

# Specific investigations

This page is from APP, the official source of professional practice for policing.

First published 22 November 2016 Updated 22 December 2023

Written by College of Policing

30 mins read

Implications for the UK leaving the European Union are currently under review – please see [APP on international investigation](#) for latest available detail on specific areas, for example:

- Schengen Information System
- Europol
- INTERPOL
- Joint Investigation Teams

This section provides additional information to aid the investigation based on the vulnerability of the individual and the circumstances in which they are missing.

## Missing children

Safeguarding young and vulnerable people is a responsibility of the police service and partner agencies (see [Children Act 2004](#)). When the police are notified that a child is missing, there is a clear responsibility on them to prevent the child from coming to harm. Where appropriate, a strategy meeting may be held.

For further information see:

- [Voice of the child](#)
- [Voice of the child practice briefing](#)
- [Section 11 of the Children Act 2004](#)
- [Department for Education \(2014\) Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care](#)
- [Children's Views on being Reported Missing from Care](#)

## Young people and risky behaviour

Children and young people often do not have the same levels of awareness or ability to keep themselves safe as adults. Going missing may indicate that something is wrong in their lives. Many of the children and young people who repeatedly go missing are considered by some to be 'streetwise' and able to look after themselves. However, these children may not understand the risk they are exposing themselves to, and should not be treated as low/very low risk simply due to their apparent willingness/complicity.

Children may find themselves in danger because they may have been abused, neglected or rejected by their families or others and, as a result, they may be vulnerable specifically when:

- misusing substances
- committing crimes
- having risky sexual contacts
- living on the streets
- mixing with inappropriate adults

## Information relevant to the child

When a missing person report relates to a looked-after child, it is important to work with all the agencies and carers that have been in regular contact with the child as they may have information about the child that might help to locate them.

When a child is missing from care, close engagement with the carers is important. Police officers should ask the care home or local authority for details of the child's risk assessment so that it can be taken into account during the investigation. Many forces are using the Philomena Protocol to guide their actions in relation to relevant cases involving children.

A child, especially a teenager, is unlikely to share all information about their life with their parents or carers. Investigators should not overlook information from siblings, friends, associates, school teachers and others. The online activity of the child may also provide valuable additional information which parents and carers may not be aware of.

For further information see:

- [Children's views on being reported missing from care](#)

- [No Place at Home - Risks facing children and young people who go missing from out of area placements](#)

## Child Rescue Alert

[Child Rescue Alert](#) (CRA) – (available to authorised users logged on to the restricted online [College Learn](#)) is a partnership between the police and the media which seeks public assistance when it is feared that a child may be at risk of serious harm. Assistance is sought via TV, radio, text messaging, social and digital media (including the internet) so that relevant information relating to the child, offender or any specified vehicle is passed on to the police.

CRA focuses on the risk to the child, rather than whether or not an offence has taken place.

The criteria for launching an alert is:

- the child is apparently under 18 years old
- there is a perception that the child is in imminent danger of serious harm or death
- there is sufficient information available to enable the public to assist police in locating the child

See [Child Rescue Alert Activation Protocol](#) (available to authorised users logged on to the restricted online [College Learn](#)).

The system is managed by the National Crime Agency (NCA) and specialist advice is available 24/7 by contacting 0800 234 6034.

The CRA provides:

- a single national number for the public to call that links immediately to the investigating force
- call handling support by linking all police forces and passing on the information to the investigating force's CRA major incident account
- a place for the public to go to for accurate information rather than relying on social media

## The law preventing identification of a teacher

The Education Act 2011 introduced reporting restrictions preventing the publication of any material that may lead to the identification of a teacher who has been accused by, or on behalf of, a pupil from the same school (where that identification would identify the teacher as the subject of the allegation).

The reporting restrictions apply until the point that the accused person is charged with an offence, or until the Secretary of State or the General Teaching Council for Wales publishes information about an investigation or decision in a disciplinary case arising from the allegation. The reporting restrictions also cease to apply if the individual to whom the restrictions apply effectively waives their right to anonymity by going public themselves or by giving their written consent for another to do so or if a judge lifts restrictions in response to a request to do so.

## Children remanded to local authority accommodation

In a small number of cases, young people become looked-after children because they are remanded to local authority accommodation by a youth court, having been charged with a criminal offence. This is known as remanded to local authority accommodation (RLAA). The child may be placed in secure accommodation or in a non-secure children's home or foster placement. A child who goes missing when RLAA, in legal terms has escaped custody.

Where the child has escaped custody, a risk assessment and appropriate action (in accordance with established procedures) must take place to safeguard the individual's wellbeing and to ensure that they are returned safely (see Wanted/Missing for additional information. Expertise of officers and staff who deal with missing person enquiries may be helpful to find the missing child and should be considered at an early stage.

The investigating officer will need to liaise with an appropriate officer in the area's youth offending team.

## Out-of-area placements

When children placed out of their local authority go missing, the local authority and social services in the area within which they have been housed/placed most is responsible for following the local **Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocol**. These services will also need to ensure that they comply with any relevant processes within the RMFHC policy of the local authority area within which the child originally lived (also known as the 'placing' or 'responsible' authority). It is possible that the child will return to their home area. It is, therefore, essential that communication with the police and other professionals in that area is effectively managed and coordinated. This should prevent issues of logistics and/or distance delaying or interfering in the actions of planning to locate the child.

Initial enquiries must be completed to determine if the person is in the force area where they have gone missing or if they have returned to the placing force area. Professional experience has shown that many young people will gravitate towards their home area. It will often be best to transfer an investigation to the force where the child lived before the placement. There may also be reasons why this is not the best course of action, for example if the child's family has moved to another area. The decision on which is the most appropriate force to investigate the case should be based on the needs of the investigation.

For further information see [Department for Education \(2014\) Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care.](#)

See also Cross-border cases.

## **Process to follow if the young person from area A is placed in area B**

1. Missing person report taken by police force area B
2. Initial investigative actions and assessment of risk carried out by police area B.
3. If significant factors relating to the investigation are centred in area B, the investigation will remain with force area B.
4. The case should be transferred to area A if the investigation reveals that:
  - there are no reasons why the missing person might have stayed in area B or suffered harm there, or
  - there are no other reasons to suggest that the child's connection with force area A has been broken

## **International child abduction**

Taking a child abroad without the appropriate consent of the child's parents or the individual who has parental responsibility is a criminal offence under the [Child Abduction Act 1984](#). Prompt action and engagement with the relevant authorities is essential in such cases. Forces should be guided by the document [Parental Child Abduction: A Brief Guide to Understanding, Managing and Responding to Parental Child Abduction](#) when responding to and investigating such cases. (This link is available to authorised users who are [logged on](#) to College Learn).

Advice and assistance when responding to cases where children may or have been taken or kept abroad in a [Hague Convention country](#) is available from the:

- [Central Authority for the Hague Convention on the civil aspects of international child abduction](#)
- [European Convention on recognition of enforcement of decisions concerning custody of children](#)

For further information see [Foreign and Commonwealth Office \(ND\) International Child Abduction](#).

## Central authority contacts for Hague Convention countries

Below are details of the relevant central authority for England and Wales and Northern Ireland.

Country	Central authority
England and Wales	<a href="#">International Child Abduction and Contact Unit (ICACU)</a>
Northern Ireland	<a href="#">Northern Ireland Courts service</a>

Where children may or have been taken or kept abroad in a non-Hague Convention country, advice and assistance is available from the [Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office](#) (FCO).

## Reunite

Reunite is an NGO that provides advice and support to families and the police in cases of international parental child abductions. Its advice line can be contacted on 0116 255 6234 or via their [website](#).

## Missing adults

Adults can be vulnerable when missing. This includes those who are accommodated in residential care, day patients at hospital or those experiencing personal problems, for example, financial, mental health or relationship difficulties. Senior officers should ensure that protocols should be in place to support partnership working.

For further information see:

- [Vulnerable adults APP](#)
- [Mental vulnerability and illness APP](#)
- [Missing Adults Framework - Policy paper overview: The multi-agency response for adults missing from health and care settings: A national framework for England](#)

## Missing from hospital emergency departments

It can be challenging to determine the level of risk to persons who go missing from emergency departments, particularly when assessing their medical needs.

It is important that full details of the individual's medical conditions are obtained, including the impact of not taking any medication, in order to make the risk assessment and decide on actions to be undertaken. Where relevant, advice should be sought from qualified medical staff on the likely outcomes of a vulnerable adult not receiving treatment and their ability to look after themselves or to survive.

The hospital has a duty to ensure the welfare of the individual, and should be expected to undertake reasonable enquiries (for example, attempting to contact them at their home address and conduct a search of the hospital grounds) to establish their whereabouts and wellbeing before reporting them missing to the police. Where there is immediate risk of harm, police should not delay action to find the missing person.

### **Detained hospital patients that are absent without leave (AWOL)**

[AWOL patients APP](#) provides guidance on the appropriate police response to reports concerning patients that are absent without leave from secure inpatient facilities.

## Suspicious missing person investigations

In many missing person cases the reasons for disappearance cannot be readily established and various hypotheses must be investigated simultaneously. This may mean running a twin-track investigation, with one side focusing on the possibility that the missing person has become a victim of crime and the other focusing on alternative reasons for the disappearance. In such cases, or where this is being considered, advice is available from the [UK Missing Persons Unit \(UKMPU\)](#).

The following APP is also available:

- [Missing person who is an alleged domestic abuse victim](#)
- [Missing person who is an alleged domestic abuse perpetrator](#)

## No-body murder investigation

Where it is apparent that the missing person is subject of a major crime, there are well-established procedures in place to give [structure to the investigation](#).

It is strongly recommended that, if the level of the investigation is raised to a murder inquiry, all of the initial enquiries and searches are reviewed to ensure that nothing has been missed.

A proof of life pack to assist forces with undertaking relevant enquiries to support a prosecution where no body has been located, is available from the NCA's [Major Crime Investigative Support](#) (telephone: 0345 000 5463).

## Found remains/people

Responding effectively when a body or human remains are found is important as the individual may be the subject of a missing person report.

Until enquiries determine otherwise, where a body or remains of a missing person are found, the case should be treated as suspicious. Early engagement with the coroner is required, and the principles of an effective murder investigation should be adhered to until the case has been established to be non-suspicious. The coroner will then take primary responsibility for establishing the identity of the individual, with the police assisting enquiries.

When the deceased person has been identified their details should be circulated on the PNC. This PNC entry will enable police forces to relate any subsequent missing person report back to the deceased and inform the reporting person.

Where an unidentified body is found, details should be recorded and notified to the UKMPU so that other forces are able to check their records of missing people.

The [UKMPU](#) is available to provide specialist support when an unidentified person or remains have been found. The UKMPU acts as the central repository for these cases and maintains a national



database, to facilitate matching of unidentified cases with outstanding missing persons reports.

The UKMPU must be notified of all unidentified bodies, body parts and people within 48 hours. This is in accordance with the [Code of Practice](#).

The following APP is also available:

- [APP on Disaster victim identification](#)
- [APP on Suicide and bereavement response](#) ([After an apparent suicide](#) and [Conveying the message](#))

## Identification samples

The police standards of investigation should be adhered to when collecting identification samples. This will ensure that no [contamination](#) occurs and the best possible samples are obtained, which will give the greatest opportunity to identify the individual.

Only forensic service providers accredited to load DNA profiles to the National DNA Database should be used to obtain a DNA profile, and the samples should be submitted for profiling as soon as they are taken.

## Obtaining consent

If the individual is alive, consent for identification samples to be taken should be obtained.

If the individual is unconscious or concern is raised regarding their ability to provide consent, an appropriate health professional involved in their care should be consulted. Assessment methods (such as the [Gillick Competence](#)) can be applied to ensure informed consent is obtained appropriately. (See Mental capacity.)

## Identification of a body or partial remains

When a body or partial remains are found appropriate samples should be obtained as soon as possible in order to identify the individual. Where available, all of the samples listed in forensics should be obtained to maximise the possibility of successful identification.

## Cross-border cases

Difficulties can arise when a person reported missing resides outside the area where the report is being made, for example, a student in temporary accommodation or a day trip visitor. The police area that receives the report must record it and carry out all necessary initial actions. If the responsibility for a case is subsequently transferred to another force area, the rationale for doing so must be recorded. Written acknowledgement from the receiving force should be obtained.

When deciding where ownership of the investigation lies, the principal issue is to consider where the majority of the enquiries are and who has the greatest opportunity of locating the missing person. It is probable that the place where the person was last seen would generate the majority of the initial enquiries (although this is not always the case, see also Out-of-area placements).

## Cross-border enquiries

In cross-border tasking and requests, details of the result of the risk assessment carried out by the investigating force, and other contextual information, should be passed to forces likely to become involved in the enquiry. This transfer of information allows colleagues to decide on the focus of their enquiries.

There is a responsibility on communications staff and investigating officers to request this information. The officer in charge of the investigation in the initiating force should ensure that all relevant information, including the risk assessment, is passed to the force that will be managing subsequent enquiries. It is important that there is a seamless transfer of responsibility for the investigation so that no cases are missed. The officer making the transfer should check that all materials have been received in the receiving force and that details of the person who received the information are noted. Developing a process that includes providing this additional information will reduce the risk to all involved. All police forces should have email addresses that are available 24 hours a day so that investigation records can be shared and transferred where relevant.

## British Transport Police

British Transport Police (BTP) has a valuable role to play in supporting relevant investigations. Although the responsibility for the investigation of missing persons will remain with the relevant Home Office territorial police force, BTP should be notified if:

- BTP has placed a suicide related information marker on the PNC, or

- there is a risk of suicide and the missing person resides, frequents or was last seen within the vicinity of a railway line, or
- there is specific information that the missing person is likely to visit or use the railway system

Engagement with BTP should form part of the investigation strategy and should be related to tangible lines of enquiry or search strategy. Where there is risk of suicide or other serious harm is likely, immediate assistance from BTP can be obtained in relation to intelligence checks, CCTV, ticketing enquiries and other railway-related matters.

These enquiries should be initiated by a telephone call to the BTP control room on 0121 254 8906.

Where the initial report of a missing person is made to BTP, they will take initial information to enable an assessment to be made of the need for any fast-track actions. BTP will then inform the relevant police force control room so that arrangements are made by that force to deal directly with the reporting person(s) and to manage the investigation.

### **BTP: Location and return of a missing person**

In any engagement between a BTP officer and a missing person, the format of a safe and well check will be followed to establish the person's wellbeing and any appropriate action to take. BTP will also check with the police force responsible for the missing person whether or not they can be returned safely to the address from which they are missing, mitigating any risk to the missing person.

The investigating police force will retain responsibility for carrying out the prevention interview and arranging the return of a missing person to their home address unless it is impracticable to do so, or an agreement has been made for BTP to return the person.

### **Ownership and responsibility for cases**

There must be clear and unambiguous ownership and responsibility for the investigation. In cases where the appropriate ownership is not clear, the matter should initially be agreed between supervisors within each relevant force to determine who should own the investigation. In the majority of cases it will be easily apparent which force should lead, for example where the majority of enquiries will be in one force area or where the enquiry is linked to other investigations in another force area.

Where agreement cannot be reached at this level it should be referred to a senior manager, who will discuss the matter with a senior manager of the other force. Where an agreement on primacy for an investigation has not been resolved, all necessary enquiries should continue with the originating force. If enquiries are requested in more than one force area, the originating force (or receiving force if primacy has been agreed) will act as coordinator to prevent duplication and to ensure that all information and intelligence is being considered by one force and the necessary decision-making is taking place.

Transferring cases should be done in a timely manner using an auditable process. An investigation should not be closed without clear confirmation that all information and intelligence has been transferred and received and the receiving force has taken ownership of the case.

See [Missing persons tasking and transfer request form](#).

## Immigration cases

When a person who is reported missing to the police, has entered or stayed in the country without the appropriate authority, the decision on which authority should deal with the report will depend on the circumstances of disappearance and level of risk.

Consideration should be given to whether:

- the individual is a victim of [modern slavery](#) or is being [exploited](#)
- the person is intentionally missing and seeking to avoid immigration procedures or repatriation
- there are any suspicious circumstances surrounding their disappearance

The assessment of risk is important when deciding the status of the person. Officers should consider the extent to which the individual is vulnerable, whether they have been able to exercise consent, and whether there is any reason to suspect any degree of coercion or deceit.

Children must always be considered as vulnerable and not being able to consent to their own exploitation. Safeguarding issues must take priority and this should be the responsibility of all agencies. For further information see [Wanted/missing](#) and [modern slavery APP](#).

## Migrant children

Incidents of migrant children (mainly unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) going missing from local authority care may be linked to serious crime, such as modern slavery or Child Sexual Exploitation. These children can be extremely vulnerable and should normally be recorded as missing persons when their whereabouts are unknown.

Anyone under the age of 18 years (or who claims to be 18 years and who hasn't been age assessed) must be treated as a child and child protection issues must take priority.

Before being placed in a children care facility, a migrant will either have provided evidence of their age, undergone an age assessment and been found to be under the age of 18 or there is further investigation being undertaken as part of the age assessment process. Child protection issues take priority for anyone under the age of 18 or anyone who is being treated as under 18 while the age assessment is being carried out.

If a young person is accompanied by an adult, consideration should be given to whether there is any cause for concern for the child's safety. Particular consideration should be given to the risk of returning migrant children into the care of adults who may be 'gang masters' or traffickers for serious and organised crime. The fact that the child appears to be with the person willingly does not mean that they are not being coerced.

In many cases, young people enter the country in possession of a mobile phone or a telephone number and use this to contact the traffickers who assisted their entry into the country. Although the young people may appear to be in the country willingly, they may often be brought here by deception or coercion and honestly believe that they have no other option but to comply. They may also have been led to believe that the UK authorities are their enemy and view figures of authority with mistrust and suspicion.

When a potential victim of **modern slavery** is identified, it is essential that special measures are put in place to ensure that the person is given the opportunity to engage with the authorities in this country and the opportunities for them to go missing are minimised. A **national referral mechanism (NRM)** referral must still be completed as soon as practicable.

For further information see:

- **Department for Education (2014) Care of unaccompanied and trafficked children ? Statutory guidance for local authorities on the care of unaccompanied asylum seeking and**

### trafficked children

- [Department for Education \(2011\) Safeguarding children who may have been trafficked](#)
- [Department for Education \(2014\) Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care](#)

## Missing persons at large events

It is important that consideration is given to ensuring effective assessment and recording of reports received during major events, such as music festivals. While many of these reports may be the result of family or friends becoming temporarily separated from one another, in some instances these missing individuals are at risk of harm.

The police should work with the organisers of the events to establish appropriate missing person procedures prior to the event. Procedures should enable officers to:

- capture all relevant details
- properly risk assess the report
- carry out follow-up enquiries, including transfer to the team that will continue enquiries if the person is not traced at the event
- confirm that the person has been located

For further information see [Planning and deployment – Working with partners.](#)

## International investigations

There are cases where a missing person investigation extends beyond national borders. This means that procedures will need to be modified to conform to international law and processes.

Any reports of missing persons overseas will, in the first instance, be investigated by the relevant agency within the country where the person went missing. If the matter is reported to the UK, a UK police force may decide to commence their own enquiries and/or investigation.

On receiving any such request, forces should conduct a risk assessment, complete a missing person report, and forward this via their International Liaison Officer to UKICB (Interpol). This report can then be assessed and transmitted to the overseas force responsible for the investigation. This ensures that the overseas force has the most useful information to conduct their enquiries.

A risk assessment completed by a UK police force is likely to be limited by the degree of available information and knowledge that the officer has of the country and area in which the person has gone missing. The risk assessment may or may not lead to actions by the recording force, however, police forces in the UK may then consider any investigative opportunities that can be progressed in the UK to support the country carrying out the investigation (for example, obtaining a DNA sample).

UK officers have no authority or rights to visit another country or carry out enquiries and investigations without the appropriate authorities first being obtained through INTERPOL channels as laid out in the Home Office guidelines.

It is important that the limitations surrounding the actions that UK police forces can take are communicated to the families of the missing person, in order that their expectations can be managed. Police forces may however consider appointing an FLO and/or SPoC to support any such case, depending on the circumstances.

If police officers believe or suspect that a person has travelled abroad for purposes linked to terrorism and radicalisation this should be communicated to the force counter terrorism unit without delay.

Any UK national reported missing from any country outside the UK (including anyone reported missing from a vessel outside UK waters) and reported to the UK (usually through INTERPOL channels) will be dealt with by the home force of the missing person or the closest relative of the missing person.

For further information see:

- [Investigation APP – International](#)
- [Investigation APP – International investigation useful contacts](#)

## **United Kingdom International Crime Bureau (Interpol Sirene Europol)**

The United Kingdom International Crime Bureau (Interpol Sirene Europol) (UKICB) within the NCA is the national focal point for international assistance and should be contacted if advice on the conduct of an international search is needed.

## **INTERPOL**

Interpol helps police forces around the world understand international crime trends, analyse information, and conduct operations.

Each police force has an [international liaison officer](#) who is able to assist and may be contacted for advice when pursuing international investigations.

## Criteria for accepting missing person enquiries

### INTERPOL's criteria for accepting missing person enquiries

- Persons under the age of 18.
- Persons 18 years and over, who are vulnerable, such as through physical or mental ill health, or some other special feature which makes it desirable to have them on record without delay.
- Persons who are 65 years or older and vulnerable.
- Persons whose disappearance gives rise to suspicions that some harm may befall them, or if a criminal investigation has begun.
- Persons normally resident in the UK who are believed to have travelled abroad and are believed to be vulnerable.
- Persons normally resident abroad who are reported to have disappeared in the UK and are believed to be vulnerable.

In addition to the above criteria, if the person has been reported missing by a foreign law enforcement agency, there must be a clear UK connection.

The submitted report must include details about:

- the risk posed to the subject
- the subject
- the location overseas

INTERPOL does not provide a family tracing service except in high-risk or life and death situations.

## INTERPOL notices

INTERPOL notices are international requests for cooperation or alerts which allow police in member countries to share information. These include:



- Yellow Notices – to help locate missing persons, especially minors, or to help identify persons who are not able to identify themselves
- Black Notices – to seek information about unidentified bodies

The international liaison officer in each force will be able to advise how to create and circulate these notices.

## The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) is responsible for the UK's international relations. One of the functions is to protect and assist British nationals overseas.

The FCDO can be contacted on 0207 008 1500.

Where it is suspected that a missing person has been taken or is being kept abroad for the purposes of a **forced marriage**, the FCDO has a dedicated **Forced marriage unit**, which can offer advice and support. Where it is suspected that the individual may be a victim of or at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM), an application can be made for an FGM protection order.

For further information see, the Joint International Crime Centre (JICC) which provides a single comprehensive service to policing for all cases involving an international component. It includes those services previously provided by the International Crime Coordination Centre and UKICB, as well as the UK INTERPOL and Europol desks, Part 1 and 3 extraditions and the international biometrics exchange.

## National Ports Office – Heathrow

This is staffed by the Metropolitan Police and can offer assistance in cases where urgent action is required to prevent individuals leaving the country.

The National Ports Office Heathrow can be contacted on 0208 721 6000.

## E-Borders

The e-Borders police team located in the National Border Targeting Centre (previously known as JBOC) can enter the missing person onto a watch list. The system screens travelers into or out of the UK before their journey and alerts the port where the missing person is expected to arrive or

depart, thereby facilitating intervention. Simply circulating the person as missing on the PNC will not ensure the police are notified if the person attempts to leave the country, unless they are stopped and checked at the border for any reason and a PNC check is conducted.

Officers are also able to search journeys made before the missing person was entered onto the system to ensure they have not already left the UK. Where journeys have been made, the system may also contain details of the person's credit cards, telephone numbers, addresses, travelling companions and other information helpful to locate the person.

## **Persons lost at sea**

This procedure applies to all persons reported lost at sea from a vessel travelling to or from ports within the UK, or a where a vessel is passing close to the UK and the incident is reported to UK coastguards. It also includes cases of persons missing from offshore installations and those lost from areas of the UK coastline.

Where a person has been reported lost at sea from a vessel travelling to or from a port within the UK, a missing person report will be completed. All reports must be properly acted on and should be dealt with by the relevant UK police force. The incident location will be the area of the UK coastline which is nearest at that time. Where there is doubt, the location for the port of destination will be used.

At the earliest opportunity after the initial report, the SIO should review the matter to assess if, on the information available, there is any possibility that the missing person is the victim of a crime.

Specialist support services are available for these cases.

## **Missing non-UK nationals**

If the missing person is not from the UK, the force to which the initial report is made should retain ownership of the enquiry and be responsible for all subsequent enquiries (including the transfer of the report overseas if deemed appropriate). Any transfer of ownership of the missing person file should be made only after consultation between senior officers in each force.

It may be appropriate to inform the relevant foreign embassy or high commission so that they may contact the family of the missing person. However, there are some circumstances in which the

relevant foreign embassy or high commission should not be informed, these include where the missing person is a political refugee, (whether for reasons of race, nationality, political opinion or religion) or is seeking political asylum.

Forces should contact the [Home Office Command and Control Unit](#) in all such cases for advice and assistance. A report should also be forwarded to INTERPOL for notification to be sent to the appropriate country and for any relevant background information to be gathered.

## Missing people involved in mass disasters

The recognition of the right of individuals to retain their identity after death is described in [INTERPOL Resolution AGN/65/Res13 \(1996\)](#).

The [INTERPOL Disaster Victim Identification guide](#) is the international standard and police forces should be guided by [Disaster victim identification APP](#).

## The role of the coroner

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the [coroner](#) has overall responsibility for the identification of the deceased following a disaster. In Scotland the Procurator Fiscal will direct police accordingly. The individual dealing with the case must be consulted throughout the identification process.

Where there is difficulty in identifying large numbers of people in a disaster, it is policy to set up an [identification commission](#) under the chair of the coroner.

## Identification process

A senior detective, who is a senior identification manager (SIM), will be nominated by the police gold commander to deal with all aspects of the identification. This officer will work closely with the SIO and the coroner/Procurator Fiscal in assuming overall responsibility for:

- recovering victims and human remains from the site
- police mortuary teams
- police casualty bureau
- police family liaison teams

For further information see [Civil contingencies APP – Mobilisation](#) and contact the [National Policing Civil Contingencies portfolio](#).

## Tags

Missing persons