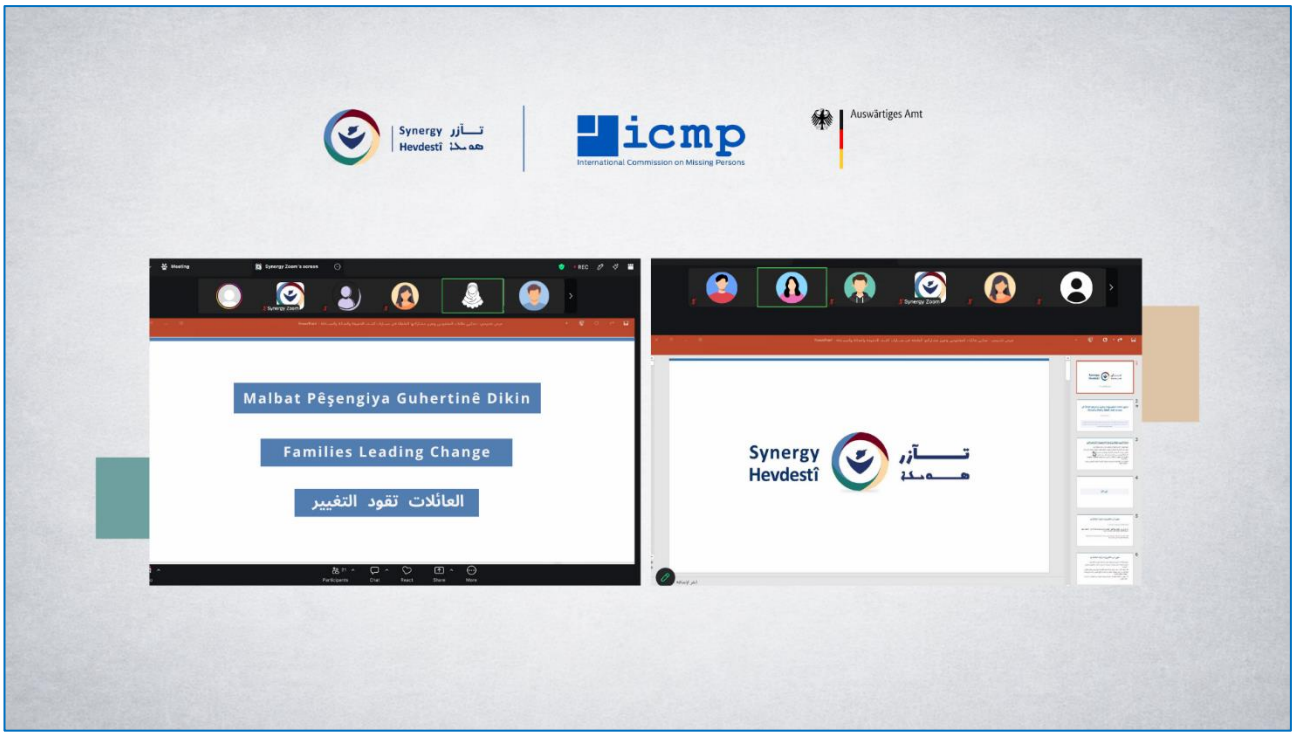


"The faces, names, and other information that could reveal the identities of participants have been obscured to respect their privacy, ensure the confidentiality of their participation, and uphold the principles of protection and do no harm."

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Strengthening the Participation of Families of Missing Persons in Germany and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in Truth and Justice Efforts in Syria

From 28 to 30 October 2026, the Synergy Association for Victims held an online training workshop entitled "Empowering Families of Missing Persons and Strengthening Their Meaningful Participation in Truth-Seeking, Justice and Accountability Processes in Syria." The workshop brought together 18 family members of missing and forcibly disappeared persons residing in Germany and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, including 11 women.

The three-day workshop was held online via Zoom to deepen participants' understanding of the rights of families of missing persons and the avenues available to them to claim those rights. It also aimed to strengthen their leadership, responsible representation, and advocacy skills, and enable them to play a more meaningful role in efforts to advance truth-seeking, justice, and accountability in Syria.

The training was structured around three main themes, with each day focusing on a different set of topics. The first day explored the rights of families of missing persons, the mechanisms available to claim those rights, and ways to engage with relevant institutions. The second day focused on meaningful participation, leadership, responsible representation, and advocacy skills. The final day addressed protection against fraud, exploitation, and extortion, the safeguarding of personal information, and the identification of shared priorities and development of proposals for advocacy initiatives.

The Rights of Families of Missing Persons and How to Claim Them

The first day focused on the fundamental rights of families of missing persons. These included the right to know the truth about the fate of their missing loved ones and the circumstances of their disappearance; the right to an effective official investigation; the right to seek, receive and share information; and the right to justice and reparations. The sessions also covered the rights to privacy and personal data protection, as well as the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

Participants were also introduced to the mandates of national and international institutions working on the issue of missing persons, including the National Commission for Missing Persons in Syria (NCMP), the Independent Institution on Missing Persons in Syria (IIMP), the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as well as the available channels for engaging with these institutions. Practical exercises focused on identifying families' needs, determining which institution was best placed to address them, preparing requests, and following up on them safely and with proper documentation.

Meaningful Participation, Leadership and Responsible Representation

The second day explored how families of missing persons can participate meaningfully in efforts to advance truth-seeking, justice and accountability. Discussions highlighted the difference between simply attending meetings and consultations and having a genuine role in setting priorities, developing proposals, and contributing to decisions and processes that affect families' rights.

The sessions examined different levels of participation, from keeping families informed about decisions and procedures, to consulting them and listening to their needs, and enabling them to contribute to the development of proposals and decision-making processes, in accordance with the mandates of relevant institutions and established procedures.

Participants also discussed the role of family associations and victims' groups in organizing collective efforts, identifying shared priorities, exchanging information and experiences, conveying families' demands to institutions, and following up on institutional responses. The training emphasized the importance of collective leadership and responsible representation, including clearly defining roles and the limits of delegated authority, and ensuring that families' demands are accurately represented while taking into account the diversity of their views and perspectives.

The workshop also provided a safe and supportive space for participants to share personal stories and experiences related to the loss of their loved ones, while respecting the privacy and confidentiality of families residing in Germany and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Strengthening Advocacy through the Participation of Families of Missing Persons

The training covered practical advocacy skills, including engaging with institutions and decision-makers, building coalitions, developing rights-based messages, and following up on institutional responses. Participants also discussed the common challenges facing families of missing persons and identified their shared priorities.

The sessions provided an opportunity to exchange experiences from advocacy campaigns involving families of missing persons, with a focus on the challenges encountered and successes achieved through their involvement at different stages of the campaigns, from planning and implementation to follow-up. The Synergy Association for Victims also shared its experience in leading field-based, digital, and joint advocacy campaigns, highlighting the role of victims and families of missing persons in shaping, carrying out, and following up on these initiatives.

Protection against Fraud, Exploitation and Extortion, and Safeguarding Personal Information

The third day focused on the risks of fraud, exploitation, and extortion faced by families of missing persons, particularly in light of their urgent need to establish the fate of their loved ones and obtain reliable information about them.

The training explored warning signs that families should be alert to, including claims of being able to reveal the fate of missing persons in exchange for money, requests for sensitive documents or information without a clear explanation of their intended use, and pressure on families to make decisions hastily. Participants also discussed ways to verify the identities and credibility of individuals and organizations, seek advice from trusted sources, and avoid exposing families to further risks.

The sessions also addressed privacy, information protection, and digital safety. Topics included the secure handling of personal documents and data, determining who is authorized to access them, verifying the identity of those requesting information, and obtaining appropriate consent before taking photographs, making recordings, or publishing materials.

Participants also shared their experiences of extortion attempts and false promises to disclose the fate of their loved ones, discussing the psychological harm and additional distress such practices cause families.

From Shared Priorities to Advocacy Initiatives

The workshop concluded with practical, participatory sessions focused on identifying shared challenges and priorities and developing initial proposals for advocacy initiatives. Participants worked together to identify problems, set objectives and determine target audiences, formulate advocacy messages, propose activities and practical steps, and assign responsibilities. They also considered potential risks, safeguarding measures, indicators of success, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

The discussions and proposals generated during these sessions will inform the development of a family-led priorities agenda and a one-year advocacy action plan, which will be developed as part of the project's subsequent activities.

The workshop was held as part of the *Families Leading Change* project, implemented by the Synergy Association for Victims. The project aims to strengthen the leadership capacities and meaningful participation of Syrian families of missing and forcibly disappeared persons living in Germany and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. It seeks to equip family representatives with the knowledge and skills needed to advance their rights, engage in advocacy, and participate meaningfully in relevant processes, while supporting them in developing a priorities agenda and a one-year advocacy action plan.

Through this project, Synergy aims to strengthen families' role in setting their own priorities, articulating their demands, and contributing to efforts and decision-making processes that affect their rights and needs.