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Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons

Parliamentary Conference on “Envisioning effective public policy to prevent and address cases of missing migrants” - 23 & 24 April 2025 in Strasbourg

Conclusive remarks

Background

1. On 23 - 24 April 2025, over 100 people took part in the parliamentary conference on “Envisioning effective public policy to prevent and address cases of missing migrants”. This event provided a one-of-a-kind opportunity to engage with parliamentarians on the role of policymaking on this issue.
2. Participants included members of the Parliamentary Assembly, civil society organisations including migrant and refugee-led initiatives, forensic practitioners, prosecutors, police officials, national human rights institutions, Permanent Representations to the Council of Europe, staff members of the Council of Europe monitoring bodies (notably the CPT and the GRETA), the UN (UN Special Rapporteurs, UNHCR, Committee on Enforced Disappearances), representatives of the ICRC, the IOM, lawyers, and researchers.
3. This event followed up on the adoption by the Assembly of [Resolution 2569 \(2024\)](#) and [Recommendation 2284 \(2024\)](#), “Missing Migrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers – A Call to Clarify Their Fate”, in October 2024 brought forward by Mr Julian Pahlke (Germany, SOC).
4. In May 2025, the Committee of Ministers agreed “with the Assembly that the phenomenon of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers going missing is a tragedy largely underestimated and neglected as a human rights issue and that it requires co-ordinated policy responses” (see [Doc. 16170](#)). The Committee of Ministers committed to bearing the Assembly’s recommendation in mind, as appropriate, “notably as regards the need for common standards across member States in order to enhance search processes and to improve the management and forensic identification of missing persons in Europe”.

Main conclusions

- **“Nothing without the families”: families of missing migrants must be included throughout any process and recognised as actors, not merely as victims.**

5. The pivotal role of families of missing migrants as rights-holders but also as information providers ought to be acknowledged. Considering the perspectives of families of missing migrants is not only ethical but also necessary to design effective public policies. In concrete terms, this entails facilitating visa access for families to enable them to enter countries where their family members have gone missing and play a role in the search and identification.
6. Some families may be reluctant to engage with state authorities: non-state actors should be identified as legitimate interlocutors to state authorities, and appropriate mechanisms be set-up so that families can turn to such entities if they so wish. Civil society, which may act as an intermediary, must be given the recognition and resources to fulfil this role. The importance and role of national human rights institutions, as well as that of lawyers must be acknowledged and facilitated in this process.
7. The highly sensitive nature of the personal data provided by and to families should be recognised and protected under strict data protection standards, when data is collected and shared for the purpose of search and identification. Standards such as the Council of Europe’s Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data ([ETS No. 108](#)), as amended by Protocol CETS No. 223 (“Convention 108+”) should apply.

➤ **Identification is essential: too many missing migrants remain forever unidentified.**

8. As it stands, identification is the exception for missing migrants instead of the norm. To remedy the “vacuum of accountability”, member States should put in place a legal obligation to identify every missing person without discrimination, regardless of their presumed origin, nationality, administrative status or the circumstance of their disappearance.

9. Marking individual graves should be enshrined in law and adequate resources provided to enact such obligation, including in cases of unidentified deceased where only a limited number of information has been found. Identification processes should combine an array of methods to increase the chances that a person be identified in the future and their family members informed whenever possible.

10. Systematic identification of bodies should follow harmonised standards such as [Recommendation No. R \(99\) 3](#) of the Committee of Ministers on the harmonisation of medico-legal autopsy rules (the set of rules adopted by the European Council of Legal Medicine in 2014 mostly drew from it) and [the Minnesota Protocol](#) on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016).

➤ **Focal points on missing migrants should be appointed at ministerial level in all member States which have not done so yet.**

11. These focal points can act as central points of information which stakeholders involved in the search and identification can turn to, facilitate co-ordination between ministries and foster exchange at international level. Avenues for co-operation and synergies should be explored between the Council of Europe’s [network of focal points on migration](#) and the Network of National Focal Points for Missing Migrants co-convened by Switzerland and the Gambia, and supported by the Rabat Process Secretariat.

➤ **Close co-operation between members States is vital to foster search and identification of missing migrants, and to ensure that no country is left to act alone.**

12. More resources and flexibility are required by forensic experts to enable identification. Forensic experts and prosecutors must have adequate funding, technical and human resources to carry out the legal duty to identify every missing person in practice. Working protocols between forensic experts and judicial authorities should be standardised to facilitate identification and data collection processes.

13. European co-operation is essential to help achieve this goal, for instance by the pooling of resources between countries and organisations. This cooperation should extend to the sharing of all required resources, such as interpreters and (body) recovery equipment.

Steps forward

14. Many participants stressed the importance of political leadership on an issue where most required standards are in place but where national legislations still lack harmonisation to enable cross-border co-operation on an issue of inherent transnational nature.

15. National parliaments have a key role to play on this pressing human rights issue with local, national, and international implications in their role as legislator and to ensure policy oversight (budget and international human rights law obligations, in particular). Parliamentarians can act by building on existing tools and initiatives, and by aligning national frameworks with regional and international standards, including those of the Council of Europe. They can also organise hearings in their national parliaments to develop an understanding of the paths forward in their respective country.

16. The important sentiment that missing migrants were individuals, not just numbers, and that no one should be forgotten was echoed throughout the conference. Every single missing migrant represents a family left searching for their loved one. Political will is needed to achieve the required changes identified in the conference, concrete action must be taken, and such action should be expected of member States.

17. A handbook will be published by the end of 2025 to guide parliamentarians in tackling the issue of missing migrants with the aim to help facilitate the materialisation of the required changes and enable policymakers to enact those. This handbook will be available in English, French, and in some other national languages.

Resources

[Webpage of the conference](#) including background documents adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly; standards adopted by the Committee of Ministers pertinent on the issue; videos of the speeches and presentations during the conference on 23 & 24 April 2025 (English and French language).

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List of members of the *ad hoc* Committee of the Bureau to participate in the Conference on *Envisioning effective public policy to prevent and address cases of missing migrants*, Strasbourg, 23-24 April 2025

Chairperson / Président : Mr / M. Julian PAHLKE (Germany, SOC / Allemagne, SOC)

Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy / Commission des questions politiques et de la démocratie

Mr / M. Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC / Italie / SOC)

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development / Commission des questions sociales, de la santé, et du développement durable

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Mr / M. Pierre-Alain FRIDEZ (Switzerland, SOC / Suisse, SOC)

Ms / Mme Carmen LEYTE (Spain, EPP/CD / Espagne / PPE/DC)

Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons / Commission des migrations, des réfugiés et des personnes déplacées

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Ms / Mme Christiana EROTKRITOU (Cyprus, SOC/ Chypre, SOC)

Mr / M. Emmanuel FERNANDES (France, UEL / France, GUE)

Lord Michael GERMAN (United Kingdom, ALDE / Royaume-Uni, ADLE)

Ms / Mme Meryem GÖKA (Türkiye, NR / Türkiye, NI)

Mr / M. Oleksii GONCHARENKO (Ukraine, ECPA / Ukraine, CEPA)

Lord Leslie GRIFFITHS (United Kingdom, SOC / Royaume-Uni, SOC)

Mr / M. Antonio GUTIÉRREZ LIMONES (Spain, SOC / Espagne / SOC)

Mr / M. Dimitrios MARKOPOULOS (Greece, EPP/CD / Grèce, PPE/DC)

Mr / M. Julian PAHLKE (Germany, SOC / Allemagne, SOC)

Mr / M. Paulo PISCO (Portugal, SOC)

Mr / M. Gonzalo ROBLES (Spain, EPP/CD / Espagne, PPE/DC)

Ms / Mme Pelin YILIK (Türkiye, NR / Türkiye, NI)

Ms / Mme Sandra ZAMPA (Italy, SOC / Italie, SOC)

Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media / Commission de la culture, de la science, de l'éducation et des médias

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Mr / M. Stefan SCHENNACH (Austria, SOC / Autriche, SOC)

Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination / Commission sur l'égalité et la non-discrimination

Mr / M. Mustafa CANBEY (Türkiye, NR/NI)

Ms / Mme Sandra REGOL (France, SOC)

Mr / M. Giorgios STAMATIS (Greece, EPP/CD / Grèce, PPE/DC)

Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee) / Commission pour le respect des obligations et engagements des Etats membres du Conseil de l'Europe (commission de suivi)

Mr / M. Yunus EMRE (Türkiye, SOC)