

Network of National Focal Points for Missing Migrants **Second in-person meeting**

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**Outcome
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Overview

This second in-person meeting of the Network of National Focal Points for Missing Migrants, co-chaired by Switzerland and The Gambia with the active support of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), brought together more than **50 participants** from **20 European and African Rabat Process partner countries**, including National Focal Points, as well as representatives of national authorities, international and regional organisations, civil society, Red Cross National Societies and family associations.

Building on Area 3 of the [Cadiz Action Plan](#) - particularly Objective 5b and Action 17 - reflecting a shared commitment to preventing migrant deaths and disappearances along migratory routes, the meeting reaffirmed the Network's role as a key platform for strengthening cooperation, information-sharing and coordinated cross-border action on missing migrants.

Participants reviewed recent developments, trends and operational challenges related to migrant deaths and disappearances, and explored opportunities to strengthen national coordination mechanisms, cross-border cooperation and family-centred responses. Discussions highlighted the role of National Focal Points in facilitating whole-of-government approaches, improving information-sharing, supporting search and identification efforts, and enhancing engagement with families and other relevant stakeholders.

This outcome document presents the **main discussions, key findings, good practices and recommendations** emerging from the meeting.

1) Opening remarks

The **opening ceremony** was attended by Ambassador Julien Thöni, Deputy Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations Office and other international organisations in Geneva; Cristina Probst-Lopez, Head of International Cooperation, State Secretariat for Migration (SEM), Federal Department of Justice and Police; Ambassador Lang Yabou, Permanent Secretary and Head of the Diplomatic Service, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Gambians Abroad; Latifa Oualhazi, Collective of Families of Missing Migrants in Tunisia; Cristian Rivier, Head of the Central Tracing Agency at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); and Monica Zanette, Head of Pan-Africa region at the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD).

The opening ceremony underscored the growing commitment of Rabat Process partner countries and stakeholders to addressing the humanitarian challenge of missing migrants through strengthened cooperation, practical action and family-centred responses. High-level representatives recalled that more than **83,000 migrant deaths and disappearances** have been recorded globally since 2014¹, while acknowledging that available figures represent only a fraction of the true scale of the phenomenon. Speakers stressed that behind every statistic are individuals, families and communities living with uncertainty and loss.

Ambassador Julien Thöni stressed that migrant disappearances are both a humanitarian tragedy and a human rights challenge. He highlighted the **transnational nature** of missing migrant cases, noting that they involve countries of origin, transit and destination and require cooperation that goes beyond national borders and institutional mandates. He also underlined the importance of ensuring that the Network delivers concrete results on the ground.

Representing the Swiss Chairmanship of the Rabat Process, **Cristina Probst-Lopez** underscored the progress achieved since the creation of the Network and recalled its origins in the 2023 Geneva thematic meeting. She particularly emphasised the need for a **whole-of-government approach**, encouraging partner countries to strengthen inter-ministerial cooperation, including through the nomination of co-focal points from different institutions.

Ambassador Lang Yabou highlighted the experience of The Gambia as a country of origin, transit and return, stressing the profound impact of migrant disappearances on families and communities. He drew attention to the need to **bridge the gap between political commitments and operational realities**, notably through stronger tracing, identification and family support mechanisms.

¹ Figures from the IOM Missing Migrants Project, <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/>. Consulted in June 2026.

Latifa Oualhazi brought the perspective of families directly affected by migrant disappearances. She reminded participants that missing migrants are not statistics but loved ones whose families continue to live with uncertainty. Her intervention emphasised the importance of **recognising families as key stakeholders and partners** in efforts to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing migrants.

Cristian Rivier focused on the humanitarian consequences of disappearances, highlighting the psychological, social, economic and legal impact on families. Recalling that the ICRC has accompanied the Network since its creation in July 2024 and serves as its Secretariat, he welcomed the progress achieved to date with **34 Rabat Process partner countries now participating** in the initiative. He stressed that the Network's success should ultimately be measured by its ability to **provide answers to families and help prevent further disappearances**, while calling for continued political leadership and resources from States.

Monica Zanette highlighted that the issue of missing migrants has become a **central priority within the Rabat Process** since the adoption of the **Cádiz Action Plan**. She welcomed the expansion and consolidation of the Network and described the second in-person meeting as an important milestone in that process. Stressing the need for **stronger international cooperation**, she underscored the Network's role in connecting African and European partners, strengthening policy coherence, and advancing practical cooperation on missing migrant cases.

Overall, the opening ceremony reaffirmed a shared commitment to moving **from dialogue to action**, strengthening cooperation across borders and institutions, and ensuring that missing migrants and their families remain at the heart of all efforts.

2) Keynote address by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants², Mr. Gehad Madi, emphasised that the disappearance of migrants is a persistent and serious human rights issue affecting countries of origin, transit and destination. He noted that, while tens of thousands of migrant deaths and disappearances have been documented globally since 2014, the true scale of the phenomenon remains underestimated. He stressed the profound and long-lasting impact on families, who are often left without information on the fate or whereabouts of their loved ones and face significant psychological, social, legal and economic consequences.

Drawing on his reports to the Human Rights Council and General Assembly, Mr. Madi highlighted that **"many migrant deaths and disappearances are preventable"** and often linked to factors such as limited safe and regular migration pathways, restrictive migration policies, externalisation and securitisation of migration governance, criminalisation of irregular migration, inadequate search and rescue capacity, pushbacks, arbitrary or incommunicado detention, family separation, trafficking, smuggling and impunity. He stressed that these factors should be understood as "human rights concerns" requiring rights-based responses.

The Special Rapporteur recalled that **"all migrants, regardless of their migration status, are rights-holders"** and that States have obligations under international human rights law to respect, protect and fulfil their rights at every stage of migration. He underlined the central importance of the **right to life**, the absolute **prohibition of enforced disappearance**, the **right to truth for families**, and the **principle of non-refoulement**. He further emphasised **States' obligations** to prevent disappearances, investigate cases promptly and effectively, ensure accountability, identify remains, provide remedies and reparations, and keep families informed.

Mr. Madi also highlighted the relevance of **international humanitarian law** and the **law of the sea**³, including obligations to account for missing persons, facilitate family enquiries, and ensure effective search and rescue operations for persons in distress, regardless of migration status.

The Special Rapporteur called for **strengthened practical measures**, including effective investigations, the establishment of national registries, enhanced forensic capacities, the collection and exchange of ante-mortem and post-mortem data, and safe mechanisms enabling families, humanitarian actors, civil society and forensic experts to contribute to search and identification efforts.

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-migrants>

³ The above principles were presented and discussed in depth during the Thematic Meeting held in Banjul, The Gambia, in July 2025. Further details can be found in the corresponding Outcome document: www.rabat-process.org/en/activities/technical-meetings/thematic-meeting-on-missing-migrants

"The transnational nature of migrant disappearances means that no State can address this issue alone." He underscored the important **role of the Network of National Focal Points for Missing Migrants** in strengthening whole-of-government coordination, facilitating cross-border information-sharing, activating search and identification mechanisms, and ensuring regular communication with families.

The Special Rapporteur encouraged participants to place **families at the centre of all efforts**, recognising them as rights-holders and essential partners in tracing, identification and accountability processes. He further stressed the importance of viewing the Network as a **tool for prevention** as well as response, including through "expanding safe and regular pathways, ensuring access to asylum, decriminalising migration, ending child immigration detention, avoiding family separation, strengthening search and rescue, ensuring access to humanitarian assistance, and reviewing policies that increase the risk of death or disappearance".

Concluding, Mr. Madi stressed that migrant disappearances can be addressed through **political will, legal compliance, operational cooperation** and **sustained commitment to human dignity**. "This Network offers an important opportunity to demonstrate that States can work together to prevent loss of life, clarify the fate of the missing, support families, and ensure accountability".

3) Missing Migrants in the Rabat Process region: trends, gaps, operational needs

Missing Migrants in the Rabat Process region: trends and gaps in 2025

Merna Abdelazim, Project Officer for the [IOM Missing Migrants Project](#), presented an overview of global and regional trends relating to migrant deaths and disappearances, with a particular focus on North, West and Central Africa, routes to Europe, and key data gaps affecting operational responses.

She noted that the Missing Migrants Project has documented 83,700 migrant deaths and disappearances worldwide since 2014⁴, including almost 8,000 additional deaths and disappearances since the first in-person meeting of the Network in Banjul in July 2025. These figures were presented as minimum estimates, highlighting that each data point represents an individual life lost and families left searching for answers.

Ms. Abdelazim recalled that the Missing Migrants Project aims to make migrant deaths visible, identify risks along migration routes, and provide evidence to inform policy, programming and advocacy. She highlighted the project's contribution to monitoring **Sustainable Development Goal Indicator 10.7.3** and supporting the implementation of **Global Compact for Migration Objective 8** on saving lives and coordinating international efforts on missing migrants.

Focusing on the Rabat Process region, she reported that **more than 16,000 deaths and disappearances** have been documented **across North, West and Central Africa** since 2014. The **Sahara Desert crossing** and the **Atlantic route to the Canary Islands** were identified as the routes with the highest recorded numbers of fatalities and disappearances. She stressed that deaths in the Sahara are likely significantly underreported due to the remoteness of the region, limited monitoring capacities and reliance on survivor testimonies and survey data. Approximately **one-third of victims on these routes remain missing, with their remains never recovered**.

The presentation further highlighted that the main known **causes of death** on African land routes include vehicle accidents and hazardous transport conditions, followed by harsh environmental conditions, lack of food, water and shelter, and violence. Libya, Niger and Sudan were identified as the countries where the highest numbers of incidents were recorded. Significant **documentation gaps** remain, with more than 5,000 victims lacking basic demographic information, such as nationality, age or sex, complicating identification efforts and family tracing.

Turning to maritime routes, Ms. Abdelazim reported that **approximately 3,400 deaths and disappearances were recorded on sea routes to Europe in 2025**, accounting for around **43 per cent of all migrant deaths recorded globally** that year. She highlighted three key trends: the continued concentration of fatalities on a small number of corridors, particularly the **Central Mediterranean**, which remains the deadliest migration route globally; the fact that lower arrival numbers do not necessarily correspond to lower mortality risks; and

⁴ [IOM's Missing Migrants Project](#), with data updated on 10 June 2026.

the emergence of new and shifting routes, including the increasing use of the **Atlantic route** and the **Eastern Libya-Crete corridor**.

She further noted that preliminary data from 2026 indicate increasing numbers of deaths across all three Mediterranean routes despite declining arrivals, suggesting a potentially higher mortality risk per journey. Declining migration flows or lower numbers of detected arrivals should not be interpreted as evidence of improved safety along migration routes.

Concluding, Ms. Abdelazim highlighted persistent and growing **data gaps affecting efforts to prevent deaths, identify victims and support families**. She reported that, in 2025, the Missing Migrants Project tracked approximately **1,500 additional persons reported missing at sea whose deaths could not be verified for inclusion in official records**. She also drew attention to possible cases of "invisible shipwrecks", involving vessels known to have departed but never confirmed to have arrived, as well as increasing numbers of unidentified human remains recovered along coastlines without links to known incidents. These challenges are compounded by fragmented information systems, reduced humanitarian presence, restrictions on information-sharing and funding constraints.

During the discussion, the IOM representative stressed that preventing migrant deaths and disappearances, protecting migrants, and supporting families cannot be achieved by a single organisation or government alone. Given the transnational nature of migration routes, effective prevention and protection require a **collective effort** involving States, international organisations, humanitarian actors and civil society. She emphasised that, ultimately, States bear the primary responsibility for protecting human rights and ensuring the safety and dignity of all persons along migration routes.

The discussion further underscored the challenges associated with investigating migrant deaths and disappearances. Information related to such cases remains highly fragmented and dispersed among different institutions and actors. Currently, there is no systematic, centralised and secure mechanism for sharing information across agencies and countries, which continues to hinder search, identification and family notification efforts.

Priority actions for States to strengthen responses to migrant deaths and disappearances

- **Strengthening national data systems** to ensure that migrant deaths and disappearances are systematically recorded through centralised, searchable and interoperable databases, with disaggregated data collected where possible to support identification efforts.
- **Enhancing inter-agency coordination** among all relevant actors, including law enforcement authorities, border management agencies, coast guards, forensic services, consular authorities, civil registries, ministries and humanitarian organisations, in order to reduce information fragmentation and clarify institutional responsibilities.
- **Promoting cross-border information-sharing and cooperation**, recognising the transnational nature of migrant disappearances and the key role of National Focal Points in facilitating communication, referral and case management across jurisdictions.

Evolution of the Network of National Focal Points for Missing Migrants

Ndumbeh Saho, Director of Diaspora and Migration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs International Cooperation and Gambians Abroad, presented the evolution of the Network of National Focal Points for Missing Migrants, from the inclusion of the issue of missing migrants in the Cádiz Action Plan (2023-2027) to the establishment of the Network in July 2024 and its subsequent development.

She recalled that the Network was officially launched by the **ICRC, Switzerland and The Gambia**, with the support of the **Rabat Process Secretariat**, following its endorsement by Rabat Process partner countries. The **first in-person meeting** took place in **Banjul in July 2025**, co-chaired by **The Gambia and Switzerland** and bringing together **27 partner countries**. The **second in-person meeting**, held in **Geneva in June 2026**, aimed to further consolidate the Network and strengthen regional cooperation on missing migrants.

Since its establishment, the Network has also held **five online meetings**⁵, which have facilitated exchanges with international and regional experts, civil society organisations, families of missing migrants, and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Ms. Saho concluded by recalling the key recommendations adopted at the [Banjul thematic meeting](#) and their continued relevance for advancing cooperation and operational responses to cases of missing migrants.

Interactive polling exercise

During a facilitated polling exercise, participants identified a number of key operational challenges in addressing cases of missing migrants, notably **fragmented information management systems, limited cross-border cooperation, insufficient coordination among actors, weak institutional frameworks, and limited technical and financial capacities**, all of which hinder search and identification efforts as well as support to families.

Participants also expressed a shared vision of a **more operational and results-oriented Network**, capable of strengthening information-sharing, cross-border cooperation, family-centred responses, capacity-building and practical support for resolving missing migrant cases. [The detailed contributions can be found in the Annex](#) (see page 14).

4) Strengthening national frameworks: learning from practice

Role and mandate of National Focal Points

Facilitated by [Florian von König](#), Head of CTA Advisory Unit at the ICRC, and [Mariela Guajardo](#), Operations and Emergencies Officer at the IOM, the session explored the role of National Focal Points in supporting both national and cross-border responses to cases of missing migrants.

The speakers emphasised that, while policy discussions and multilateral dialogue on missing migrants remains important, the key challenge lies in translating commitments into practical cooperation to prevent disappearances and help clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing migrants. They noted that while various international cooperation channels already exist, including consular, police and forensic cooperation mechanisms, these do not always function effectively in cases involving missing migrants.

Participants were reminded that the role of National Focal Points is not necessarily to carry out search themselves, but rather helping to activate, coordinate and connect the institutions that already hold relevant mandates and responsibilities. While their role may differ according to national contexts and institutional arrangements, they can play a critical role in strengthening coordination, improving information flows and promoting cooperation within and across borders.

The session highlighted that **effective transnational cooperation depends on strong national coordination**. Missing migrant cases typically involve a wide range of actors, including ministries of foreign affairs, interior and health, law enforcement authorities, forensic services, civil registries, consular authorities, humanitarian organisations and civil society actors supporting families. In this context, National Focal Points are uniquely positioned to connect these actors and facilitate a whole-of-government approach.

Three key functions of National Focal Points were put forward:

- **Facilitating and sustaining national coordination mechanisms**, including clarifying institutional roles and responsibilities;
- **Supporting information-sharing and case management at the national level**, particularly when responding to requests from other countries;
- **Promoting institutionalisation and long-term solutions**, including the development of legal bases, protocols, coordination frameworks, standard operating procedures and national action plans.

⁵ All articles related to the online meetings are available on the Rabat Process website (see July and November 2024; July, March and November 2025; March 2026): www.rabat-process.org/en/activities

The establishment of a **National Task Force on Missing Migrants in The Gambia** was presented as an emerging good practice illustrating how coordination structures can support information-sharing and operational responses.

Following the presentations, participants engaged in group discussions to reflect on national experiences, coordination challenges and opportunities to strengthen cooperation. Across the discussions, they identified several recurring challenges, including institutional coordination and governance, cross-border cooperation, family support and engagement, and the management and centralisation of information. Several participants highlighted difficulties in coordinating among government institutions with overlapping mandates, as well as challenges in engaging non-state actors and civil society organisations. Participants noted that the absence of clearly defined responsibilities, referral pathways and points of contact can hinder the effective management of cases and create uncertainty for families seeking assistance.

The discussions also highlighted the importance of strengthening cooperation with consular services, ensuring that diplomatic and consular staff are aware of the role of National Focal Points and can support outreach, referrals and case follow-up. Participants further stressed the **need to improve visibility** regarding which institutions are responsible for case management in each country and encouraged more frequent exchanges among countries sharing common migration routes.

A number of **technical challenges** were also identified, including limited forensic capacities, access to DNA testing, management of human remains, exchange of forensic information across borders, and the protection and sharing of sensitive data. Participants noted the **need for more harmonised and interoperable information systems** capable of supporting identification efforts and facilitating cross-border case resolution.

The discussions further highlighted political, administrative and technical barriers that can affect information-sharing among institutions. In this regard, participants stressed that National Focal Points can play an important role in identifying coordination gaps, facilitating dialogue among relevant institutions and helping ensure that technical challenges are addressed by the competent authorities.

Further [recommendations](#) reflected in the discussions include:

- Encouraging the establishment of **national coordination mechanisms or task forces** on missing migrants, adapted to each national context;
- Developing **standard operating procedures** to clarify mandates, responsibilities and coordination arrangements among relevant actors;
- Promoting **peer-to-peer learning and technical exchanges** among Network members, including the sharing of expertise and good practices by States;
- Organising **targeted training activities** on specific themes relevant to missing migrant cases;
- Strengthening regional exchanges among countries sharing **common migration routes** and challenges;
- Improving national coordination by identifying **practical solutions tailored** to each country's institutional framework.

It was also noted that effective coordination mechanisms do not necessarily require significant financial resources but do require sustained **political commitment, leadership and ownership**. In this regard, IOM offered to share generic terms of reference and guidance materials for national task forces with interested countries to support the development of national coordination structures.

National preparedness

Djibouti's experience in recovery and identification

[Col. Dr. Samatar Hassan Farah](#), Director of the National Police Health Service in Djibouti, presented the migration context of Djibouti, a country located at the heart of the Eastern migration route, connecting the Horn of Africa to the Arabian Peninsula through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

Colonel Farah recalled that Djibouti is a major transit country on the Eastern migration route, with **more than 300,000 irregular migration movements towards Yemen and the Gulf countries each year**. Faced with increasing migration flows, estimated at approximately **435,000 movements in 2024**, the Government established the **National Migration Coordination Office** in **November 2019** under the Ministry of the

Interior to centralise migration-related data, strengthen inter-ministerial coordination and promote a whole-of-government approach to migration management.

He also noted that migrants travelling through Djibouti face **significant risks**, including dehydration, disease, extreme weather conditions and drowning, particularly during sea crossings towards Yemen. According to national authorities, 200 to 300 migrants transit through the country daily, including a significant proportion of women and children, who are particularly exposed to these risks.

To strengthen its response to migrant deaths, Djibouti has worked with the ICRC since 2020 to provide training on the management of human remains, migrant identification and humanitarian assistance. Water wells have also been constructed along key migration routes to improve access to drinking water for migrants in transit.

Regarding the **identification of deceased migrants**, Colonel Farah explained that authorities rely on post-mortem photography, DNA analysis where feasible, and the capacities of the forensic institute and scientific police services. However, the use of DNA remains limited due to its high cost and the difficulties associated with cross-border cooperation with countries of origin. In the absence of formal identification, remains are documented, assigned a reference number, and buried in the area where they were recovered, following consultation with the relevant authorities.

Djibouti's efforts to strengthen national coordination also include the development of **Standard Operating Procedures, institutional guidance documents**, and **coordination mechanisms** involving relevant ministries, security services, health authorities and international partners.

Among the **major challenges** identified are the difficulty of identifying migrants who lack identity documents, limited information-sharing with some countries of origin, insufficient evidence for prosecuting traffickers, and technical and financial constraints related to the collection and use of biometric data.

Finally, Colonel Farah stressed the need to **strengthen the technical and scientific capacities** of relevant institutions, notably through the creation of a **dedicated database for missing and deceased migrants**, including biometric information. He also underscored the importance of enhancing **regional and international cooperation** to facilitate information-sharing, improve victim identification, and provide answers and support to families of missing migrants.

Strengthening forensic approaches and information-sharing for the identification of missing migrants

Anjli Parrin, Director of the Human Rights Clinic at the University of Chicago, and Legal Adviser to the [Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team](#) (EAAF), presented lessons learned from over 15 years of work supporting the identification of missing migrants through forensic and cross-border cooperation mechanisms.

She highlighted the numerous challenges associated with the identification of missing migrants, including the involvement of multiple actors, the absence of effective search mechanisms in many countries, fragmented and non-systematised data, difficulties in information-sharing, and differing national standards and procedures for identification. While significant amounts of information are collected by both State and non-State actors, this information often remains dispersed and cannot easily be compared, linked or used for identification purposes.

Drawing on the experience of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team, Ms. Parrin stressed the importance of adopting an **integrated investigation model** that brings together all available sources of information, including reports of missing persons, forensic information, police investigations, recovery and management of human remains, and family tracing efforts. She underlined that databases must be supported by effective procedures, coordination structures and information-management systems.

She also emphasised that successful identification efforts require not only technical expertise but also **strong institutional coordination, political commitment and trust-based information-sharing arrangements** among the many actors involved, including forensic services, ministries of foreign affairs, law enforcement authorities, humanitarian organisations, civil society organisations, embassies and family associations.

Ms. Parrin presented the experience of the **regional mechanism** established across Mexico, Central America and the United States to support families of missing migrants, strengthen cross-border information-sharing, and improve forensic identification efforts. Through a series of inter-institutional agreements, the mechanism brings together State institutions, forensic authorities and civil society actors to facilitate the exchange of information and improve the identification of missing migrants. Since its establishment, the mechanism has

contributed to the **identification of over 473 missing migrants**, supported a database containing information on 2,529 missing migrants, and collected over 6,400 genetic profiles from approximately 2,400 families.

She also highlighted ongoing initiatives within the **Rabat Process region**. These include collaboration with national task forces in **The Gambia**, local authorities and civil society organisations in **Morocco**, welcome offices and forensic networks in **Senegal**, forensic institutions and the Red Cross in **Spain**, and medico-legal authorities in **Tunisia** working to strengthen identification systems and improve coordination.

Concluding, Ms. Parrin stressed that the identification of missing migrants is not solely a technical challenge but also an **institutional and governance challenge** requiring sustainable systems for information management, coordination and cooperation. She underscored the **pivotal role of National Focal Points** in facilitating information-sharing, linking relevant actors, and supporting the development of national and transnational mechanisms capable of improving the identification of missing migrants and providing answers to their families.

Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic

Ugo Cedrangolo, Senior Human Rights Officer, presented the mandate and early experience of the [Independent Institution on Missing Persons in the Syrian Arab Republic](#) (IIMP), established by the UN General Assembly in June 2023 to address the crisis of missing persons in Syria.

He explained that the IIMP has a **humanitarian and truth-seeking mandate**, aimed at clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing persons, determining the circumstances of their disappearance, and supporting affected families. The Institution was established following years of advocacy by Syrian families of the missing and now operates alongside the recently created Syrian National Commission for Missing Persons (NCMP), creating a unique opportunity for cooperation between national and international actors.

Mr. Cedrangolo noted that the scale of the missing persons crisis in Syria is unprecedented, with Syrian authorities estimating that **up to 300,000 persons may be missing**. The Institution's mandate also covers Syrians who disappeared while fleeing the conflict, including migrants who went missing along migratory routes. To date, the IIMP has documented **more than 420 cases of missing Syrian migrants across over 30 countries**, covering both sea and land routes. It is currently pursuing investigations into several specific incidents in different countries and has established partnerships with authorities, civil society organisations, family associations, law enforcement authorities and judicial actors.

Drawing on the IIMP's experience, Mr. Cedrangolo stressed the importance of clearly communicating the **humanitarian nature of search efforts**, which has often facilitated constructive cooperation with national authorities. He also emphasised the central role of **families and family associations**, not only as beneficiaries of support but as active contributors to search processes, documentation efforts and the identification of priorities.

Echoing observations made by other speakers, Mr. Cedrangolo noted that no single institution or country can successfully address cases of missing migrants alone. Collaboration with a wide range of actors – including rescue teams, forensic experts, journalists, academics, civil society organisations and international bodies – is crucial to advancing search efforts.

Likewise, Mr. Cedrangolo identified **persistent challenges**, including the fragmentation of information across multiple countries and institutions, the absence of systematic mechanisms for information-sharing, inconsistent data collection practices, limited political will in some contexts, and obstacles to cross-border cooperation. He also highlighted **forensic challenges**, such as the absence in some countries of routine DNA sampling, insufficient standards for the management and burial of unidentified bodies, and the lack of harmonised procedures for identification process, particularly in transnational cases.

National responses and cooperation challenges

The Jinack incident, a national response in The Gambia

Ndumbeh Saho, Director of Diaspora and Migration, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs International Cooperation and Gambians Abroad, presented a practical case study on the response to the capsizing of a migrant boat near Jinack Island on 31 December 2025. The vessel, carrying more than 200 migrants, including

women and children and destined for the Canary Islands, resulted in over 120 survivors and involved migrants of multiple nationalities.

The incident activated **The Gambia's emergency response mechanisms** and highlighted the importance of coordination at three levels: **national coordination**, **cross-border cooperation with Senegal**, and **international cooperation** with countries of origin and other partners. The response mobilised a wide range of actors, including the Gambian Navy, security services, health authorities, the Red Cross, local communities and fishermen, whose knowledge of local waters proved critical in rescue operations.

Following the rescue phase, authorities provided medical care, reception services, psychosocial support and family tracing assistance to survivors. The incident also served as a real-life test of The Gambia's coordination mechanisms and confirmed the importance of involving a broader range of actors, including the **National Disaster Management Agency** and fire and rescue services, in responses to missing migrant cases.

Ms. Saho highlighted the challenges linked to the **cross-border nature** of the incident. As the shipwreck occurred close to the Senegalese border, bodies and survivors were found on both sides of the border, requiring close cooperation between Gambian and Senegalese authorities. The case also illustrated the increasing complexity of mixed migration flows, as several victims and survivors were nationals of countries other than The Gambia and Senegal.

While the response demonstrated strong levels of solidarity and cooperation, the incident underscored the need to strengthen national capacities for the identification and management of unidentified remains, standardise procedures, enhance forensic capacities, and improve information-sharing and inter-agency coordination. The presentation also highlighted the need for greater community awareness, as some bodies recovered by local communities were buried before proper identification procedures could be conducted.

Drawing on lessons learned, Ms. Saho emphasised the importance of strengthening national coordination mechanisms, improving forensic and identification capacities, enhancing search and rescue preparedness, developing standard operating procedures, and establishing stronger cross-border and regional cooperation frameworks. She also stressed the need for family-centred approaches and more effective information-sharing mechanisms to support the identification of missing migrants and provide answers to their relatives.

Concluding, she noted that the incident provided a practical example of how missing migrant cases require coordinated responses across multiple sectors and countries, and underscored the value of the Network in facilitating cooperation, information exchange and joint action on missing migrant cases.

Supporting national mechanisms in the Rabat Process region - ICRC

Annika Toerne, Protection Delegate, ICRC Regional Delegation in Dakar, presented the ICRC's support to national mechanisms addressing missing migrant cases across West Africa, as well as practical experiences from ongoing transnational identification processes.

She explained that the ICRC Dakar Regional Delegation provides technical support to national coordination mechanisms in several countries of the Rabat Process region, including **Mauritania**, **Senegal** and **The Gambia**. This support includes assistance to national task forces on missing persons, legal support programmes to families of missing persons, data management initiatives, forensic training, and efforts to strengthen cooperation among relevant stakeholders.

Ms. Toerne highlighted three ongoing **transnational identification processes**. The first concerns cooperation between **Brazil and Mauritania** following the discovery of a boat in Brazil originating from Mauritania carrying the remains of nine deceased migrants. The process involves cooperation between Brazilian authorities and Mauritanian authorities and institutions, the ICRC and the Red Cross Movement to collect DNA samples from relatives and support identification efforts.

She also presented two cases involving cooperation between **Spain and The Gambia** and between **Spain and Senegal**, where tracing requests with families have required cross-border forensic cooperation, DNA sample collection and coordination among National Societies of the Red Cross, forensic authorities and national institutions. These cases have highlighted how crucial the role of National Focal Points can be in facilitating communication between the different actors involved on a national and international level.

Drawing from these experiences, Ms. Toerne identified several recurring challenges, including **limited institutional coordination**, insufficient exchange between relevant authorities, difficulties in establishing effective channels for transnational forensic cooperation, and obstacles related to the secure exchange of data and biological samples. She also noted that newly established national mechanisms often require additional training and technical support to manage complex identification processes, while diplomatic and consular structures are not always equipped to accompany such cases.

To strengthen responses, Ms. Toerne emphasised the need to **establish and maintain operational links** among National Focal Points, forensic institutions, prosecutors, judicial authorities, Red Cross and Red Crescent actors, and other relevant stakeholders in countries of origin, transit and destination. She further highlighted the importance of **clarifying procedures for the exchange of information and forensic evidence** in advance, and of ensuring that national mechanisms can coordinate and facilitate transnational identification efforts effectively.

In conclusion, she stressed that National Focal Points can play a key facilitating role in navigating complex institutional environments, connecting the various actors involved, and supporting the resolution of transnational cases of missing migrants.

5) Families at the centre: engaging with civil society and family associations

Moderated by [Sarah Klingeberg](#), Regional Displacement & Protection in the Movement Adviser for Europe and Central Asia, at the ICRC, the discussion underscored the importance of building strong partnerships among families, civil society organisations, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies and public authorities, while reinforcing the role of National Focal Points as facilitators of dialogue, trust, coordination and family-centred responses to cases of missing migrants.

Drawing on her personal experience following the disappearance of her brother in the Mediterranean in 2011, [Latifa Oualhazi](#), President of the Collective of Families of Missing Migrants in Tunisia described the prolonged uncertainty faced by families who do not know the fate or whereabouts of a loved one. She emphasised that families are often unable to grieve or move forward without answers and stressed that what families seek is not pity, but **truth, justice and the right to know**. Based on her engagement with families across several countries including Senegal, Niger, Cameroon, and Benin, she noted that similar challenges are experienced regardless of nationality.

[Tareke Brhane](#), President of the [Comitato 3 Ottobre organisation](#), reflected on lessons learned since the 2013 Lampedusa shipwreck, emphasising that remembrance alone is insufficient and must be accompanied by concrete action. He identified the **fragmentation of responsibilities across countries and institutions**, limited access to information for families, and shortcomings in data-sharing and identification procedures as key obstacles. He also highlighted the important contribution of civil society organisations, which have supported the identification of numerous deceased migrants through cooperation with universities, forensic experts and public authorities.

From a civil society perspective, [Filippo Furri](#), Researcher at [Institut Convergences Migration](#), underscored the importance of developing both national and transnational networks to support families and facilitate access to information. He presented efforts undertaken by civil society organisations and family associations to map relevant actors⁶ working on missing migrants and to establish connections across countries. These networks allow organisations supporting families in one country to engage counterparts elsewhere and facilitate communication with the relevant authorities. He stressed that civil society can play an important role in collecting information, supporting families and complementing the work of public authorities.

Several speakers emphasised that **trust** is an essential component of effective responses to missing migrant cases. Ms. Oualhazi highlighted the importance of transparent and family-centred systems that provide regular information, clear points of contact and respectful treatment. Mr. Furri noted that trust must be built both between families and authorities and between authorities and civil society organisations. He stressed that family associations and community networks often possess valuable information that can contribute to search and identification efforts and should therefore be recognised as important partners.

⁶ The mapping initiative involves 50 civil society actors across the Mediterranean region and is accessible on the [EuroMed rights website](#).

Speakers agreed that National Focal Points can serve as key interlocutors capable of connecting different actors, promoting the exchange of information and helping overcome institutional fragmentation.

[Sofiya Kovalchuk](#), Restoring Family Links Officer at Italian Red Cross, presenting the **TRUST project**⁷, emphasised that cooperation with National Focal Points is not merely complementary but essential to achieving sustainable progress on missing migrant cases. She described National Focal Points as the institutional backbone of the project's efforts to improve cooperation, information-sharing and support for families. The project seeks to strengthen collaboration among authorities, humanitarian actors, researchers and civil society organisations, while promoting practical solutions to address the challenges faced by families searching for missing relatives. [Abdoul-Kader Kouanda](#), Migration Program Officer at Burkinabe Red Cross, involved in the **PROMISE project**⁸, shared lessons learned from a route-based approach combining humanitarian assistance, prevention activities, awareness-raising on safe migration, restoration of family links and referrals for family tracing. The project also demonstrated the value of close coordination among humanitarian actors and public authorities.

The speakers highlighted several recommendations, including strengthening national coordination platforms, creating clear referral mechanisms for missing migrant cases, fostering cooperation with family associations and civil society organisations, and promoting regional frameworks for information-sharing.

Key takeaways from the discussion

- Participants consistently emphasised that **families must be recognised as partners, not only as beneficiaries of assistance**. Families are often the first actors engaged in the search for missing relatives, mobilising information, networks and resources. Their knowledge, experience and active involvement are essential to search, identification and accountability processes. National Focal Points are encouraged to support and facilitate the organisation of family associations, helping to strengthen their engagement with public authorities and other relevant actors.
- A central theme throughout the discussion was the importance of **trust**. Participants underlined that trust between families and authorities is a prerequisite for effective cooperation, information-sharing and reporting of disappearances. National Focal Points are key actors in fostering this trust by facilitating communication, ensuring families have access to information, and promoting transparent and human-centred approaches.
- The discussion also highlighted the need for National Focal Points to take an active coordinating role at national level. Participants stressed the importance of conducting **stakeholder mapping** to identify all actors involved in addressing missing migrant cases, including government institutions, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, civil society organisations, family associations and community-based actors. Improved knowledge of existing actors and their respective roles is essential for strengthening referrals, coordination and timely responses to families.

Several **practical initiatives** and proposals were highlighted, including:

- Strengthening collaboration between National Focal Points and the **TRUST project**, including opportunities for joint exchanges and dialogue within the Rabat Process framework;
- Promoting closer cooperation between National Focal Points and existing **Red Cross and Red Crescent networks**, particularly at regional level, including in the Sahel;
- Supporting exchanges between National Focal Points in countries of origin, transit and destination to improve information-sharing and case follow-up;

⁷ With funding from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the Transnational Response for the Unaccounted through Search and Tracing (TRUST) project is implemented by the Italian, French, Portuguese and Swedish Red Cross Societies, with technical support from the ICRC. Running from 2026 to 2028, it aims to strengthen the ability of institutional and civil society actors to identify, trace and respond to cases of missing migrants through targeted training, tools and knowledge sharing.

⁸⁸ The [PROMISE project](#) seeks to contribute to improve the response to long-term protection and assistance needs of people on the move and reinforce socio-economic integration measures adapted to the local needs of vulnerable host communities in Burkina Faso and Niger. Funded by the EU through ICMPD's MMD Grant Facility, it is implemented by the National Red Cross Societies of Spain, Burkina Faso and Niger.

- Raising awareness of **existing resources**, including e-learning tools on family engagement and support;
- Encouraging awareness initiatives that bring together families, civil society and public authorities to strengthen mutual understanding and trust.

Participants further highlighted the importance of engaging law enforcement authorities while addressing concerns that some families, particularly those in irregular situations, may be reluctant to report disappearances. In this regard, participants stressed the need to develop approaches and safeguards that ensure families can report missing relatives and seek information without fear that their immigration status will result in negative consequences.

E-learning course on supporting families of missing migrants

- The **Swiss Red Cross**, building on an existing e-learning course originally published by the **French Red Cross** and the **International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support**, has developed a **free online training course** for professionals and volunteers who support families of missing persons.
- The course, which takes approximately 2 to 4 hours to complete, introduces the concept of **"Ambiguous Loss"** and provides practical guidance on how to effectively accompany and support families living with the uncertainty of a missing relative.
- The training is currently available in **English, French, German and Italian**. The acquisition of a dedicated licence enables the creation of additional language versions through the translation feature integrated into the tool.
- The course can be accessed at: https://moodle.redcross.ch/ambiguous_loss/
- For further information, please contact: tracing@redcross.ch

Facilitated by the co-chairs, **Switzerland and The Gambia**, the final session provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on the discussions held over the two days and to share recommendations on how to further strengthen and operationalise the Network.

Overall, participants envisioned a Network supported by clear governance arrangements, practical communication tools, regular exchanges, stronger operational engagement, and enhanced capacity-building opportunities. [The detailed contributions can be found in the Annex](#) (see page 16).

6) Main takeaways and conclusions

Participants welcomed the progress made in strengthening regional dialogue and cooperation on missing migrants and reaffirmed their commitment to translating discussions into concrete operational action. The meeting highlighted the value of the Network as a platform for information-sharing, trust-building and practical cooperation among States and partners.

A strong consensus emerged on the need for a **family-centred approach**, recognising families as rights-holders, key partners in search and identification processes, and essential stakeholders in policy and operational responses.

Participants also acknowledged a shared commitment to improving **identification processes, information management systems and support services for families**, while recognising persistent challenges related to coordination, data-sharing and case management.

Key priorities identified for future action include:

- Strengthening national forensic and identification capacities, including DNA analysis and ante-mortem/post-mortem data collection;

- Enhancing cross-border cooperation and regional networks to support search and identification efforts;
- Developing interoperable and standardised data-management and information-sharing systems;
- Improving coordination among national institutions and between countries of origin, transit and destination;
- Increasing technical, financial and human resources dedicated to missing migrant cases;
- Strengthening family support mechanisms, including reporting channels, psychosocial assistance and engagement with civil society, family associations and diaspora organisations;
- Addressing legal and policy barriers to information-sharing while ensuring data protection safeguards;
- Empowering National Focal Points to facilitate sustained cooperation and operational follow-up;
- Developing practical procedures and mechanisms to improve case resolution, identification and family support.

Participation and outreach

Participation

- The meeting attracted **over 50 participants from 20 European and African partner countries**, along with representatives from international and regional organisations, civil society organisations, and family members of missing migrants.
- Respondents to the online feedback form expressed overall high satisfaction. Aspects such as the thematic focus on missing migrants and quality of the presentations received high praise, with over 98% of respondents declaring they were “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied”. The meeting format, combining presentations from key stakeholders, plenary discussions, small-group exchanges and interactive polling exercises, was widely appreciated by participants.
- Overall, participants highlighted the need to **strengthen coordination and collaboration** within the Network through stronger leadership, regular follow-up, improved communication channels, and more practical exchanges. They also emphasised the importance of **broadening engagement** by involving additional countries, operational stakeholders, such as border police, gendarmerie services, and specialised units, as well as families of missing migrants in the Network’s activities.

Annex – Insights from the interactive sessions

The findings below are based on participants' contributions during the interactive Mentimeter sessions. Responses have been consolidated and organised by theme for clarity while preserving the substance of participants' inputs.

Exercise 1

*What are the **biggest operational challenges** when it comes to missing migrants?*

- **Information management, data collection and identification**
 - Difficulties in collecting, accessing, sharing and connecting data across institutions and countries.
 - Fragmented, incomplete or incompatible information systems and databases.
 - Lack of centralised and interoperable databases.
 - Challenges in collecting and linking ante-mortem and post-mortem data.
 - Difficulties in identifying missing migrants, particularly in desert and maritime contexts.
- **Coordination and cross-border cooperation**
 - Insufficient coordination among government authorities, NGOs, civil society organisations, consular networks and international organisations.
 - Limited information exchange and operational cooperation between countries of origin, transit and destination.
 - Challenges in identifying relevant stakeholders, clarifying responsibilities and ensuring effective communication.
 - Need for stronger regional, transnational and cross-border cooperation mechanisms.
- **Governance, political commitment and institutional frameworks**
 - Lack of political will and prioritisation of the issue.
 - Absence of national policies, legal frameworks, standard operating procedures and dedicated coordination structures.
 - Limited operationalisation of National Focal Point mandates.
 - Challenges linked to migration narratives and differing political priorities across countries.
- **Resources and operational capacity**
 - Limited financial resources and funding for search, identification activities, coordination and family support.
 - Insufficient technical, institutional and human capacities at national level.
 - Need to strengthen operational capacities and move from discussions to practical, results-oriented action.
- **Family-centred approaches and protection**
 - Difficulties in maintaining trust and communication with families.
 - Need to provide timely information, updates and responses to relatives of missing migrants.

	- Challenges in supporting families throughout the search, identification and case-resolution processes. - Importance of strengthening protection-oriented and humanitarian responses. • Prevention, search and collective action - Need for greater awareness of migration risks and stronger prevention campaigns. - Challenges related to search, rescue, monitoring and identification in maritime and remote areas. - Importance of coordinated regional action, shared responsibility and collective responses among Rabat Process partner countries. - Need to improve case resolution and reduce families' uncertainty.
Have you activated the Network already? If yes, in what circumstances?	• Based on 31 responses, 38.7% of participants indicated that they had already used or engaged with the Network, while 61.3% reported that they had not yet used it or were participating for the first time. Several respondents noted that their involvement had mainly been through Network meetings rather than through operational case-related exchanges. • Participants reported using the Network primarily for: - Information-sharing and cooperation among National Focal Points and partner organisations. - Exchange of experiences and good practices to address capacity gaps and strengthen responses. - Case-related support, including locating missing migrants, responding to family requests, and supporting identification processes. - Engagement with and familiarisation with the Network, including building contacts and exploring collaboration opportunities. Overall, participants have mainly used the Network as a platform for information exchange, peer learning, coordination, and support in addressing cases of missing migrants.
What is your vision for the Network?	Participants expressed a shared vision of a more operational, coordinated, and impactful network capable of delivering concrete results for missing migrants and their families. Key elements of this vision include: • Strengthening information-sharing and cooperation among member states, institutions, civil society organisations, Interpol, and other relevant stakeholders at national, regional, and international levels. • Enhancing the operational dimension of the Network, with practical tools, referral mechanisms, shared protocols, regular communication, and stronger cross-border cooperation to address concrete cases. • Improving the governance and sustainability of the Network through clear roles and responsibilities, regular communication, thematic working groups, reporting mechanisms, and predictable institutional support. • Promoting family-centred approaches, ensuring meaningful family participation, better support services, and more timely responses to families seeking information about missing relatives.

	• Strengthening capacities and knowledge-sharing through training, peer learning, exchange of experiences, development of guidance materials, and dissemination of good practices related to missing migrant cases. • Supporting awareness-raising and outreach efforts by facilitating the exchange of information, experiences, and communication materials among Network members. • Supporting stronger national and cross-border responses by fostering cooperation, encouraging dialogue among relevant actors, and promoting the exchange of experiences on legal, institutional, and operational frameworks. • Contributing to more coordinated responses to missing migrant cases by facilitating cooperation, information exchange, identification efforts, and support to families within the Network's mandate and capacities.
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Exercise 2

<i>How can I leverage this meeting to drive concrete actions in my capacity?</i>	Participants identified several ways to translate the insights gained during the meeting into concrete action in their respective roles and institutions. Strengthening cooperation and networks • Building on contacts established during the meeting and maintaining exchanges with other National Focal Points and stakeholders. • Strengthening collaboration among national authorities, international organisations, civil society actors, and families of missing migrants. • Establishing or reinforcing national coordination mechanisms, working groups, and multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms. Translating knowledge into practice • Applying lessons learned, recommendations, and good practices shared during the meeting in their national contexts. • Using the knowledge gained to better understand gaps and challenges and inform decision-making. • Sharing key takeaways within their institutions and with relevant national stakeholders. Turning recommendations into concrete initiatives • Transforming discussions and recommendations into practical actions, policies, and action plans. • Promoting measures that improve identification efforts, information-sharing, protection, and support for missing migrants and their families. • Mobilising support and resources to advance implementation. Raising awareness and promoting the issue nationally • Sensitising competent authorities and other relevant actors on the issue of missing migrants.
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	• Increasing visibility of the topic within national institutions and policy discussions. • Encouraging a greater focus on protection and humanitarian considerations in responses to missing migrant cases. Keeping families at the centre of the response • Advocating for the needs and rights of families of missing migrants. • Ensuring that family perspectives and humanitarian considerations are reflected in policies and operational procedures. • Promoting approaches that strengthen support, communication, and access to information for families. Overall, participants viewed the meeting as an opportunity to strengthen partnerships, share knowledge and good practices, raise awareness, and translate discussions into concrete actions that improve cooperation and responses to missing migrant cases.
What should trigger the activation of the Network?	Participants' responses suggest that the Network should primarily be activated when a concrete operational need arises, particularly in relation to missing migrant cases requiring coordination and information exchange. Key trigger points highlighted include: - Reports of missing migrants, especially where there is a credible disappearance, an identified protection concern, or a risk to the life or safety of the person concerned. - Cases requiring cross-border cooperation, particularly when information, coordination, or action is needed across multiple countries or institutions. - Requests for support from families, including situations where families are seeking information, assistance, or answers regarding missing relatives. - Concrete operational cases that would benefit from coordinated action, information-sharing, search efforts, identification processes, or referral mechanisms. - Situations requiring enhanced collaboration among National Focal Points, including the exchange of information, expertise, procedures, and good practices. - The need for preparedness and rapid response, with several participants emphasising that the Network should be sufficiently visible, accessible, and engaged to respond proactively when required. Some participants also questioned whether a formal activation mechanism is necessary, suggesting that the Network should remain continuously accessible and allow National Focal Points to contact one another directly whenever cooperation or support is needed.

*What are your
recommendations for
operationalising the Network?*

Participants emphasised the need to make the Network more practical, accessible, and action-oriented through the following measures:

Establish practical communication and exchange mechanisms

- Ensure that an up-to-date contact list of National Focal Points is shared among Network members and relevant stakeholders to facilitate direct exchanges, information-sharing, tracing requests, and operational cooperation.
- Facilitate regular information-sharing through regional calls, route-based exchanges, and discussions on anonymised case studies.
- Improve the visibility and accessibility of National Focal Points among relevant migration stakeholders.

Strengthen the Network's structure and governance

- Ensure all participating countries nominate National Focal Points (whether through a single or co-focal point arrangement) and provide them with a clear mandate endorsed at the appropriate institutional level.
- Establish subregional groups and route-based cooperation mechanisms to facilitate more targeted collaboration.
- Introduce reporting and monitoring mechanisms to track the Network's activities, progress, and challenges.

Promote common approaches and operational cooperation

- Develop and disseminate harmonised procedures, models of action, and documented good practices.
- Encourage greater engagement of operational actors and practitioners directly involved in missing migrant cases.
- Promote case management approaches and stronger multilateral cooperation among Network members.

Build capacities and knowledge

- Organise training activities and thematic meetings, including on specific topics such as forensic identification.
- Encourage National Focal Points to map national actors, procedures, and existing mechanisms to identify gaps and opportunities for cooperation.

Foster inclusivity and partnerships

- Strengthen engagement with relevant institutions, civil society organisations, and other migration-related networks.
- Promote a multi-stakeholder approach and reinforce partnerships at national, regional, and international levels.