NEEDS OF FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS IN CYPRUS
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We extend our deepest gratitude to the families of missing persons who were graciously interviewed by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Committee on Missing Persons (CMP) and shared their life stories with us. We appreciate this was extremely painful for many. The time spent with the mothers, fathers, wives, husbands, children and grandchildren talking about their loved ones was extremely enriching and profound.

The ICRC and the CMP hope that this report adequately represents the voices of those families interviewed, and will prove informative and useful for the authorities and other actors to continue supporting all efforts to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons in Cyprus and to adapt current responses to better address their families’ multifaceted needs.

About the CMP
The mandate of the Committee on Missing Persons (CMP) is to establish the fate of missing persons in order to alleviate the suffering of affected families. It does not include investigations into the circumstances surrounding the death of missing persons or the attribution of responsibility for their disappearance. The CMP is composed of a Member appointed by each of the two communities and a Third Member, selected by the International Committee of the Red Cross and appointed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. All CMP decisions are taken by consensus.

About the ICRC
The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organisation whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflicts and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. At the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the ICRC endeavors to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening international humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. While State authorities bear the primary responsibility for preventing and addressing disappearances and responding to the needs of the families of those missing, the ICRC recognizes the complex nature of this form of loss and consequently supports States’ efforts in around 60 contexts worldwide by identifying and understanding the various issues associated with missing persons and their families, and offering technical advice and support in order to better respond to families’ multifaceted needs.

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With special thanks to Nick Danziger for permission to use the top right photograph on the cover page.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the last four to five decades (44 – 55 years), relatives of missing persons in Cyprus have been profoundly affected while they wait to learn what has happened to their loved ones. The emotional toll this uncertainty takes has significantly affected entire families’ lives as they have waged a constant struggle, not only to find their missing relative but to also stave off the possibility of their loved one disappearing completely should they not find them.

While the families of missing persons undergo much the same experiences as the rest of a population affected by armed conflict and violence, the uncertainty caused by a lack of answers about the fate and whereabouts of missing relatives can have specific consequences as a result of long-term distress and anxiety. As a result, many Cypriot families have a range of specific needs, which are often overlooked but which require a multifaceted response.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus (CMP) undertook a joint Family Needs Assessment in Cyprus between October 2018 – April 2019, with 170 Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot family members (out of a total combined number of 934 families) who have not yet received answers about the fate and whereabouts of their missing relatives in relation to the events of 1963-1964 and 1974, in order to better understand these needs. This public report is a summary of the combined results of the assessment.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE ASSESSMENT (of the 170 family members interviewed)

ONGOING AMBIGUITY OF FAMILIES ON FATE OF THE MISSING ➞ 40% expressed ambiguity over their missing relative’s fate – that they could possibly still be alive – or were convinced they were still alive somewhere. For them, keeping a sense of hope that their missing relatives were alive was crucial to ensuring their own wellbeing. Though the remaining 60% were doubtful that their missing relative could still be alive so many decades since the disappearance occurred, a lack of credible information and absence of mortal remains continues to cast lingering doubts over the definitive fate of the missing relative.

1. NEED TO KNOW ➞ 91% said their first need is to receive an answer regarding their loved one’s fate: whether they are alive or dead and in the case of the latter, to locate, identify and receive the remains of their missing relatives to be able to bury them. This includes receiving updates and feedback on the status of their individual case/s.

2. NEED FOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ➞ 57% expressed a need for greater official acknowledgement of their ongoing plight to find their missing relatives. Of these, 60% called for both the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot Authorities to make public statements calling for the resolution of outstanding missing cases before vital information were lost; while 44% talked about the importance of educating the next generation in a way that highlights the humanity of those still missing and the humanitarian impact on the families in Cyprus to prevent a recurrence.

3. NEED FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT ➞ 53% talked about the ongoing psychological and psychosocial difficulties as a result of being forced to live with the hope and despair surrounding their loved one’s fate. With no proof of death, no possibility of closure, and no rituals for support, there is no resolution of the families’ grief. 21% reported feeling reluctant to share their experiences with others who may not be empathetic or understanding of their situation.
4. NEED FOR ECONOMIC & ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

29% reported experiencing ongoing economic and/or administrative difficulties as a result of the disappearance, including due to the ongoing economic strain as a result of losing the essential breadwinner. Families asked for more attention be given to the welfare needs of the elderly and female relatives of the Missing as well as more information related to entitlements and rights.

CONCLUSIONS

Families wish for nothing more than to be able to close this painful chapter of their lives in a culturally acceptable and meaningful way, however painful that would be. This included (1) a response about the fate and whereabouts of their missing relatives, and (2) if they were dead, the recovery and identification of their loved ones’ remains and (3) a proper burial in accordance with the wishes of each and every family. Until the time when families receive satisfactory information that allows them to come to terms with the disappearance of their loved ones, the convictions of the families with regard to their missing relative should be respected and taken into consideration when designing a response to their needs.

For families of missing persons, time does not heal – answers do.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

Much has been done to address the Missing issue in Cyprus, including the creation of the CMP and the recovery, identification and return of missing persons to their families. However, International Humanitarian Law (IHL) casts a long-lasting obligation on each party to the conflict to take all additional measures to account for persons still reported missing as a result of armed conflict and other situations of violence, and to provide their family members with any information it has on their fate. The ICRC’s recommendations to the relevant Cypriot Authorities is to focus in particular on the ongoing needs of the families, including to:

1. CLARIFY THE FATE OF REMAINING MISSING PERSONS - Take all possible measures to relieve the 748 Greek Cypriot families and the 186 Turkish Cypriot families (accounting for a total of 1072 missing Cypriot individuals) of their uncertainty and to fulfill their Right to Know. This includes clarifying the fate and whereabouts of those who remain missing in relation to the events of 1963 – 1964 and 1974. To achieve this, the required support and funding should be provided to the Committee on Missing Persons (CMP).

2. ACKNOWLEDGE AND CONTINUE TO COMMUNICATE THE PLIGHT OF THE MISSING - Communicate publicly about the Missing issue with the aim of highlighting the humanitarian plight of their families to help generate wider general public understanding and empathy for the families’ need for resolution.

3. PROVIDE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT – Make available psychosocial support outreach, whether that be individual and group-based support, in all geographical locations where families live. Such a psychosocial program can be carried out by local government structures, NGOs or other actors who are well-trained in providing psychosocial support and well-informed on the Missing issue. Additionally, ensure those who present with severe psychological needs can access mental health services which are well-informed on the particularities on the needs of the families of the Missing.

4. MAP FAMILIES’ ECONOMIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE NEEDS – Conduct a mapping of the economic and administrative challenges and needs of all Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot families of the Missing; ensure families are aware of and have access to the services and benefits available and guarantee consistency and non-discrimination in the services and benefits provided.

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2 The cited number is valid as of 31.03.2019
1. The Missing Impact

The impact of disappearances on individuals, families and communities at large are one of the most damaging and long-lasting humanitarian consequences of conflict, violence, migration and natural disasters. The plight of persons who disappear is tragic. So too is that of their families who suffer great anguish and mounting anxiety from not knowing the whereabouts of the people they love.

An individual who goes missing and remains unaccounted for is the primary person affected by disappearance. However, the tragedy extends beyond the missing person and affects many others, including close family members.

Being a missing person’s relative is unlike any other experience in life. The families of the Missing face a specific reality and exist in a state of limbo: vital questions related to the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones often remain unanswered for a long time. The ongoing uncertainty over their missing relative’s fate and whereabouts leaves families oscillating between feelings of hope and despair. Families’ suffering can be prolonged over decades as they wage a constant struggle, not only to find their missing relative but to also stave off the possibility of never finding them.

Missing people are also part of wider communities and their disappearance can have devastating effects on the communities’ sense of belonging. The lack of answers about the fate and whereabouts of missing persons can also affect generations. For families missing a relative for decades, this means that the waiting and anguish is spread over generations and can shape the history of entire families, communities and ultimately society.

For families of missing persons, time does not heal – answers do.

Families have the Right to Know the fate of missing relatives, to be reunited with them if alive or to receive their mortal remains and mourn with dignity if they have lost them forever. Adopting all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing as a result of armed conflict, and providing their family members with all available information, is a legal obligation imposed on states by International Humanitarian Law (IHL).\(^1\) Respect for the principles of international law means respect for the dignity of all human beings, including the dead.

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2. Families of the Missing in Cyprus

According to the Official List of Missing Persons in Cyprus, a total of 2,002 Cypriots were recorded as missing in relation to the events of 1963 – 1964 and 1974. Of these,

- 1,510 are Greek Cypriot missing persons
- 492 are Turkish Cypriot missing persons

While the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus (CMP) has identified and returned the mortal remains of 930 missing Cypriots in relation to the events of 1963 – 1964 and 1974 to their families, the fate and whereabouts of 1,072 Cypriots (belonging to 934 families) is still waiting to be clarified.¹ Of these,

- 829 are Greek Cypriot missing persons²
- 243 are Turkish Cypriot missing persons

A total of 934 families are searching for missing relatives in Cyprus.³ Of these,

- 748 are Greek Cypriot families
- 186 are Turkish Cypriot families

Families of missing persons face a constant emotional struggle incomparable to other forms of grief. They suffer from a phenomenon known as ‘ambiguous loss’ – a form of grief that has no end when there has been no verification of death or certainty that the person will come back or return to the way they used to be.⁴ Families of the Missing experience a constant vacillation between hope and despair, and are driven by a need to clarify the fate and whereabouts of their relatives in order to be reunited with them if alive, or to identify and bury them with dignity if they have died.

Over the last four to five decades (44 – 55 years), relatives of missing persons in Cyprus have been profoundly affected while they wait to learn what has happened to their loved ones. The emotional toll this can take has significantly affected entire families’ lives as they have waged a constant struggle, not only to find their missing relative but to also stave off the possibility of their loved one disappearing completely should they not find them. It is therefore essential to assess the humanitarian needs of missing persons’ families before embarking on bridging the gaps between identified needs, and existing resources and/or responses.

¹ The cited number, in addition to the cited numbers of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot missing persons, is valid as of 27.03.2019.
² This term includes all cases of missing persons submitted by the Office of the Greek Cypriot Member, including Greek Cypriot, Armenian, Maronite, Greek and American individuals who went missing in relation to the above-mentioned events in Cyprus.
³ See above note 7.
⁴ See above note 4.
3. Family Needs Assessment

The CMP invited the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to undertake a joint Family Needs Assessment (FNA) in Cyprus between October 2018 – April 2019, with Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot families who still do not know the fate and whereabouts of their missing relatives in relation to events of 1963-1964 and 1974. The objective of the Family Needs Assessment is exclusively humanitarian and seeks to learn about the specific challenges, variety of needs, coping mechanisms and expectations that families of missing persons in Cyprus encounter today. This report is a summary of findings based on interviews conducted directly with the affected families by the ICRC, and offers conclusions and recommendations as to how the families’ multifaceted needs can be comprehensively addressed by all concerned parties.

While the families of missing persons undergo much the same experiences as the rest of a population affected by armed conflict, the uncertainty caused by a lack of answers about the fate and whereabouts of missing relatives can have specific consequences as a result of long-term distress and anxiety. As a result, many face a range of specific challenges and needs, which are often overlooked but which require a multifaceted response. These include among others:

⇒ The need to know the fate and whereabouts of the missing person, as well as circumstantial information related to his/her disappearance;
⇒ Emotional needs;
⇒ Economic needs;
⇒ Legal and administrative needs;
⇒ Needs relating to acknowledgement and justice.⁵

Assessment Sample Frame

The 170 family members randomly selected to be interviewed as part of this FNA accounted for 234 missing persons – nearly 22% of all those still considered to be missing according to the Official List of Missing Persons.

To ensure the sample was statistically relevant and representative of the total number of missing persons and their families, certain criteria were chosen to define the sample structure to evaluate whether these elements would result in having a certain influence on the challenges and needs expressed by the families. These criteria included:

⁵ Families’ associated needs were recognized by the International Conference of Governmental and non-Governmental Experts on the Disappeared in 2003 and adopted by the 28th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent at the end of that year. See: https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/themissing_conf_03.2003_en_90.pdf
Relationship to the missing person of families interviewed:

All interviewees were immediate relatives of the missing person. Given the time lapse since the disappearance occurred, many family members who were directly affected by the disappearances have passed away. As a result, it was important for the next generation (grandchildren of the Missing) to be included in the study in order to understand the longer-term impact of disappearance (see chart 2).

Gender of the missing person related to families interviewed:

Nearly 13% of all Cypriots still considered to be missing are female. Gender was thus also used to structure the FNA sample in order to explore the relationship between the gender of the missing person and the subsequent difficulties, needs and expectations experienced by their families. The high representation of females in the FNA sample frame was due to some of the families who were interviewed in this assessment, who were searching for 20 or more female relatives (see chart 3).

Year of disappearance of missing persons related to families interviewed:

To ensure families affected by disappearance from both time frames were included – 1963 / 1964 and 1974, this criteria was also used to structure the FNA sample to see the sorts of differences the period of disappearance could have on the families’ specific challenges, needs and expectations (see chart 4).
Geographical coverage of families interviewed: The chosen FNA sample covered all areas where families of the Missing reside. See chart 1 for the total number of individuals interviewed per location.

Data Collection

Mixed methods of information were collected including a review of the relevant literature and reports, in-depth interviews and focus groups with families still searching for their missing relatives. Interviews with key actors with specific knowledge related to the Missing issue were also held to gain an alternative insight into certain related topics. A total of 170 Cypriots either participated in an in-depth interview using a semi-structured questionnaire or a focus group from 22 October 2018 to 22 February 2019.

Given decades had passed since the disappearances occurred and the majority of families had not talked in-depth about their missing relative for a long period, a qualitative approach to collecting the data was chosen to ensure the complexity of their lives since the disappearance occurred could be taken into account and to foster a receptive environment where those interviewed felt listened to and supported. Based on the qualitative data collected, quantitative results were also drawn.

Before commencing each interview, all interviewees were explicitly explained the purpose and aims of the study and also received a written information notice outlining the assessment objectives and specifics in their respective language, including with whom and how their shared information would be used, stored and processed, and how the results of the assessment would be used and with whom. A CMP Psychologist also attended the interviews to ensure the families received psychosocial support if required.

Some interviewees (n = 67 out of 170 total interviewees) also completed a self-reporting survey to measure their Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales (DASS-21). As not all participants interviewed as part of this Assessment conducted the DASS-21 survey, the report findings are based on a reduced sample which is not representative of all the families of the Missing. CMP Psychologists selected the interviewees. As a result, it is worth noting the possible selection bias of the sub-sample. As a result, it is worth noting the possible selection bias of the sub-sample. Five categories of respondents completed the DASS-21 survey including: parents (8%); spouses (5%); siblings (28%); children (35%); and grandchildren (24%).

The ICRC processes Personal Data in accordance with the ICRC Rules on Personal Data Protection while the CMP processes data in accordance with the new European General Data Protection Regulation rules.

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6 For an explanation of the DASS-21 tool including how the different variables (stress, depression, anxiety) are scored, see: http://www2.psy.unsw.edu.au/groups/dass/
8 Available at https://eugdpr.org/
4. Main Findings

4.1 Families’ Need to Know the Fate and Whereabouts of their Missing Relatives

One of the most pressing needs expressed by the families interviewed as part of this Assessment is for an individualised response concerning the fate and whereabouts of their missing relatives as soon as possible.

In fact, 91% of all families interviewed said they wanted to receive an answer regarding their loved one’s fate: whether they were alive or dead and in the case of the latter, to locate, identify and receive the remains of their missing relatives to be able to bury them.

Families were asked to express their inner beliefs as to the fate of their missing relatives. While more than half of all families interviewed believed their missing relative was dead, 40% of all those interviewed expressed ambiguity over their missing relative’s fate – that they could possibly still be alive – or were convinced they were still alive somewhere (see chart 5). For them, keeping a sense of hope that they were alive was crucial to ensuring their own wellbeing.

“If you call me on the phone and say that the bones have been found, it will be like you are killing me a second time round, because I do not want to believe it... I prefer to keep on hoping in this situation. Others prefer to know what happened. I prefer to hope for as long as possible.” (Daughter of the Missing)

Changing their attitudes as to the fate of their missing relative has been a continuous process for other families. Many only accepted the possibility that their loved ones had died in recent years with the CMP’s work of recovering and returning the mortal remains of the Missing. Though doubtful that their missing relative could still be alive so many decades since the disappearance occurred, the lack of credible information and absence of mortal remains continues to cast lingering doubts over the definitive fate of the missing relative. In fact, 51% of all those interviewed reported one of the main difficulties they faced during the search over so many years had been as a result of receiving confusing / contradictory information or no information at all.
“Well, to know that you have lost someone very exceptional, very valuable, somebody you are very close to is difficult to accept at the first stage. And it is the case that there is still hope... he is lost, but there is still hope. Time goes on and you don’t hear anything, but still, you have some hope. This is the difficult part. If you lose someone due to health reasons or an accident, you know that the person’s gone and will never come back. But in this case, you still have a hope, which may never be realised. This, I should say, is the dilemma for the people.” (Wife of the Missing)

The absence of mortal remains has been one of enduring, never-ending pain for the families. They continually fluctuate between hope and despair as news spreads of new possible burial sites being recovered and/or more mortal remains being found, only to learn their loved one is not among those identified. Families reported they would be convinced of their loved one’s death only after the recovery of his or her mortal remains. Having no grave to visit where they can conduct religious rituals only compounds the families’ grief.

“At least if they find the bones you can see them and bury them...You can bury them and visit them...Where can I go to visit my son? It affects me so much...So much more than you can imagine...The more time passes, the fresher the wound becomes.” (Mother of the Missing)

Though families reported being advised by well-wishers to move on and treat their missing relative as if they were dead, the families continue to feel a strong sense of responsibility towards their missing loved ones and are defined by a powerful, ever-present fear of their Missing being forgotten. In their view, calling off the search would be equivalent to abandoning their missing relative. As a result, families remain unwilling to let their Missing go until their fate and whereabouts has been clarified, their mortal remains recovered and buried, and the missing person’s dignity restored. Until such time, the disappearance continues to take hold of their everyday lives.

“It’s just that there is always a feeling that we owe something to these people. Not to myself but to these people; that they deserve the right to have a decent grave and be properly laid down...you know, we have obligations to them.” (Son of the Missing)

Families’ Main Concerns Related with the Search and Recovery Process

While families have had to develop deep reserves of resilience to cope with external factors that continuously revive their active search, families reported their resilience being even more tested over recent years by a number of concerns and fears, including but not limited to:

⇒ A fear that time is running out; key witnesses have already died or are dying and/or refuse to share information which could shed light on the fate and whereabouts of those still missing;

“Steps have been taken, for the better. Efforts were made. But, it’s not an everyday issue anymore... and thus there's also complacency. Time passes, people grow old...witnesses pass away...Somehow, there’s this complacency. In order for things to happen more human resources are needed, more funds must be invested into the issue.” (Son of the Missing)
Possible excavation sites are being built over by buildings / roads / new housing and the topology of the terrain is changing over time, making it difficult for witnesses to identify sites according to how they existed decades ago. A lack of new excavation sites / access to these sites could also mean the Missing will remain forever disappeared;

“We are completely losing our hope [with news that there are no new excavation sites]. And we are afraid of the possibility that the missing persons will never be found and for us never to know.” (Brother of the Missing)

The crucial work of the CMP could be at risk or cease completely if funding runs out;

What will happen if the CMP’s funding runs out and it’s no longer possible for them to be located? The relatives of these people, what will they do? What will happen for those whose [relatives’] bones will not be found? Will we have to wait forever? (Wife of the Missing)

The generation directly affected by the disappearances will soon die and nobody will continue the search with their same degree of intensity, accountability and knowledge;

“Our lives won’t be long enough for that [to bury the Missing]. It was my mother’s greatest wish. Now she’s gone... I am the oldest child) and I am the one who remembers best... Those who come after me, what do they know? They know nothing [of the situation]” (Daughter of the Missing)

People are too afraid to share information without the support and approval of the corresponding Authorities;

I believe that there are people who know what happened in those days…I’m not sure whether they are willing to help. Because... you know the pressure on the people is from both sides...” (Wife of the Missing)

Families’ Needs for Information

Many families requested to receive more information about the different processes involved in establishing the fate and whereabouts of their missing relatives, including the investigative, search and identification processes. Interviewed families expressed differing levels of knowledge and awareness of these processes and reported garnering the majority of related information from the media. Families reported lacking sufficient information and said they would prefer to receive information directly from a more credible source.

“To make the family realise that it has a ballast; for each family to be able to say that they know what is going on with the issue of the missing persons, we need constant updates. Maybe this will make the families feel more secure let’s say; that their own people will be found.” (Granddaughter of the Missing)
Families likened their anguish to a rollercoaster ride – their hopes raised as other families received news of a positive identification made by the CMP, then dashed as their Missing were not among those identified. While 45% of all Greek Cypriot Missing and 50% of all Turkish Cypriot Missing have been identified by the CMP and their mortal remains returned to their families, more than half for both groups are still missing. The 748 Greek Cypriot families and the 186 Turkish Cypriot families (accounting for a total of 1072 missing Cypriots) who are still waiting for news say they are desperate for the CMP to continue its work unhindered and will need to be convinced that there is nothing more to be done, should suggestions be made that excavations will cease in the future.

“Families will ask, ‘Why couldn’t you find our missing persons but you found others?’ They will not understand the reasons for this, especially if they say if it was because of a lack of money. They will give their own money [to continue the search]. They will not accept for excavations to finish.” (Grandson of the Missing)
4.2 Needs for Acknowledgement

Out of the total number of families interviewed, 57% expressed some form of an official acknowledgement of their experiences as their second greatest need.

Acknowledgement was interpreted by each missing person’s family differently and was even differently interpreted among the members of the same family. All of the families who expressed a greater need for acknowledgement felt that their situation had not been sufficiently recognised.

Chart 6: Type of Acknowledgement Expected by the Interviewed Families

- Public Acknowledgement of the humanity of the Missing: 60%
- Private Visit / Meeting with Authorities: 38%
- Equal Treatment of all Families of the Missing: 34%
- Consultation with Families: 16%
- Respect and Justice: 10%

⇒ Public Acknowledgement of the Humanity of the Missing

Sixty percent (60%) of all families asked for both the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot Authorities to make public statements calling for the resolution of outstanding missing cases before vital information were lost (see chart 6).9 They believed that those with information which could lead to resolving cases, need to receive greater encouragement to come forward to share such information with the CMP from the corresponding Authorities.

“Still today, not even the half of all the missing people has been found. Now this is a very big problem for the relatives. All this time, information we could have heard from people and seen from them [possible burial sites]… the Authorities act as if this is not a problem and it exists neither on the Turkish Cypriot nor on the Greek Cypriot side. They neither show attention to the relatives of missing people nor say this is a problem and what we can do about it. This is demoralising for the people and can even lead to a [mental] breakdown.”

(Son of the Missing)

Others asked for the situation of the relatives of missing persons to be better acknowledged through public statements given by the relevant Authorities, again highlighting the humanitarian plight of the Missing and their families to help generate wider general public understanding and empathy. To do this, families expressed a distinct need to have the relevant Authorities listen to and understand their stories of resilience and loss so these personal stories can be more widely communicated.

9 The percentages in Chart 6 surpass 100% because each family member could provide multiple answers to the same question.
“Do you think we wanted to live like this? Do you think we wanted these labels like – you’re alone; you haven’t got a husband, and you haven’t got a dad or a house? Some people are cruel. Look, how can a small child carry this anguish all the way home and into bed? I’m sorry to say that I even used to wet the bed. Now I understand why. The things I experienced, only I know...When someone high up in the government does a presentation in parliament and they speak on behalf of me, or other missing persons’ families, they cannot understand or express what it’s really like. If only they listened to us and expressed our thoughts.”  (Daughter of the Missing)

⇒ Private Visit / Meeting with Authorities
Forty percent (40%) of the families who prioritised acknowledgement as one of their greatest needs also called for greater moral support to be shown by the authorities in private ways. Children and grandchildren of the Missing were particularly disappointed that the authorities had not paid a home visit to their elderly mothers since many of them were homebound and unable to attend public events.

“The State should have been the one responsible for finding ways to support a family with a missing husband. There were many ways...but they provided us with just a small pension...and problem solved! As if they are thinking only money has value for us. Other ways could be...to update us...to pay attention to the fact that we lost our loved ones; at least to give us some support by informing us, ‘today we did this and tomorrow we will make efforts to find the missing persons’... We don't want to get this information only via the television!”  (Wife of the Missing)

⇒ Equal Treatment of all Families of the Missing
Some families said they had heard the authorities and others, making a distinction among the missing persons themselves, either between those who were ‘civilians’ and those who were ‘soldiers’ at the time of their disappearance, or between those who are ‘Martyrs’ and those who are ‘Missing’. This distinction impacts negatively on families of civilian missing persons since they perceive the value of their relatives’ lives as less important than those of soldiers or Martyrs.

“There are differences made between citizens and soldiers [of missing persons]; a distinction has been made for the families [by the authorities]. For me, my parents didn’t fight in the war, so I am not entitled [because they are not considered ‘heroes’ like soldiers are].”  (Son of the Missing)

⇒ Consultation with Families of the Missing
Twenty percent (20%) of families reported they would appreciate greater consultation before decisions were taken concerning them, or to include them in decision-making processes where appropriate. This included taking an individualised approach to asking families their preferred form of reparation.

“I believe that people should be consulted when decisions are being taken. The messages should come out very clearly about the reasons why something is being done a certain way.”  (Grandson of the Missing)
Respect and Justice

Sixteen percent (16%) of individuals interviewed expressed needs for respect and justice. When asked what justice would represent for them, 82% of all families interviewed reported that justice meant receiving an answer about the fate and whereabouts of their missing relative and if they had died, the recovery of their loved one’s remains and the ability to bury them according to the families’ wishes (see chart 7).

![Chart 7: Meaning of Respect and Justice in Relation to the Missing](chart7.png)

Forty-four percent (44%) of families also said it was important for them to talk about their missing relatives and their own experiences in order to educate the next generation, and prevent disappearances from ever happening again. Some of the families also mentioned it being very important for the Missing issue to be taught and discussed in schools in a way that highlights the humanity of those still missing in Cyprus.

“They must teach our recent history in our schools, not for creating animosity but so that kids know our recent history. My daughter wrote a poem about Martyrs and she won a prize. Her friends said, ‘didn’t you have anything better to do than write a poem about Martyrs?’ My daughter got very frustrated. Not everyone talks about the past so that children know about it.” (Daughter of the Missing)

Some of the families interviewed also expressed a need to see the prosecution of those who were responsible for the disappearance of their relatives, though they were doubtful that would happen.

“They are not going to find justice. The State has been covering a lot of people at fault all these years…and thus it’s impossible to prosecute any of those who were responsible.” (Brother of the Missing)

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10 The percentages in Chart 7 surpass 100% because each family member could provide multiple answers to the same question.
4.3 Psychological and Psychosocial Needs

Families of the Missing are forced to live between hope and despair, and are consumed with thoughts about their loved one’s fate. While searching for information is a perfectly normal reaction, especially in the early years following the disappearance, it is also a significant and lasting source of stress.

The length of time that has passed since the disappearance occurred and the varying intensity of the search as new information surfaces have resulted in the families’ physical and mental exhaustion. Indeed 50% of all families interviewed reported the ongoing psychological and psychosocial difficulties associated with the disappearance over decades as their third biggest problem.

Impact on Families

The Missing issue in Cyprus has resulted in not only an individual but also a familial loss. Families exist in a particularly complex situation. The majority of families reported constantly thinking of their missing relative.

With no proof of death, no possibility of closure, and no rituals for support, there is no resolution of their grief. The grieving process that would normally accompany a death is frozen and families are confronted with a prolonged stress (over four decades) because they have not been able to follow the rituals usually associated with someone who has died. Instead, the uncertainty surrounding the fate results in the missing person being psychologically present for the families, even though they are physically absent.

“This is my inner world…Throughout the day I speak to people and do different things but this topic [my missing father] is my inner world. It’s always in my head and in my heart. Every incident reminds me of this; it is always there. This is the only thing I haven’t ever been able to get over” (Daughter of the Missing)

Mothers, wives and children reported that their families had been torn apart following the disappearance of a member of their household. Men also talked about the ways their family social fabric was in some cases obliterated. This had left them feeling hopeless as a result of the absence of clear answers and the constant guilt about surviving their missing relatives.

“I lost my wife and five children. Family is important in Cyprus but I’ve had to live through a complete dissolution of my family – it destroyed me. I’m only staying alive now to bury them. They died once but I’m dying every day.” (Father of the Missing)

Some of the fathers and husbands interviewed for this Assessment reported turning to alcohol, while some of the mothers and wives reported taking medication after the disappearance occurred until the current day, to cope with the psychological impact of the disappearance.

“How did I stay sane? One could lose their mind. I have lots medicine so I stay well.” (Mother of the Missing)

11 See above note 4.
Children of the Missing talked in particular about the heavy price they had paid from dealing with the disappearance of a parent in addition to the stress of watching a mother / father struggling to cope with the absence. While their parents dealt with the ambiguity of their disappeared relatives, the surviving children dealt with a double ambiguity – both in terms of having a disappeared relative (who was physically absent but psychically present) but additionally in terms of the emotional absence of their surviving parent who was often occupied with searching for the Missing and / or providing financially for the remaining family members. Many talked about feeling as though they had lost both parents and had instead raised themselves.

“I was both my mother’s child and husband… I didn’t get married so I could feed and look after my brothers and sisters. I helped my mum to get them [my brothers and sisters] married.” (Daughter of the Missing)

All of the children interviewed talked about the heavy price they had paid from constantly shifting between feelings of hope and despair over such an extended period of time. They spoke about how their own distress developed due to the disappearance of a parent in addition to watching their sole parent’s anxiety over the fate of their missing relative. In fact, in a self-reporting survey conducted to measure the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales (DASS-21)\(^{12}\) of some of the Assessment interviewees,\(^ {13}\) the majority of parents and spouses of the Missing reported experiencing severe, to extremely severe anxiety (88%). Additionally, as a result of growing up watching their parents’ distress, around half of the children who completed the DASS-21 also reported experiencing moderate to severe anxiety (71% - see chart 8).

Some families also reported believing their family members had ‘gone crazy’ due to their changed behaviours after the disappearance of their loved ones. These families were surprised to learn that these behaviours are experienced by families of the Missing all around the world and are typical thoughts, behaviours and actions of those who are living with ambiguous loss.\(^ {14}\)

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\(^{12}\) For an explanation of the DASS-21 tool including how the different variables (stress, depression, anxiety) are scored, see: [http://www2.psy.unsw.edu.au/groups/dass/](http://www2.psy.unsw.edu.au/groups/dass/)

\(^{13}\) A total of 67 family members completed the DASS-21 survey. See Methodological section for more information.

\(^{14}\) See above note 4.
“All these years I thought my mother was crazy because she kept buying clothes to put in my missing brother’s wardrobe. We took her to the doctors and he gave her medicine and told us it was better not to talk about it with her. She was completely over-medicated to stop her crying.” (Brother of the Missing)

Psychosocial Support for Children and Elderly Relatives of the Missing

Among all Cypriots interviewed, less than one quarter (21%) reported preferring not to talk about their missing relatives at all or only within the family circle (see chart 9). These individuals reported feeling reluctant to raise such a sensitive issue outside of the close-knit domestic realm should they encounter individuals who were not empathetic or understanding of their particular situations. In fact, many families reported never having discussed the topic in detail amongst each other until this Assessment’s interview.

Chart 9: Type of Psychosocial Support Preferred by Families

For others, living through decades of silence had taken a heavy toll and they felt new relief with the possibility of discussing their experiences and feelings openly, including in the interviews conducted for this Assessment. As a result, 38% of all those interviewed said they wanted to be able to talk more openly with others who had lived through a similar experience.

“At the beginning of your visit, I felt tense but by the end, I felt relief. That was the first time we have ever all sat together as a family to talk about it.” (Daughter of the Missing)

Most children said they had grown up feeling unable to talk about their experiences at school or at home when they were young. They had learned from a young age to internalise their emotions related with the topic and had continued in this way until the present day; they reported avoiding sharing their feelings at home for fear of further contributing to the stress of their mother. Meanwhile, elderly family members said they wanted to talk about their experiences but not in front of their children, so as not to upset them. As a result, the parents and children’s mutual protection of each other’s grief had silenced many households over decades.

Some children of the Missing spoke of the extreme loneliness of their parents; that they were more than ever alone at home lost in their thoughts of their missing loved ones. Indeed, there was a significant, positive association between the age of interviewees and their corresponding DASS-21 (negative emotional states) of depression, anxiety and stress levels: older family members, especially those who were home-bound, were more likely to experience negative emotional feelings. Indeed, all the parents who were included in this Assessment reported
experiencing moderate to severe depression. This finding was also confirmed by the qualitative results.

Consequently, 41% of all interviewees believed it would be a positive step should their parents be visited at home by an experienced professional to listen to them. Those who lived more geographically remote particularly requested support in the form of a home visit. They emphasised a form of social support – rather than the provision of a Psychologist to talk solely about the disappearance – would be beneficial both for their ageing parents as well as for themselves.

“My mother is old and needs care…From time to time if someone would visit and talk with her about other topics…that would be something positive.” (Son of the Missing)

**Psychosocial Support for Grandchildren Relatives of the Missing**

The Assessment also included interviews with 44 grandchildren of the Missing (26% of the total of those interviewed). Grandchildren described the complex roles they had inherited: looking after their surviving grandparent and ageing parents while at the same time taking responsibility for the ongoing search for the missing relative. Though the vast majority was not directly impacted by the disappearance, all of the grandchildren of the Missing interviewed described feeling a sense of responsibility to locate, identify and bury their missing relative before their elders died.

“If I can find my grandfather, I will have done a duty for my family.” (Grandson of the Missing)

Being equipped with information about how to psychologically support their elders as well as information related to the search process was deemed very important for all the grandchildren of the Missing interviewed. This group specifically requested the assistance of an experienced professional well-informed on the Missing issue, to help them prepare understand how to prepare for the longer-term emotional care of their family members.

“We are the ones who will support our families as the new generation. We need help to be prepared.” (Granddaughter of the Missing)
4.4 Economic and Administrative Needs

Twenty-nine percent (29%) of interviewees reported facing ongoing economic and / or administrative challenges as a result of the disappearance of their relative.

Out of all the families interviewed, 61% reported their missing relative was the essential breadwinner at the time of the disappearance. While many families talked about the pressing economic difficulties they had faced over the years, particularly immediately following the disappearance of the family’s essential breadwinner, some still cited financial difficulties as a source of ongoing stress.

While the economic consequences on the families of the Missing so many years since the disappearance of their loved one were difficult to establish, all families reported the disappearance had clear and important financial consequences today including the inability to find employment. A lack of employment opportunities was mentioned by 17% of those interviewed for this Assessment.

Families reported that to be occupied with work was an important element in avoiding thinking about the missing person. Having employment served a dual purpose of both occupying the families of the Missing as well as making them financially independent.

In the longer term, having a missing relative has meant a generally lower income for most of the families interviewed than the one they could have achieved had they not lost the essential breadwinner. Additionally, those families who lost an essential breadwinner to disappearance reported experiencing ongoing economic strain negatively impacting on their emotional wellbeing (see chart 10). Families who lost a main breadwinner but reported having enough economic support said this was so because they had secured employment to support themselves.

Chart 10: Emotional Wellbeing of Interviewees as a result of losing essential breadwinner

Female children of the Missing reported feeling particularly vulnerable because, when the family unit broke apart, their own financial vulnerability meant they were forced into making choices they would not have otherwise made had their father not gone missing.

“Our father received a salary from the government after our mother went missing, but he remarried and we never saw him again. He stopped looking after us so I got married very young to survive.” (Daughter of the Missing)
Some families also reported receiving certain benefits while others had not. Those who had not received benefits reported they had not known about them. The lack of a consistent approach to providing financial and in-kind support to families contributed to their feelings of financial insecurity, especially if they required medical treatment and/or as they entered old age. Again, in particular, mothers and female children of the Missing appeared to be the most vulnerable.

Administrative Needs

The majority of families did not have property or assets that were belonging to the missing person to manage, nor did families overall report experiencing issues related to accessing the missing person’s salary, pensions, social security or obtaining divorce/remarrying.

For those who did face issues, in general, most managed to solve them.

Some of the families of the Missing were unaware of what benefits they were entitled to and some expressed a need to be better informed by the relevant Authorities about their rights and entitlements as families of the Missing.

“When I visited the state healthcare, they asked me if I had a `missing person card` …I had no idea about it; first time I heard about it! They should have let me know about the existence of this card…or even, they should have sent it to me in the first place. They expected me to already know about it but I had no idea. How could I've known? Eventually, the Committee on Missing Persons' Relatives (association) issued the card for me. And now I am using it. For us, even five euros...does matter!” (Wife of the Missing)

Interviewees also expressed dismay at the lack of interest shown by the authorities in the general welfare of the female and elderly relatives of the Missing. They asked that more attention be given to their plight; to individually pay them a private visit to understand their welfare needs.

“No one asked how we were doing – from the authorities; no one came. No one said, ‘Do you need anything?’ It was never asked. You know how they say in the olden times, `we fried our own liver in our own oil’. It was like that; we got through it on our own.” (Daughter of the Missing)
5. Conclusion

The impact experienced by Cypriot families who were still searching for answers related to the fate and whereabouts of their missing relative was long-lasting and deep. The ongoing emotional distress created by the absence of their loved one and the associated psychological difficulties to cope with the uncertainty, is still strong despite more than five decades passing since the disappearance occurred. The families today continue to suffer emotionally and psychologically both privately at home and in their social environment, which shows the impossibility for the families to find any relief without the answers they seek.

Families included in this assessment strongly expressed a wish for an end to their suffering.

They wished for nothing more than to be able to close this painful chapter of their lives in a culturally acceptable and meaningful way, however painful that would be. This included a response about the fate and whereabouts of their missing relatives, and if they were dead, the recovery and identification of their loved ones’ remains and a proper burial in accordance with the wishes of each and every family.

Despite this, even with the recovery and return of the Missing to their families, many individuals affected by disappearance will continue to experience some psychological disturbance because they will never regain the lost decades following the disappearance of their family member, particularly given their experience of loss was never ‘normal’ or part of an anticipated pattern of human life and death. As one interviewee said, “The bones are not going to talk to me or hug me.”

This report has provided a summary of the situation as expressed by the families of missing persons themselves through a series of in-depth discussions with the ICRC. It is hoped this Assessment provides one means of sharing the families’ direct accounts of their most pressing associated needs and daily challenges. This report should be considered a tool to inform and assist all efforts that aim at responding to the families’ needs.

Until the time when families receive satisfactory information that allows them to come to terms with the disappearance of their loved ones, the convictions of the families with regard to their missing relative should be respected and taken into consideration when designing a response to their needs.
Based on the findings described in this report, the following recommendations have been developed to assist governmental and non-governmental actors, and national and international stakeholders to address the issue of missing persons and their families in Cyprus.

6.1 Main Recommendations Addressed to the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot Authorities

Much has been done to address the Missing issue in Cyprus, including the creation of the CMP and the recovery, identification and return of missing persons to their families. However, International Humanitarian Law casts a long-lasting obligation on each party to the conflict to take all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing as a result of armed conflict and other situations of violence, and to provide their family members with any information it has on their fate.15 Stemming from the interviews conducted with the families in this Assessment, the ICRC makes the following recommendations to the relevant Cypriot Authorities:

ADDRESS THE FAMILIES’ RIGHT TO KNOW BY CLARIFYING THE FATE OF REMAINING MISSING PERSONS
1. Take all possible measures to relieve the 748 Greek Cypriot families and the 186 Turkish Cypriot families (accounting for a total of 1072 missing Cypriot individuals)16 of their uncertainty and to fulfill their Right to Know. This includes clarifying the fate and whereabouts of those who have disappeared in relation to the events of 1963 – 1964 and 1974. To achieve this, the required support and funding should be provided to Committee on Missing Persons (CMP).

ADDRESS NEEDS FOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
2. Acknowledge – both publicly and privately – the multifaceted needs of the families of missing persons. This will help to increase general awareness of the personal, humanitarian plight of the families in the search for their missing relatives. To achieve this, authorities are advised to prepare a communication strategy that includes ways of acknowledging the plight of all families of the Missing, including those of civilian missing persons.

3. Consult with families of the Missing in the processes and programs affecting them, including forms of reparation such as the building of cemeteries, burials and memorials, to ensure these address the families’ needs and wishes.

PROVIDE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT
4. Recognise the importance of the provision of psychological and psychosocial support to family members. Facilitate access to psychological and psychosocial services through trained professionals at state institutions and/or other service providers. To achieve this, the concerned Administrations are advised to set up a taskforce that has the authority to instruct relevant departments to address these specific needs.

5. Provide psychosocial outreach support, whether as individual and/or group-based support, in all geographical locations where families with these needs live. Such a psychosocial program could be carried

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16 The cited number is valid as of 31.03.2019
out by local government structures, NGOs or other actors who are well-trained in the provision of psychosocial support and well-informed on the Missing Persons issue. In particular, children, siblings and grandchildren will benefit from discussions on issues of disappearance and strategies to cope with the needs of their elderly relatives.

6. Ensure those relatives of missing persons who present with severe psychological needs, including elderly parents, and the wives and husbands of missing persons, can access mental health services that are well-informed on the particularities on the needs of the families of the Missing.

**ADDRESS ECONOMIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE NEEDS**

7. Map (i.e., create a census) the economic and administrative needs of all Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot families of the Missing.

8. Provide information to the families of the Missing on different legal and administrative processes and their requirements, ensure families are aware of and access to the services and benefits to which they are entitled, and guarantee consistency and non-discrimination in the services and benefits provided.

9. Provide public guidance on the role and responsibility of each administrative party involved in the issue of missing persons.

**6.2 Recommendations Addressed to the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus (CMP)**

1. Create an outreach service for families still searching for their missing relatives in an individualised way. This communication will ensure these families are at the centre of the CMP’s humanitarian work and will support the families’ Right to Know.

2. Share information with the families of missing persons regards to the CMP’s investigative, search and identification processes. This communication will directly provide families with the information they seek.

3. As part of the CMP’s new Outreach Service, create a two-way feedback mechanism, including (1) the provision of regular updates to each family on the status of the search for a missing relative/s; and (2) receive any additional information provided by the family which could further assist in the resolution of missing cases and provide feedback on how this additional information was acted upon.

**6.3 Recommendations to Other Actors Relevant to the Missing Persons Issue**

1. Promote the clarification of persons who are still missing in Cyprus and provide the required financial support to the CMP to address the families’ Right to Know.

2. Together with the respective Authorities, coordinate the various responses to the multifaceted needs of the families of missing persons. This will ensure that all individuals are supported and all potential gaps in the response are coherently covered.
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CIL – Customary International Humanitarian Law
CMP – Committee on Missing Persons Cyprus
DASS – Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scales
FNA – Family Needs Assessment
GC – The four 1949 Geneva Conventions on the Protection of Victims of Armed Conflicts
ICPPED – International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance
ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross
IHL – International Humanitarian Law
IHRL – International Human Rights Law

KEY DEFINITIONS AND TERMS

Missing Person
A missing person is an individual of whom their families have no news and/or who, on the basis of reliable information, has been reported missing as a result of an armed conflict – international or non-international – or of other situations of violence or any other situation that might require action by a neutral and independent body.¹

The ICRC’s definition also includes those considered to be “forcibly disappeared,” as according to the ICPPED (2006). A broader description of missing persons is deliberately applied by the ICRC to ensure that all missing persons, including those not covered by the ICPPED, are included and that the families’ needs, including their right to know the fate and whereabouts of their missing relatives, are addressed.

Family of a Missing Person
Commonly family includes: children (born in and out of wedlock, adopted children or step-children); partners (lawfully wedded or unwedded); parents (including step-parents and adoptive parents); siblings (including half-siblings and adopted siblings). Nevertheless, in many sociocultural contexts, the family goes much beyond what is mentioned above and includes members who either live under the same roof or keep close relationships between themselves.²

Families’ Needs Assessment³
A Family Needs Assessment (FNA) is a process aimed at understanding what are the families’ specific difficulties, needs and expectations, what are the existing resources, means and coping mechanisms available to address the expressed needs and what are gaps between expressed needs and existing resources (provided services); with the aim to define an appropriate response.

Psychological
‘Psychological’ refers to individual thoughts and feelings, and to ways of perceiving the environment and analysing situations. ‘Psychological difficulties’ describes the suffering experienced by individuals while dealing with stressful situations. These difficulties can affect: behaviour, emotions, the ability to think or analyse or to memorise routine details, relations with others, and personal health (in the form of pain unrelated to physical ailments).

Psychosocial
This term highlights the relationship between individuals and their social environment. This is an essential relationship: changes in the social environment of individuals can affect their well-being and their ability to cope and vice versa.

Ambiguous Loss
This term refers to a loss that occurs without closure or understanding. It differs from ordinary loss as there is no verification of death or certainty that the person will come back or return to the way they used to be. Ambiguous Loss does not evolve from an individual’s psyche but is rather caused by an external event that perpetuates an individual’s stress and ambiguity. The impact of the disappearance of a relative bears certain resemblances to that of a traumatic event. However, these are two different experiences, each generating specific psychological reactions. A traumatic event is characterised by violence and a limitedness of duration, while the situation in which relatives of the Missing find themselves has no fixed time limit and the pain and stress they endure is continuous.

5 Above note 2.
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