

The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP)

A short guide on data collection for families
of the missing and civil society organizations

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Report a missing person
ICMP Online Inquiry Center
oic.icmp.int



The importance of data

Data from families of the missing is central to the process of locating and identifying missing persons.

ICMP has established the **international benchmark for collecting, storing, and sharing personal data** efficiently and securely.

ICMP's Data Systems make it possible to bring together the disparate elements in investigations that span **different countries and continents**, different time periods and different social, cultural and legal environments.

ICMP Data Systems consist of two major data processing applications, the **Identification Data Management System (iDMS)** and the **Online Inquiry Center (OIC)**. The iDMS is **an advanced software solution** used to manage large-scale missing persons programs in cooperation with national and international agencies throughout the world. It is an interactive tool that relatives of missing persons and other stakeholders can use to obtain and provide information that is stored in the iDMS.






This brochure was produced by ICMP for families of the missing and civil society organizations. It describes **the important role that families play** in the collection of data, and the way in which families of the missing and civil society organizations can work with ICMP to contribute to effective processes to account for missing persons. It also presents ICMP's data systems and the process through which ICMP collects, uses, shares and protects data.

Who is a missing person?

A missing person is **someone whose whereabouts are not known** and who is reported as missing by his or her family. Missing persons may be alive or dead.

Relatives and close friends may **report a person** as missing to ICMP.

Persons go missing involuntarily under **many circumstances:**

				
Armed conflict	Human rights abuses	Migration or displacement	Organized crime such as drug-related crimes or human trafficking	Natural or man-made disasters

The role of data in finding missing persons

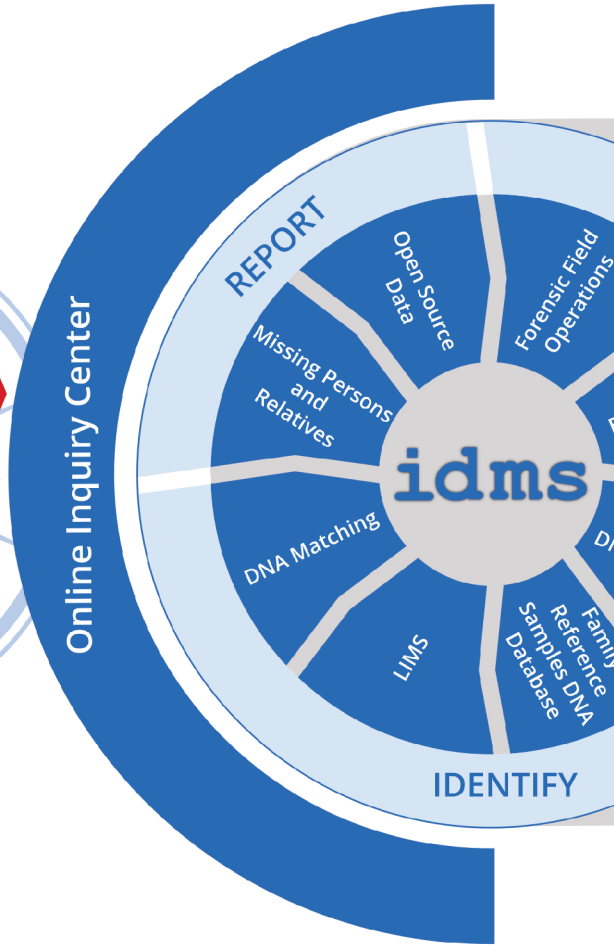
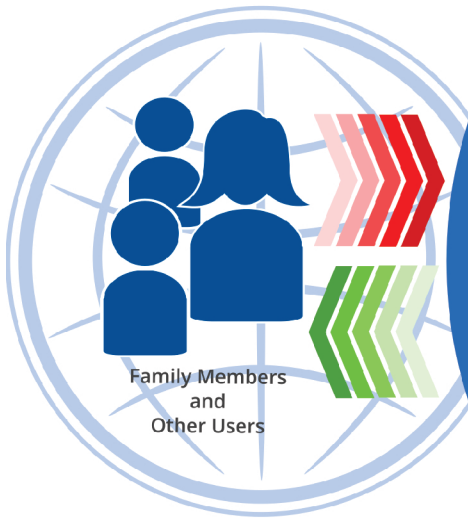
Data about the person who is missing is key. Such data includes:

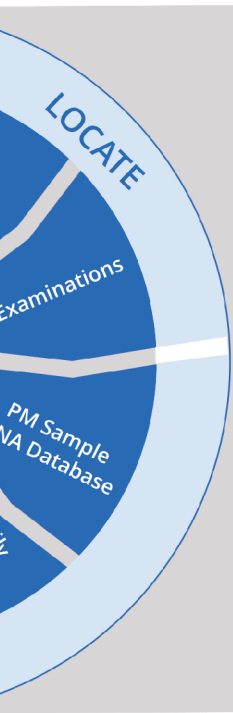
Type of data	What is this data?	What is this data used for?
Personal information about the missing person	Name of the missing person and other basic information such as date of birth, last known address and physical characteristics. If possible a picture of the missing person	This enables ICMP to establish a unique record of this missing person in its databases
Information about the disappearance	Date, place and other circumstances known or suspected to be associated with the disappearance	This may assist in locating and/or identifying the missing person
Personal information about the person reporting a missing persons case	Name and contact information	This enables ICMP to contact the person making the report in the event that additional information is needed, or that the missing person has been located
Information on biological relatives (family members) of the missing	Information regarding how family members are related to the missing person	This enables ICMP to contact family members and request small drops of blood or a saliva swab that may permit DNA identification
Family reference genetic data	DNA profiles unique to each family member	Sophisticated computer comparisons are conducted to match DNA profiles from families to unidentified missing persons, enabling highly certain scientific identifications



ICMP does not collect or use information on ethnic affiliation, race, religious beliefs or other personal information that could serve a discriminatory purpose.

ICMP Data Systems





Identification Data Management System

Applications:

Missing Persons and Relatives

Collects and stores data about reported missing persons and their relatives.

Family Reference Sample DNA Database

Stores DNA profiles from family members of the missing, and manages family reference sample tracking and chain of custody.

DNA Matching

Permits finding DNA matches between living family members that have been separated or between unidentified human remains and families of the missing, by advanced computer comparison of DNA profiles and cross-referencing to missing persons and family data.

Forensic Field Operations

Permits management of data relevant to the location and recovery of human remains, relating to investigations, gravesite reconnaissance, excavations, crime scene documentation and chain of custody.

Post-mortem Sample DNA Database

Stores DNA profiles obtained from samples taken from unidentified human remains, and manages sample tracking and chain of custody.

Examinations

Manages data obtained from pathology or anthropology examination of human remains.

Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS)

Tracks samples, chain of custody, and processing steps throughout the DNA laboratory procedures that extract DNA from biological samples and produce DNA profiles.

Open Source Data

Compiles and analyzes publicly available information about individual missing persons cases, news and social media, as well as country assessments, from open sources.

Why should families report a missing person to ICMP?

1. ICMP has 20 years of experience in collecting data from families around the world.
2. ICMP has contributed to the identification of more than 20,000 persons.
3. ICMP is independent and impartial in its work.
4. ICMP maintains advanced DNA identification laboratories to identify large numbers of missing persons.
5. ICMP is a treaty-based international organization that benefits from privileges and immunities that can guarantee legal protection of data.
6. ICMP can use data to help families access rights, including truth, justice and reparations.

The importance of reporting a missing person

1. It is the first step toward finding a missing person.
2. It is part of every individual's right to an official, transparent and effective investigation into the fate and circumstances of a person who has gone missing.
3. It ensures recognition of the missing person under the law.
4. It helps to ensure that the missing are not forgotten.
5. It helps to prevent manipulation of the facts for political gain.
6. It can support justice processes.
7. It lays the foundations for access to socio-economic assistance for families of the missing.
8. It contributes to building comprehensive databases of missing persons.
9. It contributes to raising awareness of the problem of missing persons.

The rights of the families of the missing



How does ICMP use data?

To ensure that data that has been collected about missing persons contributes in an effective way to finding them, ICMP developed the **Identification Data Management System (iDMS)**.

This system is:



Accessible anywhere in the world via the Online Inquiry Center (OIC) to provide information on the missing;



A comprehensive and centralized system for organizing, storing and managing large amounts of data on the missing;



Protected against unauthorized access and manipulation.

The iDMS includes the Online Inquiry Center (OIC), which allows families of the missing:



to **report** a missing person



to **update information** they have provided



to ask ICMP to **collect their DNA reference samples**

See also “ICMP Data Systems” on page 4-5 of this guide.

Information provided by families of the missing is stored in the iDMS together with information **obtained from other organizations, collected in the field, or gathered from the media and other sources.**



DNA profiles are also stored in the iDMS. This information is used to assist in locating and identifying the missing.

How can families of the missing and civil society organizations get involved in finding the missing?

A missing person report can be submitted from anywhere in the world using the Online Inquiry Center (OIC).

Report a Missing Person

Through the OIC families of the missing can safely **provide information about the missing person** and the place and date of disappearance, and they can also update that information.



The OIC also allows families of the missing to **establish contact with ICMP in a secure way.**



Families of the missing retain **control of the data** and can decide how and if the data is shared.

Civil society organizations can work together with ICMP to collect data about missing persons



Civil society organizations can **access the iDMS to store collected data securely.**



Civil society organizations can use the iDMS **to standardize and systemize data they have collected.**



Civil society organizations **retain control of personal information**, subject to the consent of the family members who have provided the data.

How does ICMP share data and why?

Sharing data is **necessary in order to find missing persons**, but privacy rights must be respected when data is shared.

ICMP will use or share personal information **only if family members agree**, and only for the purposes that they have agreed to. With such agreement, ICMP may:



- search its **own databases** for information.
- search the **databases of other organizations**,
- allow **family members and others to search** ICMP's database for reports and news on missing persons,



- Information on missing persons and their relatives, including genetic information can be used as evidence in trials, provided:
 - ⇒ family members have provided ICMP with their **free, informed and written consent**, and
 - ⇒ the court and parties to the trial **do not disclose the information to the public**.

How does ICMP protect data?

ICMP protects personal information by providing security in four ways:



Physical security: personal information in databases is guarded.



Technical security: ICMP data processing systems are secured against cyber-attacks, are regularly reviewed for their safety and are hosted only on ICMP's own IT Servers.



Organizational security: Access to personal information is limited to ICMP staff members who are responsible for safeguarding information in accordance with ICMP's policies and applicable international norms.



Legal security: Personal information is protected by international law which guarantees that it cannot be accessed by courts, prosecutors or the police, unless the person who has provided the data has consented to sharing his or her information.

The Right to Privacy

Privacy includes the right to determine what information is communicated to others. Privacy is a fundamental human right recognized in the **UN Declaration of Human Rights** which underpins human dignity, personhood, autonomy and liberty.




To decide whether or not to share personal information, it is necessary to know:

- **who** will receive the information,
- **how** the information will be used, and for what purpose,
- how the information is **protected**,
- what rights exist to **withdraw** the information once it has been provided.







Case study: The missing from the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia

Over **100,000 family reference samples** and missing persons records were collected, which were used to:

-  Compile a **comprehensive database** of missing persons
-  Initiate and promote a process of **searching for the missing**
-  **Identify** missing persons.

50,000 DNA profiles obtained from missing persons, including unidentified bodies, were compared to **100,000 DNA reference profiles** provided by relatives of the missing:

-  To identify missing persons with scientific certainty allowing authorities to **close missing persons cases** and to inform families that the remains of their missing relative had been found;
-  To link the identity of the missing person back to the **location** where they were killed or recovered;
-  To enable families to seek **compensation**; and
-  To serve as **evidence in criminal trials** for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. Personal data was provided only after the consent of the families of the missing had been given.



- 40,000** Missing persons as a result of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia
- 100,000** Reference samples from families of the missing
- 3,000** Mass graves excavated
- 50,000** Post-mortem samples provided by authorities
- 30** Domestic and international criminal trials (including those at which ICMP provided expert witness testimony and evidence)
- 70%** Missing persons accounted for

About ICMP

ICMP seeks to secure the co-operation of governments and other authorities in locating and identifying persons missing **as a result of conflicts, human rights abuses, disasters, organized violence, irregular migration and other causes** and to assist them in doing so. ICMP also supports the work of other organizations in their efforts, encourages public involvement in its activities and contributes to the development of appropriate expressions of commemoration and tribute to the missing.

ICMP was created at the 1996 G-7 Summit to address the issue of persons missing as a consequence of the conflicts in the Western Balkans. Starting **in 2004, it began working globally**. In 2014, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Sweden and Luxembourg signed an international agreement establishing ICMP as **an international organization with headquarters in The Hague** to respond to the global challenge of missing persons. ICMP is the only international organization tasked **exclusively to work on the issue of missing persons** and as such it has helped governments and others build rule-of-law institutions that successfully and impartially search for and identify missing persons.





To report a missing person to ICMP
please go to: oic.icmp.int

Email address: oic.support@icmp.int

Viber and WhatsApp phone number: +387 62 699 513

Skype username: [oic.support@icmp.int](https://www.skype.com/en/contacts/oic.support@icmp.int)

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