

EULEX'S WORK ON MISSING PERSONS

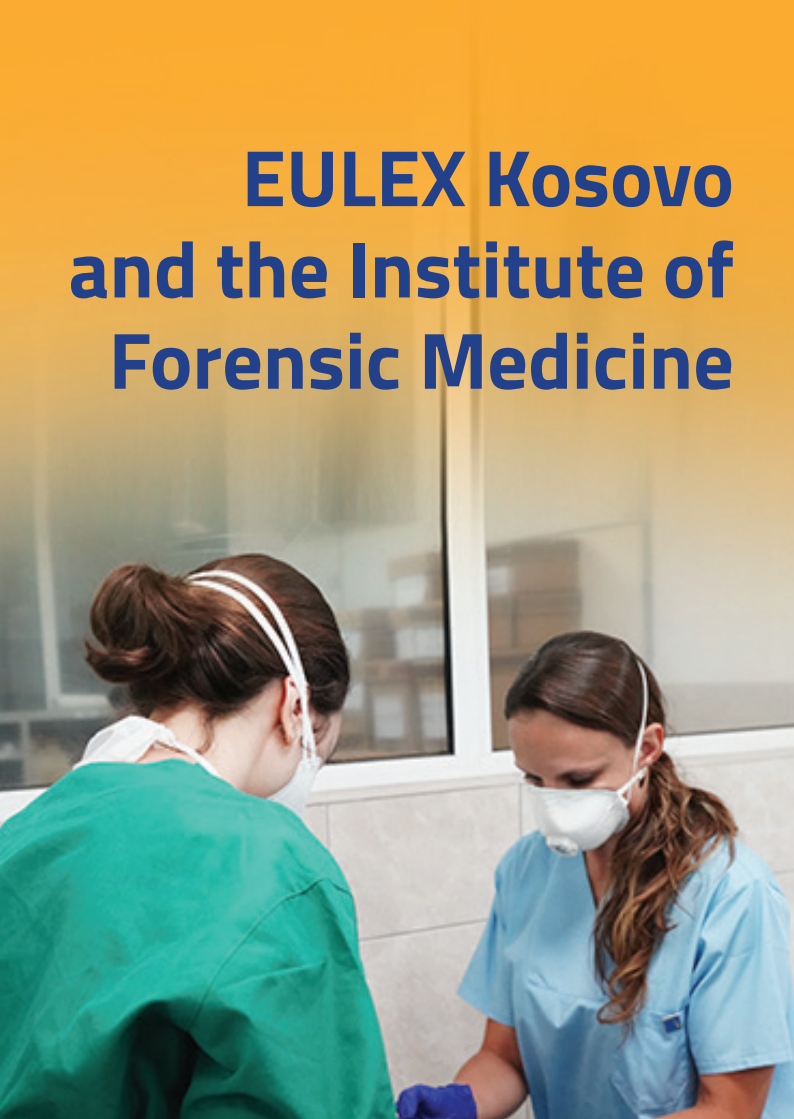


EULEX Kosovo and the Institute of Forensic Medicine

As of 14 June 2024, there are still over 1600 missing persons related to the Kosovo conflict; their families have the right to know the truth.

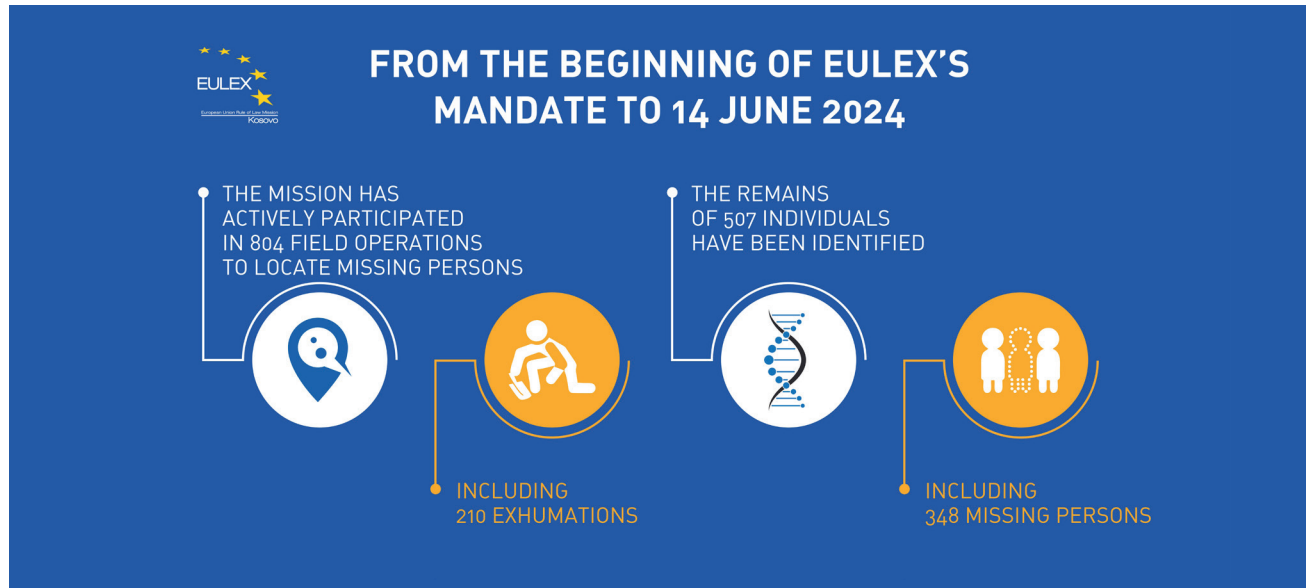
EULEX forensic experts work shoulder to shoulder with their local counterparts at the Institute of Forensic Medicine (IFM) and other relevant Kosovo institutions to **shed light on the fate of missing persons** regardless of the circumstances of their disappearance, their ethnic, religious or national origin or any other characteristics.

The Mission's role is to help Kosovo institutions provide answers to the missing persons' families and loved ones, and realize their **right to know the truth**.



Shedding light on the fate of missing persons is a continuing obligation. Since the beginning of its mandate to date, EULEX has been working relentlessly to locate and return the remains of missing persons to their families so that they can be buried with respect and dignity.

- EULEX offers expertise and advice in the **identification of clandestine or unmarked graves and the exhumation and identification of victims** who were reported missing during the period 1 January 1998 – 31 December 2000 as a consequence of the war in Kosovo during 1998-1999.
- The Mission also supports the IFM in **reviewing the unidentified remains at the Pristina morgue.**





The work done so far

Following the Kosovo conflict, international and local forensic experts found a significant number of human remains in the following locations in Kosovo and in Serbia:

| LOCATION | NUMBER OF BODIES EXHUMED |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ● Brekoc/Brekovac | 121 |
| ● Çikatovë e Vjetër / Staro Čikatovo | 112 |
| ● Rakosh/Rakoš | 97 |
| ● Qirez/ Ćirez | 96 |
| ● Studime e Epërme / Gornja Sudimlja | 93 |
| ● Korishë/ Koriša | 72 |
| ● Suhodoll i Poshtëm/Donji Suvi Do | 70 |
| ● Çikatovë e Vjetër (1) /Staro Čikatovo (1) | 68 |
| ● Makoc/Makovac | 63 |
| ● Suhodoll/ Suvi Do | 61 |
| ● Krushë e Madhe/ Velika Kruša | 58 |
| ● Rudnica | 54 |
| ● Suharekë/Suva Reka | 54 |
| ● Çikatovë e Vjetër (2)/ Staro Čikatovo (2) | 50 |
| ● Kiževak ¹ | 7 |

¹ Kiževak explained: EULEX experts describe how they identified the exact location where the human remains were discovered - EULEX Press Releases - EULEX - European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (eulex-kosovo.eu)

The challenges

One of the main challenges encountered by forensic experts in the process of establishing the fate of Kosovo's missing persons is the fact that a considerable number were **deliberately buried by perpetrators in small, clandestine graves**, some of them even in cemeteries to make the search for missing people more difficult and hide evidence of their crimes.²



² [“Hiding the body of a missing person in a cemetery is like hiding a book in a library. It is that hard to find.” – EULEX experts on the challenges in locating missing persons buried in cemeteries - EULEX Press Releases - EULEX - European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo \(eulex-kosovo.eu\)](#)

Overview of the number of bodies exhumed in four cemeteries

| CEMETERY | NUMBER OF BODIES EXHUMED |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ● Arbëria/Dragodan Orthodox cemetery (Pristina) | 81 |
| ● Prizren cemetery | 77 |
| ● Shiroko /Široko cemetery | 59 |
| ● Arbëria/Dragodan Muslim cemetery (Pristina) | 49 |





In addition to the aforementioned challenges encountered by forensic experts in the process of shedding light on the fate of missing persons, there are also additional major challenges such as:

- The **lack of new and credible information** on the location of graves;
- The fact that not all missing persons' families have given **blood samples** for DNA analysis;
- The **limitations of DNA analysis in the early years**. Firstly, DNA analysis was not readily available in the first few years after the conflict in Kosovo. Additionally, the advancements in DNA technology over the years might allow for new results that were not attainable in the past, which might lead to a new identification;
- The issue of **misidentifications**. In the aftermath of the war, bodies were identified in a summary way, for example through pictures or clothes, resulting in mistakes which are difficult to trace and rectify today.



Review of the remains at the Pristina mortuary

EULEX experts work together with the Kosovo authorities to review the remains at the Pristina mortuary.

The ongoing review of the cases in IFM's morgue is **coordinated by a working group led by the forensic experts of the IFM.**

The process has two main objectives:

- to review each set of remains;
- to review the respective case files.

The strategic approach to review simultaneously the remains and the respective case files will allow the IFM to assess if all information available to date on each case has been considered and, for example, whether new sampling for DNA analysis is required or possible.

At the start of EULEX's mandate, one of the greatest challenges and priorities was to address the remains which had been found and accumulated for almost 10 years and that were at the IFM morgue in various states. During the first few years of the Mission, an extensive work of inventorying those remains was done and, where they existed, leads were followed that resulted in the identification of several cases. A large majority, however, were indeed very challenging cases and despite all efforts they remain unidentified until today.



With the current review process, the reconstruction of history of each case and all the information that can be gathered from newly accessed archives on the associated event and groups of persons who went missing together will be once again considered and hopefully new leads can be found and resolved.

By reviewing all human remains stored in the morgue as well as the associated case files, it will be possible to determine the updated status of all cases, especially conflict-related cases of forensic interest, but also cases of forensic interest which are not related to the conflict, and cases of no forensic interest.

The families of missing persons can help the work of IFM by donating blood reference samples if they have not done so, and by coming forward with information related to the missing person or the event of a disappearance. Families can also reach out for any clarifications or requests for information.


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