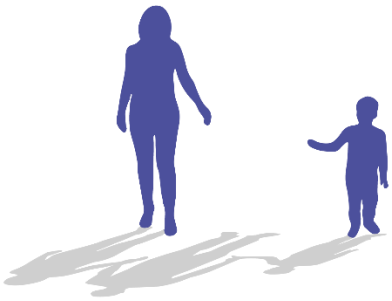


الهيئة الوطنية للمفقودين والمخفيين قسراً في لبنان
National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared — Lebanon
الجمهورية اللبنانية

National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared- Lebanon

Strategic and Operational Framework (2025–2030)

Executive Summary

More than 17,000 persons remain missing or forcibly disappeared in Lebanon, leaving thousands of families in a state of prolonged uncertainty and perpetuating a legacy of unaddressed injustice. For decades, families have demanded a fundamental right - the right to know - while the State's response remained fragmented, politically sensitive, and operationally limited.

The National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared, established as the central national mechanism under Law 105/2018, is mandated to address this issue. Between 2020 and 2025, the Commission laid its institutional and technical foundations: internal and organizational frameworks, data protection systems, burial site mapping, and initial partnerships with national and international bodies. These efforts strengthened institutional readiness, but have yet to translate into tangible results for families.

The Strategic and Operational Framework 2025-2030 marks a decisive shift - from institution-building to implementation and the delivery of results. It charts a phased, goal-oriented path toward outcomes, anchored in eight interconnected priorities:

- Data unification and documentation
- Investigations and forensic procedures
- Family engagement and support
- Partnerships and access to information
- Public communication and awareness
- Institutional sustainability
- Legal and policy reform
- Memory and recognition

By 2030, the Commission aims to establish a unified national data system, document and verify a significant proportion of cases, complete a national registry of burial sites, and commence pilot exhumation operations in accordance with international standards. Families will be recognized as active partners, benefiting from structured mechanisms for participation, legal support, and psychosocial assistance.

These priorities are supported by a phased implementation roadmap (2025–2030), a monitoring and evaluation framework, and a financial plan requiring approximately $3.4 million over five years. The Commission will operate in a context of political, economic, and security instability, relying on a phased and adaptive approach that allows it to respond to new developments while maintaining continuity of core functions.

Ultimately, this framework charts a credible and reliable path toward fulfilling the right to know and ensuring recognition for families. Its success depends on sustained political will, predictable funding, effective collaboration with national and international partners, and genuine family participation.

1. Context, Rationale, and Achievements to Date

Lebanon continues to carry the unaddressed legacy of the Civil War (1975–1990) and subsequent conflicts. More than 17,000 persons remain missing or forcibly disappeared. Information on these cases is scattered across institutions, ministries, civil society organizations, and in some instances, political actors, making access and investigation difficult. Many potential burial sites are located in sensitive areas.

Despite years of advocacy by families and civil society, the State's response has remained structurally fragmented. This issue persists as a long-term national challenge - one that erodes trust in public institutions, prolongs trauma, and impedes reconciliation.

Law 105/2018 established the National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared as the central mechanism for addressing this issue, with a mandate encompassing data unification, investigations, exhumation operations, family engagement, and coordination with national and international bodies.

Between 2020 and 2025, the Commission established its institutional foundations: an internal and organizational framework, data protection systems, and the legal and procedural basis for exhumation operations. It began mapping burial sites - including in sensitive areas such as Mdoukha and Arsal - and engaged in partnerships with key bodies, notably the International Committee of the Red Cross, the UN Development Programme, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), and UN reporting mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

These steps contributed to building the Commission's credibility and technical readiness. The current phase requires a decisive transition - from institution-building to implementation - with focus on operational outcomes, unified data, the strengthening of national capacity, and tangible progress toward clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing persons and ensuring recognition for families.

2. Key Gaps and Challenges

Despite progress between 2020 and 2025, the Commission continues to face structurally interconnected constraints. Addressing these gaps is essential to transitioning from institutional readiness to effective implementation.

2.1 Data Fragmentation and Absence of a Unified National System

No unified national data management system has yet been established. Information remains scattered across ministries, non-governmental organizations, international bodies, and in some instances, political actors, impeding case verification, cross-referencing, and the building of a comprehensive national registry.

2.2 Limited Access to Archives and Information

The Commission faces ongoing challenges in accessing existing databases and archives, stemming from institutional reluctance on the part of some government entities, the politically sensitive nature of certain information, and international partner requirements to verify the existence of robust data protection infrastructure before transferring data. Without addressing the technical and policy dimensions of this issue, data unification will remain incomplete.

2.3 Weak Operational Capacity

The Commission's specialized units - investigations, forensic operations, data management, and family support - have yet to be fully staffed and funded. Available resources cover only a portion of the required personnel, constraining sustainable operational deployment.

2.4 Forensic Capacity Gap

Lebanon suffers from a shortage of qualified forensic experts capable of supporting exhumation and identification operations. This affects the pace of operations and compliance with technical standards,

and perpetuates reliance on international expertise. The Commission will advocate for the establishment and maintenance of a national forensic team, and will pursue training partnerships to build practical skills and professional accreditation pathways in key specializations - including Disaster Victim Identification (DVI), osteology, forensic legal medicine, and genetic identification. A national registry of certified forensic experts will be developed, with DNA analysis referral pathways established with accredited national and international laboratories. The goal is to have no fewer than 15 forensically certified and deployable experts at the national level by 2030.

2.5 Infrastructure Constraints

The absence of a permanent, secure headquarters affects the Commission's institutional stability, public visibility, and operational efficiency. Secure infrastructure is also required to support sensitive data systems and specialized functions.

2.6 Financial Fragility and Sustainability Risks

The Commission faces acute financial constraints: irregular and inconsistent government contributions and excessive dependence on external donor funding. Available resources remain below the level required to fully activate the mandate, leaving implementation variable and exposed to risk.

2.7 Political and Security Constraints

Many potential burial sites are in areas with political or military sensitivity, including privately owned or contested locations. Field operations require precise risk assessment, careful coordination, and trust-building, which may delay or limit access.

2.8 Limited Family Engagement and Support Mechanisms

Although families lie at the heart of the mandate, their methodological participation mechanisms remain incomplete. Access to legal and psychosocial support remains limited, and structured participation platforms have not yet been established.

2.9 Political Instability and External Constraints

The Commission operates in a context of recurring political, economic, and security instability. These factors directly affect institutional capacity, access to information, resource availability, and the execution of field operations. The Commission is likely to continue operating in a volatile environment, including exposure to financial pressures, political ambiguity, and security risks including regional tensions. This context underscores the importance of adopting a phased and resilient approach that allows the Commission to adapt to changing circumstances while maintaining continuity of its core functions.

3. Strategic Vision (2030)

By 2030, the National Commission for the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared seeks to achieve tangible progress in determining the fate of the missing, while consolidating the right to knowledge within Lebanon's institutional and social framework. The Commission's vision centers on transitioning from institution-building to the delivery of results - operational, nationally owned, and sustainable over the long term - addressing the issue of the missing as a public responsibility: ensuring that families receive answers.

This vision reflects a shift from building systems to achieving impact. By the end of the strategy period:

- A fully operational national data system will be established, enabling the unification, verification, and analysis of information from multiple sources.
- A significant proportion of cases will be documented, verified, and cross-referenced, providing families with clearer pathways toward fulfilling their right to know and achieving recognition.
- A national registry of burial sites will be completed, and pilot exhumation operations will be carried out in accordance with international standards, with forensic, legal, and psychosocial safeguards.
- Families will be recognized as active partners in this process, benefiting from structured mechanisms for participation, consultation, and access to legal and psychosocial support.
- The Commission will be institutionally stable and operationally sound, with strengthened legal frameworks, intensified cooperation with relevant bodies, and the integration of the right to knowledge into national policies, public discourse, and educational practices.

The Commission's theory of change flows from a clear logic: unifying scattered data into an integrated system enables case verification; verification enables investigations; investigations, conducted with families at their center, enable forensic operations; and forensic operations, when accessible, enable the fulfilment of the right to know and recognition for families**.** Each priority in this strategy reinforces this chain, and no single priority can substitute for another.

4. Strategic Priorities (2025–2030)

To achieve its 2030 vision, the Commission will focus on eight interconnected strategic priorities. These priorities are designed to address existing gaps and enable the phased transition from data unification to operational outcomes and institutional sustainability.

Priority 1: National Data System and Documentation

Establishing a secure, unified national data management system constitutes the cornerstone of the Commission's work. By early 2026, the Commission will launch a centralized system for managing data, enabling the unification, verification, and protection of information. This will be accompanied by a nationally comprehensive family data collection effort and the gradual integration of existing archives through formal agreements with relevant entities.

Specialized documentation functions will be established to ensure cases are recorded systematically, data is verified, and cross-referencing is conducted. In parallel, the Commission will develop and maintain a national registry of burial sites, including mass graves.

Priority 2: Investigations and Forensic Operations

The Commission will strengthen its investigative and forensic capacities to advance case processing. This includes conducting feasibility studies for priority sites, establishing a national registry of burial sites by 2027, and implementing pilot exhumation operations between 2027 and 2030. The Commission will develop its operational capacity for identification and family communication.

It will also build national forensic expertise through: creating a registry of certified forensic experts and developing training and accreditation pathways in partnership with universities and international bodies in specializations including DVI, osteology, forensic legal medicine, and genetic identification; establishing DNA analysis referral pathways with accredited national and international laboratories; and contributing to the institutional development of the national forensic medicine infrastructure (National Forensic Medicine Institute). The goal is to have no fewer than 15 forensically certified and nationally deployable experts by 2030.

Priority 3: Family Engagement and Support

Families will be placed at the heart of this process as active participants and rights-holders. The Commission will establish a specialized Family Support Unit to provide legal and psychosocial assistance - including support for legal documentation such as death certificates, inheritance settlement, and administrative papers. Family forums will be institutionalized at both national and regional levels, with a minimum of two forums annually, to ensure genuine participation in decision-making.

A multi-channel feedback mechanism will be established - including a hotline, email address, and secure digital form - enabling families to submit inquiries, information, and complaints confidentially and safely. A separate anonymous hotline for reporting the missing and forcibly disappeared will be operated. Regional access points will be established offering facilitated, secure communication, enabling families in all regions to submit requests and contribute to documentation processes.

Coordination channels with bar associations and civil society organizations will be established, targeting a satisfaction rate of no less than 70% among families regarding participation mechanisms by 2029.

Priority 4: Partnerships and Access to Information

Access to information will be broadened through formalizing cooperation with key relevant entities, including ministries, public institutions, security and judicial bodies, civil society organizations, and international partners. These partnerships will be essential for archive unification, facilitating investigations, and ensuring access to burial sites.

The Commission will also pursue cross-border and regional cooperation mechanisms, specifically including the Independent Institution for the Missing in Syria and the Syrian National Commission for the Missing, the National Commission for the Missing in the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as other bodies with expertise in cases of persons who disappeared in Syria, to support information exchange and case clarification.

Priority 5: Public Communication and Awareness

A proactive communication strategy will be implemented based on the principles of transparency, clarity, and public participation. This includes national awareness campaigns, bilingual annual reports, and sustained efforts to promote the right to knowledge as a public and institutional priority. The Commission will develop digital communication platforms, produce accessible media materials, and conduct outreach activities across various regions.

These efforts will also contribute to raising awareness of the phenomenon of enforced disappearance and its consequences, in support of the broader efforts to prevent recurrence and promote respect for fundamental rights.

Priority 6: Institutional Sustainability

Ensuring the Commission's long-term continuity is of paramount importance. By 2026, the Commission will secure a permanent headquarters and activate its specialized units - data, investigations, forensic operations, and family support - with clear definition of roles and operational responsibilities. Efforts will also focus on strengthening administrative and financial management systems, clarifying internal procedures, and incorporating a dedicated budget line within the government budget to gradually reduce dependence on external funding.

Priority 7: Legal and Policy Reform

The Commission will contribute to strengthening the national legal framework to address the phenomenon of enforced disappearance. This includes advocating for Lebanon's ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED),

supporting the development of a comprehensive reparations framework, and incentivizing legal and regulatory reforms to strengthen protection from enforced disappearance.

Priority 8: Memory and Recognition

The Commission will support national and local initiatives aimed at recognizing the suffering of victims and families. This includes contributing to the establishment of a national memorial for the missing by 2030, encouraging local commemoration initiatives, and supporting the integration of the issue of the missing into educational frameworks and public discourse.

The Commission will also contribute to awareness campaigns aimed at preventing the crime of enforced disappearance - including advocating for legislative protections and participating in transitional justice frameworks that address the root causes of disappearance.

5. Implementation Roadmap

The Commission's framework will be implemented through a phased approach (2025–2030), ensuring the gradual transition from institutional consolidation to operational implementation and measurable results.

2025 - Transition Phase

The first phase will focus on aligning institutional readiness with strategic direction. Key actions include formal adoption of the strategy, targeted resource mobilization, and capacity and needs assessments. This phase will also include continued consultation with families, partners, and stakeholders, reinforcing commitment, and laying the groundwork for structured participation and communication mechanisms.

2026 - Foundation Year

Year 2026 represents the operational foundation of the strategy. The Commission will launch the national data system and commence family data collection at national scale. On the institutional front, efforts will focus on securing a permanent headquarters, strengthening core staff, and establishing a functional working environment. The Commission will also formalize Memoranda of Understanding to facilitate access to data and archives, begin building capacity in the forensic and investigative fields, and launch its public communication strategy.

2027 - Consolidation Phase

By 2027, the Commission will move toward consolidating its core functions. This includes completing the national registry of burial sites, expanding units and strengthening them, and drafting a policy paper on reparations. Efforts will also focus on strengthening operational readiness for field activities, including preparatory steps for exhumation operations.

2028–2030 - Results Phase

The final phase will focus on achieving tangible outputs. The Commission will conduct pilot exhumation operations, expand data verification and case documentation, and strengthen memory initiatives at national and local levels. Simultaneously, efforts will intensify to advance legal and policy reforms, expand cooperation mechanisms, and contribute to long-term non-recurrence guarantees.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

A structured monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework will ensure accountability, transparency, and adaptive implementation throughout the strategy period.

The Commission will adopt annual operational plans aligned with its strategic priorities, supported by a set of measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), covering progress in data unification, partnerships, field operations, and family engagement.

An independent mid-term evaluation will be conducted in 2027 to measure performance, identify challenges, and extract necessary adjustments. A final evaluation in 2030 will assess the overall impact of the strategy, including progress in case documentation, operational outcomes, and institutional development.

7. Financial Framework

Implementing the Commission's strategy for the period 2025–2030 requires predictable and sustainable financial resources to ensure the transition from institutional establishment to actual implementation.

Estimated Requirements

The total estimated implementation cost is $3.4 million over the 2025–2030 period, at an average annual rate of $680,000. This is consistent with projections indicating that the full operational cost of the Commission is approximately $800,000 per year.

These resources are directed to support: establishing and maintaining the national data system; activating investigative and forensic activities; providing family support services; and institutional strengthening, including staff, infrastructure, and communications.

Confirmed Funding

To date, the Commission has received the following initial contributions:

- $250,000 from the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), implemented through the UN Development Programme (UNDP)
- 14 billion Lebanese Liras allocated by the Lebanese Government for 2026
- $31,800 from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)
- $25,000 from the Ghazal Foundation

These contributions allow for a degree of initial institutional development, but remain below the level needed to support full implementation.

Funding Gap

A significant funding gap of approximately $3 million remains to be secured. Closing this gap is a vital priority to activate core activities, including data unification and field operations, ensure the continuity and scalability of interventions, and reduce delays in delivering results to families.

Resource Mobilization Approach

To address this gap, the Commission will pursue a diversified funding strategy, including: continued engagement with international donors, advocacy to increase government allocations in the national budget, and consideration of additional funding mechanisms to support sustainability. Securing adequate

and sustainable funding is an indispensable necessity to enable the Commission's transition from institutional readiness to full implementation.

Conclusion

The issue of the missing and forcibly disappeared is not merely a legacy of the past - it remains to this day an ongoing injustice experienced by thousands of families in Lebanon.

This Framework charts a credible, reliable, and goal-oriented path toward results - toward the right to know, recognition, and institutional reform. It directly addresses the shortcomings of the 2020–2025 phase and holds the Commission to a new standard: actual implementation, not merely institutional readiness.

The Commission calls on all stakeholders - Lebanese authorities, international partners, civil society, and donors - to honor their commitments. The families have waited long enough. The legal framework is in place. The institutional foundations have been laid. What is needed is the political will to fund this work, take responsibility for it, and the collective determination to close one of Lebanon's most painful and unresolved chapters.

The Commission is ready for action. It asks its partners to stand alongside it.