

Internationally Linked, Missing Persons

When an individual chooses to go missing out of one's own accord, the data collection is contingent on whether that individual stays in the country or not. This record of account is identified when the data is collected by direct communication, typically with local services such as the police. However, the unstable variation of this data is when the individual in question becomes an international case. In the UK, missing persons' reports are held by localized police forces, where the data will be held for a maximum of 48 hours before that data can be released and made available on a national scale (GOV.UK Crime, justice and the law, Reporting crimes, 2023).

Interpol (International Criminal Police Organization) is a government organization who serves to help police forces within 195 of their country partners. They collaborate by enabling data access on crimes and criminals as well as offering 'a range of technical and operational support' (Interpol, 2023). Yet when people go missing abroad, their [potential] data is not readily available from international police forces until an associate, family member or friend has recognised they may be missing abroad and contact the correct local police forces or the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to decipher their whereabouts. A request is then made via the local police who will then contact the police force in the relevant country via Interpol.

Though the level of efficiency of data retrieval has propelled in recent decades, an international linked database of missing persons is lacking. It continues to be a global challenge. The key demand is for a structured international response to approaching the whereabouts of missing people ((1) IMCP International Commission on Missing Persons, 2023). National initiatives require improved cooperation within their self-governing political entities to improve legality frameworks and human rights to a higher, international scale. This still must fulfil the correct approaches for data protection and investigatory standards to formally acknowledge a missing person. The existence of this database remains nil due to safeguarding individual rights and to uphold the rule of law correctly in these fields.

In turn, this perception of data is crucial to numerous power structures such as local police forces, Interpol, governments, countries who abide by the Schengen agreement (border control), the National Crime Agency and operational response organizations, for example NATO (in approaches to finding victims of international disasters).

Justification for a data request of a missing person needs to be of high value. In the cases where there are no criminal offenses against a missing individual, it is difficult to trace them. Vulnerability (i.e. where you require routinely medication), or unstable mentality are reasons for them to be found quickly and efficiently, if the cost may be their life. Alternatively, there are those who do not want to not be found. A missing person could go missing for a 'good reason'. For example; escaping from abusive nature or domestic violence; those attempting immigration (do not want leaked information); those with criminal associations and have people subject to finding them.

A missing person's data is held locally on individual databases, in individual countries at a localized level. Unless the data isn't added to or retrieved by a police or civilian request, there is no existence of missing person's data held on a modern, single database at an international level that is readily accessible by police forces or government agencies. There is an unknown time frame upon which the police can access data from abroad, let alone successfully retrieve that data. Readily accessible, international missing persons data would achieve finding them quickly and efficiently so close relations know where they are. People go missing for all sorts of reasons. Are they at risk? Are they in danger? And if these answers are yes, then they need to be found to ensure their right to live. Yet generally speaking, 'the interests and welfare of the individual has priority over the rights and interests of society' ((2) IMCP International Commission on Missing Persons, 2023).

Bibliography

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4. (2) IMCP International Commission on Missing Persons (2023) *Data Protection*. Available at: <https://www.icmp.int/the-missing/approaches-and-standards/data-protection/> (Accessed: 21/01/23).