

Policy Roundtable: Improving the Response to People Going Missing Along Dangerous Routes in Asia

Key Recommendations for Member States in the Asia-Pacific Region

These recommendations were shaped by expert discussions in the Policy Roundtable in November 2024 and are further detailed in the [Event Outcome Report](#). They are structured in alignment with the recommendations issued by the [UN Secretary-General in December 2024](#) on missing migrants and providing humanitarian assistance to migrants in distress in transit.

The recommendations apply to both refugees and other persons in need of international protection, without prejudice to their specific rights under international law, reinforcing the complementarity between the Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees.



Prevention and protection of people going missing along dangerous routes in Asia

Migrant and refugee deaths and disappearances are preventable. Rights-based migration and asylum policies, which encompass timely humanitarian responses in distress situations on land and at sea, can protect and save lives.

1. Review migration and asylum policies and laws to assess whether they increase the risk of people going missing along dangerous routes in Asia.

2. Invest in inclusive and agile civil registration systems to ensure that marginalized populations, particularly those at risk of going missing, have a way of obtaining proof of legal identity/legal documentation.

A. Assess existing civil registration systems to identify inequalities and gaps.

B. Identify and address practical barriers preventing access to civil registration.

3. Strengthen institutional coordination to enhance the efficiency and responsiveness of humanitarian operations in distress situations.

A. Ensure that protection services including restoring family links are available at key points along.

B. Establish a regional multistakeholder coordination mechanism comprising State and non-State development partners to support the sustainability of responses to people going missing along dangerous routes in Asia.

4. Facilitate access to communication tools that allow maintaining contact with families throughout the movement, including in detention centers and at border crossings. For instance, mobile applications such as the RedSafe App provide a Digital Vault for storing essential documents and contact details.

*Disappearances often result from an inability to maintain contact with families in transit.



Search and identification of migrants and refugees who have died or gone missing

Effective search and identification efforts require national coordination and transnational cooperation between origin, transit, and destination countries. Cooperation efforts in relation to the country of origin should be made on a “do no harm” basis recognising the potential risks arising for refugees and other persons in need of international protection.

5. Establish and strengthen national coordination mechanisms, owned and led by States, to ensure a whole-of-government response to which international organisations and civil society provide technical expertise.

6. Utilise existing regional fora such as the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to facilitate transnational cooperation and information exchange.

7. Enhance transnational cooperation by:

- A.** Activating **Disaster Victim Identification (DVI)** to respond to mass casualty events involving migrants and refugees in cooperation with INTERPOL.
- B.** Establishing **formal coordination channels** and designated **national contact points** for families searching for missing migrants and refugees.
- C.** Developing **legal frameworks** that clarify responsibilities for **managing human remains**, including financial and procedural support for repatriation.
- D.** Harmonising and unifying **forensic and identification processes** across institutions and borders to improve efficiency in identifying deceased migrants and refugees.



Provision of support to affected families

Families of missing migrants and refugees face socio-economic, psychological, administrative, and legal challenges, with disproportionate impacts on women and children. It is essential to integrate family needs into programmes for missing migrants and refugees, including legal, economic, and psychosocial support.

8. Enable International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to serve as intermediaries between the State and families of the missing or has been identified as deceased, including addressing psychosocial needs.

A. Support families in obtaining certificates of absence or of death to facilitate administrative procedures (e.g. inheritance, property, child custody) after a family member goes missing.

9. Ensure that the repatriation of bodies is conducted in a culturally sensitive manner and accordingly to dignified management of the deceased.

A. Provide affected families with access to grieving and memorialisation opportunities.

B. Recognising the role of faith-based and religious organisations in forensic and burial procedures.



Data

Gaps in data collection, monitoring, and reporting often create incorrect perceptions of the reality of missing persons and hinder effective responses. Strengthening data systems is crucial to informing policies and interventions.

10. Strengthen mechanisms for collecting, centralising, and sharing data on migrant and refugee deaths and disappearances.

11. Raise awareness on loss of life in transit to highlight ongoing challenges to duty-bearers and inform affected communities about available support and information channels.