

MISSING MIGRANTS AND REFUGEE PROGRAM

Migrants and refugees are at risk of going missing during and after their journeys, as result of human rights violations, maritime disasters, organized crime, and other causes. Large numbers of migrants and refugees have been reported missing around the world, and disappearances continue. Between 2014 and 2021, more than 45,000 migrants and refugees were reported dead or missing, according to data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Of these, nearly 23,000 were lost in the Mediterranean. ICMP's current program focuses on Missing and disappeared migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean region and will extend to include European countries who are hosting refugees from the war in Ukraine.

Under international law, states have an obligation to investigate the fate and whereabouts of missing persons in an effective way, including the circumstances of their disappearance. Concurrently, families of the missing have the right to justice, truth and reparations.

WORK TO ACCOUNT FOR MISSING MIGRANTS AND REFUGEE

The International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) works with governments and others to establish a sustainable process to account for missing migrants and refugees including through:

- Fostering stronger cooperation among governments and others involved;
- Building the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) and families, enabling them to participate in the process of accounting for missing persons;
- Promoting joint solutions for the processing and exchange of collected data among government authorities, CSOs and other actors; and
- Improving scientific capacity to handle the issue, including through technical assistance in DNA testing and matching.

ICMP's program, which includes work with governments, civil society and relevant international organizations covers the following areas:

- **The Joint Process to account for Missing Migrants in the Mediterranean (Joint Process)**

The Joint Process was launched in Rome in June 2018 at a meeting convened by ICMP. The Joint Process, which currently consists of Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Malta, aims to expand cooperation and enhance domestic capabilities to find missing migrants and refugees. The Joint Process has established focal points who are tasked to create and embark on a strategic workplan that will include exploring and agreeing upon modalities for securely exchanging data to find the missing and reunite separated families. In addition to the four European governments, other governments, including Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt participate as observers. The four Joint Process countries have also agreed to enhance the work of the Joint Process by inviting other countries to participate.

- **Engaging migrant and refugee communities in Europe**

ICMP's work on missing migrants and refugees is interlinked with its work to support efforts to address the missing persons issue in the MENA region, including Iraq, Syria

and Libya. ICMP is working with refugee communities in Europe from the MENA region to engage them in the missing persons process at a policy level, through learning and development programs and through an outreach program that allows families of the missing voluntarily to provide data to ICMP's Integrated Data Management System (iDMS). This combined effort is laying the groundwork to help families find missing persons in their country of origin, destination country, or along migratory routes. Thus far, ICMP has collected data from 60,000 Syrian family members who have reported more than 20,000 missing persons, and it has collected genetic reference samples from 174 Syrians residing outside Syria.

- **Interagency Cooperation**

Largescale efforts to find missing persons require cooperation among governments, families of the missing, international organizations and others. ICMP promotes interagency cooperation as a core element of its work on missing persons, including missing migrants and refugees. As a follow-up to a 2016 discussion at the UN Security Council on the global challenge of missing persons, including missing migrants and refugees, ICMP conducts regular interagency meetings with international organizations whose mandates are relevant to the issue of missing migrants and refugees. Participants in these consultative discussions include the IOM, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust), the International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol), the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR), the European Network of Forensic Science Institutes (ENFSI), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the International Criminal Court. All participating organizations have expressed support for the Joint Process.

ABOUT ICMP

ICMP is a treaty-based intergovernmental organization mandated to secure the cooperation of governments and others in locating missing persons from conflict, human rights abuses, disasters, organized crime, irregular migration and other causes, and to assist them in doing so. It is the only international organization tasked exclusively to work on the issue of missing persons. Its Headquarters in The Hague, the Netherlands, house an advanced DNA laboratory for human identification.

