenge for the Garda Síochána and its partners, especially the Health Service Executive. More than 40% of all missing persons reports relate to children in care. Moreover, of the children in care reported missing, many were reported missing on multiple occasions, including one child who was reported missing 169 times. The lack of a shared risk assessment approach to these reports – and a general lack of resources in the care facilities to send staff to retrieve those in their care – has placed an enormous demand on Garda Síochána resources. This demand decreases the resources available for other high-risk cases. The frequency with which children in care go missing also poses significant risks to the children themselves. In fact, those children who go missing from care are at substantial risk of becoming victims and perpetrators of crime.

Other places, such as Northern Ireland and West Yorkshire, have reported similar challenges in their jurisdictions. They responded by developing closer relationships between police and social service agencies. They issued clear risk assessment protocols that spell out the roles and responsibilities of each partner. Generally, this has resulted in an increased role for social service agencies in reducing the number of children in their care who go missing and in responding to their disappearance.

As noted above, the Missing Persons Bureau and the Health Service Executive have worked jointly over two years to develop a shared approach to increasing the safety of children in care.

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána and the Health Service Executive move quickly to sign and implement the Joint Protocol. In addition, the Garda Síochána and the Health Service Executive should commit to a periodic review of the Protocol to ensure it is well understood and successfully implemented by both organisations. The Garda Síochána and the Health Service Executive should jointly develop training on the Protocol. Moreover, the Garda Síochána and Health Service Executive personnel with responsibility for implementing and following the Protocol should train together. By training together, the personnel from each organisation will develop a better understanding of their respective responsibilities.

In a related area, the Inspectorate was informed of the priority the Garda Síochána has given to the subject of human trafficking. In 2007, the Garda National Immigration Bureau established Operation Snow. The operation was designed to detect and prevent the trafficking of minors and to prosecute criminal activity. The Inspectorate has been briefed on Operation Snow and is satisfied that the Garda Síochána is currently addressing this important concern. As follow-up to this report, the Inspectorate will monitor progress of the operation.

Civil Defence, Irish Mountain Rescue Association, Sub-aqua and Other Voluntary Search Organisations

Search and rescue skills and assets are essential to the successful recovery of all missing persons in Ireland. Civil Defence, the Irish Mountain Rescue Association, sub-aqua and other voluntary search organisations have very considerable experience, expertise, technology and equipment to assist in search operations. Partnerships between the Garda Síochána and these organisations have the potential to strengthen greatly the search for and recovery of missing persons.

At present, the level of coordination and cooperation varies significantly depending on the location. In some districts, the partnership is very strong.

In other districts, there is little or no knowledge of and / or cooperation with these organisations. For example, some members of these organisations have expressed challenges in identifying contacts within the Garda Síochána for search and recovery issues. This results in missed opportunities for cooperation and unfulfilled potential for successful operations. Garda management is addressing this shortfall by pursuing memoranda of understanding with both Civil Defence and the Irish Mountain Rescue Association. The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána expedite formal agreements with Civil Defence, Mountain Rescue, sub-aqua and other volunteer search organisations. These agreements should provide for regular exchanges of up-to-date contact rosters.

The Garda Síochána and its partners should commit to periodic reviews of these protocols to ensure they are well understood and successfully implemented by all parties. Furthermore, all parties should agree to conduct a joint debriefing following each search for a missing person. These debriefings should collect data on the conduct of the search. They should also include a review of current policies and procedures to determine if there are unresolved issues arising from the search. The debriefings should identify best practices, which should be included in a best practice database.

Non-governmental Organisations

In other countries, the police have found that partnerships with NGOs have resulted in increased services to the public. The NGOs provide volunteers to staff helplines, maintain missing persons webpages, and assist in quickly disseminating posters and other materials in the event of high-risk missing persons incidents. In some countries, these non-governmental organisations receive substantial government funding to assist the public and police in these areas.

In Ireland, the largest NGO focused on missing persons is Missing in Ireland Support Service (MISS). MISS provides staffing for a missing persons helpline (available 4 hours / day) and advocacy services. There is room for the Garda Síochána to explore a more active relationship with MISS. This relationship could include greater opportunities for joint training and increased information sharing.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland

The issue of missing persons has no borders. Especially for those individuals living in border counties, a strong partnership between the Garda Síochána and the Police Service of Northern Ireland provides additional reassurance of seamless police efforts in missing persons cases.

The Garda Síochána and the Police Service of Northern Ireland are well positioned to increase the strength and depth of their partnership on missing persons. Both services are in the process of institutionalising best practices in their missing persons structures and procedures. Both police services also benefit from having extraordinarily committed and innovative officers in their respective missing persons areas.

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána work with the Police Service of Northern Ireland to develop an all-island approach to missing persons. This could include complementary missing persons policies and procedures. Furthermore, the Garda Síochána could partner with the Police Service of Northern Ireland to develop joint training and cross-border exercises. The Inspectorate also recommends that the Garda Síochána work with the Police Service of Northern Ireland and other partners to establish a cross-border working group on missing persons. This working group could include representatives of both police services and partner agencies on both sides of the border.

Given the European Union focus on child abduction alert systems, the Inspectorate also recommends that the Garda Síochána work with the Police Service of Northern Ireland to explore developing an all-island child abduction alert system. In the event of a high-risk child abduction, where literally every minute counts, it is imperative that no time be lost due to cross-border differences in missing persons policies and procedures. The following chapter will discuss the importance and complexity of developing an Irish child abduction alert system.

Other International Partners

International organisations have played a significant role in assisting member states in the recovery of missing persons and in dealing with the extradition of suspects in missing person cases.

INTERPOL is the world's largest international police organisation, with 187 member countries. Created in 1923, it facilitates cross-border police co-operation, and supports and assists all organisations, authorities and services whose mission is to prevent or combat international crime.³ Interpol is used by member states to transmit and receive information concerning missing persons. The Garda Missing Persons Bureau can issue all-station- and-port alerts when necessary on receipt of an Interpol request concerning a missing person. This level of cooperation must be continued and supported by the Garda Síochána.

Europol is the European law enforcement co-operation organisation which 'aims at improving the effectiveness and co-operation of the competent authorities in the Member States in preventing and combating terrorism, unlawful drug trafficking and other serious forms of international organised crime.'⁴ Based on the Garda Missing Persons Bureau's experience, Europol has a limited role in the missing persons area. However, a missing person report could arise where a person is trafficked or otherwise involved in an organised crime incident with some international dimension.

The Schengen Convention (and related agreements) is an international treaty that establishes a common external border around many European States. The adoption of a common external border facilitated removal of internal border controls and allowed free movement for all citizens within the Schengen Area. By way of compensatory measures in the area of law enforcement, Schengen States established the Schengen Information System (SIS) to share information on a variety of subjects, including missing persons reports. Also, each participating Schengen State operates a SIRENE

³ <http://www.interpol.int/public/icpo/default.asp> (Accessed February 17, 2009).

⁴ <http://www.europol.europa.eu/> (Accessed February 17, 2009).

(Supplementary Information Request at the National Entry), which is responsible for sharing any additional information required to supplement the information held on the SIS.

Under a special protocol to the EU treaties, Ireland opted into certain non-border-related aspects of the Schengen Convention, including participation in the SIS. Ireland is currently preparing to connect to the second generation of the SIS, which is now being developed. To this end, the Garda Síochána is engaged in a procurement process for the necessary connecting systems and infrastructure. When this connectivity is in place it will provide a new platform for the dissemination of information, including information and alerts about missing persons, through a newly established SIRENE office at Garda Headquarters.

Recommendations

Recommendation 12

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána and the Health Service Executive expedite the Joint Protocol that clearly defines arrangements for addressing the issues of children in care who go missing.

Recommendation 13

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána expedite agreements with Civil Defence, Irish Mountain Rescue Association, sub-aqua and other voluntary search organisations.

Recommendation 14

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána explore developing a more active relationship with Missing in Ireland Support Service (MISS) and other non-governmental organisations dedicated to missing persons.

Recommendation 15

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána work with the Police Service of Northern Ireland and their respective partners to establish a cross-border working group on missing persons. This could lead to an all-island approach to missing persons.

Recommendation 16

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána work with the United Kingdom and other international partners to develop standardised protocols for cross-border investigation of missing persons cases.

CHAPTER
06

AMBER ALERT

Overview

The abduction of a child by a stranger is perhaps a parent's worst fear. While representing a very small percentage of all missing persons cases internationally, this scenario is generally considered to present the highest level of risk to child safety. An urgent, widely disseminated bulletin notifying the public and law enforcement of the abduction of a child by a stranger can be an effective tool in recovering the child safely. This urgent notification system (known as Amber Alert in the U.S, Child Rescue Alert in the U.K., and Alert-Enlèvement in France) has been adopted successfully by several countries. Amber Alert has become well known by the public at large, both in those countries that have adopted a similar approach as well as in countries without an alert system. In Ireland, where increasing attention is being drawn to the issue of missing persons, families of missing persons are advocating for implementation of an Irish Amber Alert system. This advocacy is mirrored across the European Union with the Council of the European Union considering the adoption of an EU-wide Amber Alert system. This chapter examines alert systems operating in other countries – including Amber Alert in the USA – and how effective such a system would be in an Irish context.

Amber Alert Systems

Contrary to popular understanding, the Amber Alert system is not used for every child who is reported missing. In fact, the Amber Alert system is governed by very strict criteria and employed only under those criteria. This narrow application is required to preserve the efficacy of the system, which relies on the cooperation and attention of numerous agencies, the media, and the public.

There are four specific criteria governing most countries' alert systems (See Appendix A):

- The missing person is a child;
- The police have reason to believe the child has been abducted or kidnapped;
- There is reasonable belief the child is in imminent danger of serious injury or death; and
- There is sufficient information to describe the missing child and the circumstances of the disappearance, so that an Amber Alert may effectively contribute to the search.

When a law enforcement organisation determines these four criteria have been met, an urgent notification is released to cooperating agencies, the media, and the public. The purpose of the bulletin is to 'instantly galvanise the entire community to assist in the search for and the safe recovery of the child.'⁵ The dissemination of this bulletin can take many forms, but typically includes the use of public announcements on radio and television, the use of missing children webpages, the use of updates on traffic signs and, increasingly, the use of text messages to mobile devices. Some countries have begun to display messages at lotto dealers and to stream the bulletin to webpages that have agreed to display Amber Alerts. Generally, the partnerships with media, transport agencies (airports, port authorities, road authorities, etc.), lotto dealers, and mobile companies are voluntary. Similarly, it is a voluntary decision on the part of individual members of the public as to whether they wish to sign up to receive alerts through their own communication devices, including webpages and mobile devices.

⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, Amber Alert homepage, <http://www.amberalert.gov/>, accessed January 22, 2008.

In developing and implementing an urgent notification system, there are several core best practices. Most importantly, the success of an urgent notification system rests on the community's understanding that such a notification is indeed a 'crisis' event that warrants its immediate attention and response. The key to maintaining the community's willingness to respond is the establishment of a set of narrow criteria that reserve the notification for those instances when a child is likely to be seriously injured or killed and where the use of the system may contribute to a successful recovery of the child. Another key component is the rapid dissemination of the warning through transportation signs (road signs, signs in ports, signs in airports, etc.), electronic billboards, television and radio, text messages, email, webpages, and posters. This rapid dissemination requires strong partnerships with government and private organisations to ensure all avenues of communication are leveraged. A third important component is the ability to mobilise resources swiftly to take telephone calls from the public during the period of an alert and to track and forward leads to investigators.

Discussion

In Ireland, there is no equivalent to the Amber Alert system. In the event of an alleged or actual child abduction, the Garda Síochána would follow the missing persons policies and procedures described earlier in this report. In analysing a European Union proposal that urges Member States to consider adopting a national mechanism similar to the Amber Alert approach, the Garda Síochána concluded that there was no case in the past ten years in Ireland that would have warranted the initiation of an alert. The Inspectorate is in agreement with the Garda Missing Persons Bureau that this fact should not rule out consideration of an alert system. Upon the launch of a province-wide alert system in Alberta, Canada, which has a similar population (3,455,062, est. 2007⁶) to Ireland (4,239,848, est. 2006⁷), Solicitor General Heather Forsyth remarked, 'We anticipate an Amber Alert will only be issued once a year in

Alberta. We hope we never have to use it, but if a child is abducted Amber Alert is another tool police can use to find them and help them bring the child home safely'.⁸ Other jurisdictions have made similar decisions.

The potential to rescue a child from a life-threatening abduction is deserving of priority in all circumstances. For this reason, the Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána develop an alert system grounded in best practices recognised around the world. While some costs will inevitably arise, a lot can be achieved in establishing an Amber Alert system without incurring substantial expenditure. The Garda Síochána should seek to build a strong alliance of public and private communications networks and organisations willing to make their resources available immediately to achieve the greatest possible level of public awareness of a missing child. The Garda Síochána should explore the possibility of developing arrangements for raising the alert within the existing framework for major emergency management.

Furthermore, the Inspectorate recommends that Ireland seize the opportunity to partner with Northern Ireland, if possible, to develop an all-island alert system. An abductor, like other criminals, will pay no heed to a border, particularly a seamless border. An all-island alert system would enhance the safety of children regardless of where they are abducted on the island. It would also integrate well with a European Union approach for child abduction alert and increase the ability to work with other international partners.

Developing an alert system will be a challenging task. It will require the participation of many government agencies in addition to the Garda Síochána. It will also require agreements with non-governmental organisations and the media. The Garda Síochána will play a central role. However, as the Inspectorate noted at the beginning of this report, the police cannot address this complex challenge alone. A successful alert system will require Government support, the cooperation of many partners in the private sector

⁶ http://www.alberta.ca/home/about_alberta.cfm (Accessed February 6, 2009)

⁷ <http://www.cso.ie/statistics/Population1901-2006.htm> (Accessed February 6, 2009)

⁸ http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/1038869809405_30/?hub=Canada (Accessed February 6, 2009)

and the support of the Irish people.

Recommendations

Recommendation 17

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána develop an alert system for missing children that includes strict criteria and provisions for international collaboration. The Inspectorate recognises that this is a challenging task that will require the support and participation of many government agencies, NGOs and private sector representatives.

Recommendation 18

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána explore the opportunity to partner with Northern Ireland to develop an all-island alert system.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Missing Persons Bureau continue to advise and assist in high-risk missing person cases leaving direct, day-to-day responsibility to district superintendents and their personnel in local police districts.

Recommendation 2

The Inspectorate recommends that Garda Síochána management supplement the current resources of the Garda Missing Persons Bureau with a limited number of additional personnel, including sworn police officers and non-sworn administrative and analytical staff.

Recommendation 3

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána designate personnel in each police district who will be responsible for all missing persons cases and coordinate as necessary with the central Garda Missing Persons Bureau and external partners.

Recommendation 4

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána develop specific missing persons procedural guidance for call takers, front-line officers and supervisors.

Recommendation 5

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána provide detailed instructions to front-line officers and supervisors on their responsibilities when new agreements regarding missing persons are reached with partner organisations.

Recommendation 6

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Missing Persons Bureau continue to invest in training its personnel to ensure they remain subject matter experts on missing persons issues.

Recommendation 7

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Missing Persons Bureau work continually with the Garda College to develop updated training on the subject of missing persons for new students, in-service and specialist personnel.

Recommendation 8

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána develop joint training with its partners, including the Health Service Executive, Civil Defence, Irish Mountain Rescue Association, sub-aqua and other voluntary search organisations, non-governmental organisations, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Recommendation 9

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána expedite the release of enhancements to its PULSE information system that will improve the quality of its missing person incident records and introduce the online risk assessment tool.

Recommendation 10

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána make the Garda Missing Persons Bureau responsible for both official missing persons webpages. The Inspectorate further recommends that the Garda Síochána improve these webpages to increase the ease with which they can be found and understood by the public.

Recommendation 11

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána ensure that missing persons technology allows for collaboration and coordination with the Police Service of Northern Ireland and other police services across Europe.

Recommendation 12

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána and the Health Service Executive expedite the Joint Protocol that clearly defines arrangements for addressing the issues of children in care who go missing.

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The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána expedite agreements with Civil Defence, Irish Mountain Rescue Association, sub-aqua and other voluntary search organisations.

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The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána work with the United Kingdom and other international partners to develop standardised protocols for cross-border investigation of missing persons cases.

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Recommendation 18

The Inspectorate recommends that the Garda Síochána explore the opportunity to partner with Northern Ireland to develop an all-island alert system.

APPENDIX A



Comparison of National Criteria for Urgent Notification Systems

	Age	Cause is Abduction	Likelihood of Serious Injury or Death	Information Available to Assist in Recovery	Established
Australia (Queensland) 'Child Abduction Alert'	A missing child under the age of 17 years has been abducted	Abduction	The child is at risk of serious harm or death	There is sufficient descriptive information available to make the alert effective; and an urgent public broadcast will assist location and safe recovery of the child.	2005
Canada (Quebec) 'Amber Alert / L'Alerte Amber'	The missing person is a child under the age of 18 years.	The police have reason to believe that the missing child has been abducted.	The police have reason to believe that the physical safety or the life of the child is in serious danger.	The police have information that may help locate the child, the suspect and/or the suspect's vehicle.	2003
France 'L'Alerte-Enlevement'	The missing person must be a minor.	Abduction, as opposed to a disappearance, must have taken place.	The life or physical integrity of the victim must be in danger.	The prosecutor is in possession of pieces of information that, if distributed, could help to locate the child or the suspect.	2006
Germany 'Amber Alarm'	The abducted child is 17 years old or younger.	The investigating authorities have concrete evidence that it was a kidnapping act.	The investigation authorities assume that the missing child is in the greatest danger to life and limb unless located.	There is sufficient information to describe the missing child and the circumstances of the disappearance such that an Amber Alert may effectively contribute to the search.	2008
Netherlands 'Amber Alert'	A child under 18 years of age.		There is immediate danger to the life of the child or fear of serious injury		2008
United Kingdom 'Child Rescue Alert'	The child is under the age of 16 years.	There is reasonable belief that the child has been kidnapped or abducted	There is reasonable belief that the child is in imminent danger of serious harm or death	There is sufficient information available to enable the public to assist the police in locating the child	Began in 2002 in Sussex, gradually rolling out across UK
United States of America 'Amber Alert'	The abduction is of a child aged 17 years or younger.	There is reasonable belief by law enforcement that an abduction has occurred.	The law enforcement agency believes that the child is in imminent danger of serious bodily injury or death.	There is enough descriptive information about the victim and the abduction for law enforcement to issue an Amber Alert to assist in the recovery of the child.	Began in 1996 in Texas, adopted across the USA. National legislation was passed in 2003 to encourage the development of Amber Alert across the USA.

Australia: <http://www.police.qld.gov.au/News+and+Alerts/alerts/Information.htm>

Canada: http://www.spvm.qc.ca/en/service/1_4_2_6_Alerte-amber.asp

France: <http://www.alerte-enlevement.gouv.fr/index.php?rubrique=10445>

Germany: <http://www.amber-alarm.net/000001986d019ea06/0497eb9a55140a752.html>

Netherlands: <http://www.amberalertnederland.nl/Amber.aspx>

United Kingdom: <http://www.npia.police.uk/en/10239.htm>

United States: <http://www.amberalert.gov/guidelines.htm>