

ICMP SYRIA PROGRAM FACTSHEET

OCTOBER 2025

Overview

Since 2017, the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) has worked with families of the missing, Syrian civil society organizations (CSOs), government institutions, and international partners to address the issue of persons missing as a result of conflict, human rights abuses, and other causes in Syria.

ICMP supports legislative and institutional development, delivers training and technical assistance, and assists in collecting and processing data to help locate and identify the missing using advanced database technology and forensic science.

In May 2025, the Syrian Government established the National Commission for Missing Persons (NCMP) to locate and identify the missing, create a national database, and provide support to families. In November 2025, ICMP signed an MoU with the NCMP to help it build a robust, sustainable missing persons process.

According to the NCMP, up to 300,000 persons are missing in Syria.



Photo credit: Judy Organization for Relief and Development (JORD)

ICMP Program in Syria

Working with the NCMP, domestic institutions, families of the missing, and international partners, ICMP is:

- Helping the NCMP to **build an effective institutional and legislative framework**;
 - Ensuring **meaningful participation of Syrian civil society and families of the missing**, including **women-led groups**;
 - Providing **technical expertise for large-scale investigations**, deploying forensic anthropologists, archaeologists, and pathologists to **locate, recover, and document** remains and crime scenes;
 - Assisting in the development of a **Central Record** and shared **missing persons data system**, including deployment of ICMP's **Arabic-language Integrated Data Management System (IDMS)**;
 - Supporting the **collection of data, including genetic data**, from all families – regardless of background, beliefs, or circumstances of disappearance;
 - Providing **training** on data collection, protection, DNA testing, and excavation/exhumation techniques to Syrian institutions, CSOs, and families;
 - Providing **small grants** to families of the missing to build a network of associations and to enhance knowledge about the missing persons process;
 - Facilitating **bilateral discussions with neighboring states** to address shared concerns related to missing persons;
 - **Donating equipment** and **establishing forensic facilities**;
 - Facilitating **dialogue sessions** where Syrian experts advance justice reform recommendations and ensure that marginalized voices are able to influence policy, and;
 - Assisting in **building a national human identification laboratory system** in Syria.
- If requested, ICMP will also:
- Support **victim identification** through **DNA testing and matching** at its laboratories in **The Hague**.



Background and Achievements

The liberation of **Damascus in December 2024** enabled ICMP to shift from its initial program – launched in 2017 to lay the groundwork for a future process – to a fully operational engagement *inside Syria*. This transition made it possible to establish the foundations for the following:



Creating a Central Database

- Through the iDMS, **77,600 family members** have reported **~30,000 missing persons**;
- **70 mass grave sites** have been reported via ICMP's **Online Inquiry Center (OIC) Site Locator**;
- Since December 2024, **817 family members** (representing **597 missing persons**) in **Europe and Kurdistan, Iraq**, have provided **blood samples** for DNA profiling;
- The **Syria Data Governance Group (DGG)** has convened **14 meetings** with Syrian CSOs under **Data Partnership Agreements** to promote transparency, cooperation, and good data governance.



Building Legislative and Institutional Foundations

- Through the **Syrian-led Policy Coordination Group (PCG)**, families, CSOs, and experts have developed a **policy framework** for a sustainable missing persons process;

PCG Achievements:

- Published the **Ethical Charter for Data Collection and Documentation of Syria's Missing** (August 2021);
- Submitted "**Syria: Towards Addressing the Issue of Missing Persons**" to the **UN Human Rights Council (2021)**;
- Proposed **constitutional and legislative provisions** for a national commission and central record;
- Published **policy papers** on missing persons legislation, mass graves, and amnesty laws;
- Included **natural disaster victims** in the national missing persons strategy;
- Developed and launched a **national advocacy plan**.



Regional and International Cooperation

- **Intergovernmental meetings** have been convened with senior policymakers from **Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Türkiye, Germany, and the Netherlands**, securing political support and enabling refugee data collection;
- At an **Interagency Meeting in The Hague (Dec 2024)**, 24 representatives from CSOs, family associations, donors, and UN agencies reaffirmed their support for the **Ethical Charter**;
- In **October 2025**, ICMP, the **UN Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic (IIMP)**, and the **International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** submitted a **Joint Paper to the NCMP** outlining support for a Syrian-led search process.

Underlying Principles

States have a responsibility to:

- Conduct **impartial, transparent, and thorough investigations** into disappearances;
- **Uphold the rule of law** and protect individual rights;
- Establish the **circumstances of disappearance** and uphold the **right to truth**;
- Fully investigate crimes **related to disappearances**; and
- Maintain **international cooperation** to ensure effective responses.

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 others in locating missing persons from conflict, human rights abuses, disasters, organized crime, 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.