

The issue of missing and disappeared persons is a global challenge. Conflict, human rights abuses, organized crime, human trafficking, political instability, climate change, irregular migration and forced displacement of refugees all contribute to the growing number of people around the world who disappear or go missing. These factors in turn lead to forced displacement, which adds to this global challenge.

States have obligations under international and domestic law to conduct effective investigations when people go missing – and these efforts should be carried out regardless of the missing person’s social status, or nationality, or ethnicity, or gender, or religious, political or military affiliation. States must also secure the rights of families of the missing, to justice, truth and reparations.

Even in complex scenarios it is possible to account for large numbers of missing persons, when governments work together with families of the missing and other stakeholders to implement coordinated strategies. The issue does not respect borders and it therefore has an international dimension. The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) helps governments and others to develop and implement effective programs to account for large numbers of missing persons.

About ICMP

ICMP is a treaty-based intergovernmental organization with Headquarters in The Hague, the Netherlands. Its mandate is to secure the cooperation of governments and other authorities in locating persons missing as a result of conflicts, human rights abuses, natural and man-made disasters and other involuntary reasons 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.

What ICMP Does

As the only intergovernmental organization tasked exclusively to work on the issue of missing persons, ICMP helps governments to develop institutional and legislative capacities, promotes the rule of law and human rights, fosters social cohesion and the direct engagement of civil society, and develops and provides technical expertise to locate the missing. ICMP helps to build and support processes that are sustainable, impartial, credible and transparent and that secure the rights of surviving families of the missing.

ICMP maintains six crosscutting programs:

- **Direction and Policy** supports and provides a secretariat to ICMP treaty or statutory and subsidiary bodies. It is responsible for efforts to broaden state participation in ICMP and to enhance and strengthen cooperation with governments. Direction and Policy supports effective outreach and planning, and ensures that ICMP’s policies, standards and best practice are implemented across all thematic, regional and country programs.
- **Institutional Development.** States are responsible for finding the missing and disappeared. The process is complex and involves a number of stakeholders, including government institutions, families of the missing, judicial institutions, law enforcement, international organizations and others. ICMP helps states build the institutional capacity to find missing persons and coordinate with others. ICMP also helps states create purpose-specific legislation that allows families of the missing to secure their rights.
- **Civil Society Initiatives.** Families of the missing have rights, including the right to a proper investigation, the right not to be discriminated against, the right of access to justice, the right to information, and the right to privacy. ICMP has programs geared towards helping families of the missing assert and advocate for their rights, including participation in the creation of institutions and legislation, and in data collection.
- **Data Systems and Data Coordination.** Data is key to finding missing persons. ICMP’s Integrated Data Management System (iDMS) developed over more than two decades, makes it possible to collect, store, analyze and share data on missing persons securely and efficiently while maintaining the privacy of victims and their families. Missing persons cases can be reported from anywhere in the world through the Online Inquiry Center, available on the ICMP website and as a mobile application. ICMP also helps civil society organizations collect and store data safely and it helps states build their own capabilities, including central records.
- **Science and Technology** incorporates advanced technologies in the field of forensic genetics and forensic anthropology and archeology to support countries in locating and identifying missing persons and reuniting families. ICMP’s laboratory in The Hague is a leading center of DNA-based human identification. The laboratory has a standing capacity to process thousands of cases annually and operates as a resource for countries and organizations throughout the world.
- **The Wim Kok Center for Excellence and Learning** provides learning and development resources to governments, judicial institutions, international organizations, civil society organizations, academic institutions and scientific agencies.

Where ICMP Works

ICMP has worked in more than 40 countries around the world. It currently maintains **country, regional and thematic programs** related to Albania, Armenia, Colombia, Iraq, Mexico, Syria, Vietnam, and the Western Balkans. ICMP's **Missing Migrants and Refugees** Program supports the development of a sustainable process to account for migrants and refugees who have gone missing and to reunite families that have been separated. ICMP maintains a Disaster Victim Identification capacity, which has been deployed in numerous disaster scenarios throughout the world. It also maintains an Assistance to Justice Program that helps justice sector institutions strengthen their capacity to investigate missing and disappeared persons cases. This support includes cooperation agreements with international tribunals and courts and international law enforcement agencies. ICMP's **Global Forum on Missing Persons**, mandated in the treaty establishing ICMP, facilitates the exchange of ideas and practical proposals. Through policy forums, conferences and publications, the Global Forum seeks to inform and enhance public discourse on the issue of missing persons.

History

ICMP was created at the initiative of US President Bill Clinton in 1996 at the G-7 Summit in Lyon, France. It spearheaded the efforts by the authorities in the former Yugoslavia that have made it possible to account for more than 70 percent of the 40,000 persons who went missing in the region as a result of the conflicts in the 1990s. In 2004, supporting States expanded ICMP's mandate to cover the issue of missing persons throughout the world. The 2014 Agreement on the Status and Functions of ICMP, which established ICMP as an intergovernmental organization with Headquarters in The Hague, has nine States Parties: Afghanistan, Chile, Cyprus, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Serbia, Sweden and the United Kingdom, and two signatory states: Belgium and El Salvador. ICMP completed the process of establishing its Headquarters in The Hague in 2017.

Statutory Bodies

The Board of Commissioners oversees the work of ICMP and currently the Board comprises:

- Ambassador (ret) Thomas J. Miller (Chair)
 - Her Majesty Queen Noor
 - Ambassador Rolf Ekéus
 - Ambassador Knut Vollebaek
 - Rt. Hon. Alistair Burt
 - Judge Sanji Monageng
 - Ms. María Eugenia Brizuela de Ávila
 - Mr. Bert Koenders
 - Ambassador Dirk Brengelman
- **ICMP Director-General**, Kathryne Bomberger
 - **The Conference of States Parties** represents States Parties to the ICMP Agreement and includes signatory and other states that participate in an observer capacity.
 - **Panel of Experts** comprises eminent specialists and practitioners in forensic science, medicine, information technology, social and political science and other fields who work with ICMP to advance benchmarks and standards in the global effort to account for missing persons.
 - **The Financial Committee** represents States Parties that have supported ICMP financially during a given reporting period. Other supporting States are invited to participate in an observer capacity.

Funding

ICMP is voluntarily funded and seeks support from governments, multilateral organizations, foundations, corporate funding sources (including through in-kind donations and corporate social responsibility programs), and private donations. From its inception in 1996 through 2020, more than 90 percent of ICMP's funding was provided by government sources, with Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States being major contributors, along with the European Union. As well as these contributors, current donors include the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, and Switzerland.