

# THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON MISSING PERSONS (ICMP) UKRAINE – FACTSHEET

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, escalating the 2014 aggression that resulted in the occupation of Crimea and part of the territory of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In early April 2022, mass graves were discovered in Bucha, Irpin and the village of Makariv (Kyiv region). During 2022 and 2023, new mass grave sites were discovered in Izium (Kharkiv Oblast) and Liman (Donetsk Oblast). These graves testify to the existence of numerous graves with unidentified human remains in the territory temporarily occupied by Russian troops.

The circumstances under which people go missing in Ukraine include forced displacement, summary executions, incommunicado detention, abduction, family separation, including illegal adoption, and human trafficking. Among the missing are Ukrainians and people of other nationalities, both combatants and civilians. Under international law, States have an obligation to investigate cases of missing persons and to help bring those responsible for their disappearance to justice. Holding perpetrators accountable is part of a broader effort to protect the rights of families of missing persons and uphold the rule of law.



Photo credit: Krysjá

ICMP's Ukraine Program supports the efforts of the authorities to account for all those who are missing, through effective and credible investigations. The ICMP Ukraine Program focuses on the following strategic objectives:

- **Supporting further development and strengthening of Ukraine's technical capacity for a dedicated and sustainable impartial investigation into missing persons** cases to a level in which evidence can be provided in an international court, starting with the professional recovery of mortal remains, documentation of the crime scene, determining the cause and manner of death, and facilitating a DNA- led process of identification that includes large-scale genetic kinship matching between the family of the missing and the missing person, and concluding with irrefutable evidence of the identity of the missing that can be linked to the crime scene in tens of thousands of cases;
- **Supporting the meaningful participation of Ukraine's civil society and family associations, especially those which are women-led, in the missing persons process** to strengthen the state's accountability and secure the rights of families of the missing;
- **Facilitating intergovernmental and in-country cooperation and coordination of efforts** among state institutions, civil society, international organizations, and the diplomatic community to address the issue of missing persons in an effective way;
- **Advocating and raising public awareness in Ukraine and among policymakers globally** regarding the missing persons issue, highlighting its indispensable role in security, conflict-prevention, peace building and international justice;
- **Supporting the strengthening of Ukraine's institutional capacity and legislative framework** to account effectively for missing persons and to secure the rights of all families of the missing, regardless of circumstances of disappearance, nationality, or any other factor, to truth, justice and reparations.



Collection of blood reference samples for DNA testing.



ICMP's human identification system relies on its integrated DNA laboratory located in The Hague.

## THE ICMP PROGRAM IN UKRAINE

Between July 2019 and October 2023, ICMP signed agreements with Ukraine's Commission on Missing Persons and its successor, the Commissioner for Missing Persons under Special Circumstances (Ministry of Internal Affairs), as well as with the National Police of Ukraine (NPU) and the ministries of Health and Justice. ICMP has also signed agreements with specialist institutions such as the Lviv Regional Bureau of Forensic Medical Examination, and the Danylo Halytskyi National Medical University.

In July 2022, ICMP launched a comprehensive program, based on a five-year strategy to help Ukraine create a sustainable missing persons process in accordance with international standards and the rule of law. Under its agreements with Ukrainian institutions, ICMP is:

- collecting data from Ukrainian families residing outside the country who have missing relatives from the war;
- training Ukrainian personnel in DNA-led human identification techniques;
- training Ukrainian personnel in techniques related to mass graves exhumation and identification;
- training personnel from the Main Investigation Department of the NPU to use ICMP's Integrated Data Management System (iDMS);
- supporting capacity building in forensic science, forensic anthropology, data collection and data processing, and effective case management.
- ICMP has launched an outreach and data collection campaign in Poland and Germany to collect biological samples from families of the missing in those countries to support identification efforts in Ukraine. Data collection campaigns will be rolled out in other countries hosting Ukrainian refugees who have missing relatives in the future.
- addressing the inquiries and requests of investigators and prosecutors for technical forensic assistance involving complex cases of unidentified mortal remains thereby helping in the process of identification of cases of missing persons, which are under criminal investigation.

At the same time, ICMP aims to strengthen the role of Ukrainian family associations and civil society organizations (CSOs) working on the issue of missing persons. Through education, training, and grants, ICMP's Civil Society Initiatives (CSI) unit will provide families and CSOs with knowledge and skills that will enable them to participate actively in decision-making and in resolving cases.

In the coming years, the CSI unit will focus on ensuring the continuity of grant programs, developing a comprehensive training program for families of the missing, organizing special events and commemorations on significant dates, facilitating dialogue between families of the missing and government representatives, and ensuring effective communication between different ICMP departments to keep families informed about all aspects of the search process.

### About ICMP

ICMP is an 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, irregular migration and other causes and to assist them in doing so.