MEDIA ADVISORY

Kyiv roundtable to examine how DNA can help reconnect forcibly transferred Ukrainian children with their families

Public press briefing: **Wednesday, 28 October 2026 | 16:00-17:00 Kyiv time**
Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute, Kyiv, Ukraine
In-person attendance only; no remote access

DNA Bridge (www.dnabridge.org) will convene Ukrainian and international participants for a roundtable on DNA-supported family reunification for forcibly transferred Ukrainian children. A public press briefing will follow the day's discussions.

Event:	DNA Bridge International Roundtable: DNA-Supported Family Reunification for Forcibly Transferred Ukrainian Children - Current Practice and Future Directions
Convened by:	DNA Bridge
Hosted by:	Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute
In partnership with:	International Science and Technology University University of California Berkeley Human Rights Center International Commission on Missing Persons Yale School of Public Health Humanitarian Research Lab

The roundtable will examine current practice, operational challenges, and future approaches to using DNA to reconnect families, help people recover lost family and cultural connections, and support documentation of human rights violations.

The discussion will emphasize three messages:

- **Every child matters**. Regardless of the number of children taken to Russia, each Ukrainian child's separation deserves attention and a sustained effort to reconnect them with their family and homeland.
- **DNA has a role beyond identifying the deceased**. DNA can help living people find relatives, recover family histories, and establish relationships relevant to human rights investigations.
- **Separation may last decades**. Preparation today must support children who may only be able to search for their families as adults.

Contact: Please feel free to contact one of us with information or questions:

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ADVANCE NEWS RELEASE

Every child matters: Kyiv roundtable to examine DNA's role in reconnecting Ukrainian families
The 28 October 2026 gathering will consider family reunification, recovery of family identity, and documentation of human rights violations.

KYIV, Ukraine — DNA Bridge will convene a roundtable at Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute on 28 October 2026 to examine how DNA can support the reunification of forcibly transferred Ukrainian children with their families and communities.

The meeting will bring together Ukrainian and international participants to discuss current practices, institutional coordination, and the foundations needed for searches that may continue for decades.

At the center of the event is a simple principle: every child matters. Whether a search concerns 100 children, 1,000, or 10,000, the importance of finding a child and restoring their family connections does not depend on the total number affected.

DNA is widely associated with identifying human remains and investigating deaths. It can also help living people reconnect with relatives when names have changed, records are missing, or children are too young to remember their origins. Establishing biological relationships can provide a starting point for recovering family histories and cultural connections and can contribute evidence to investigations of unlawful separation.

The roundtable will consider three connected uses of DNA:

- **Reconnecting family members:** assessing possible relationships and helping identify relatives when a person's family is unknown.
- **Helping people reclaim lost cultural identity:** reconnecting people with relatives and family histories that can help them understand their origins.
- **Documenting human rights violations:** establishing relationships that, together with records and testimony, can help document family separation and disrupted identities.

DNA results must be interpreted alongside other evidence. They do not determine a person's cultural identity or, by themselves, establish how a separation occurred.

The meeting will also address the long-term nature of this work. Some children may remain separated into adulthood. Preserving family information, maintaining secure and usable records, and creating trusted pathways for voluntary participation can help keep future reunification possible.

Discussions will cover current approaches and operational constraints, followed by future opportunities, governance, international collaboration, and sustainable support for families.

A public press briefing will take place at Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute from **16:00-17:00, Kyiv time, on Wednesday, 28 October 2026**. Attendance is in-person only.

The roundtable is convened by DNA Bridge, hosted by Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute, and held in partnership with International Science and Technology University, the International Commission on Missing Persons, the University of California, Berkeley Human Rights Center, and the Yale School of Public Health Humanitarian Research Lab.

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MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

Ukrainian children, family separation, and the role of DNA

The DNA Bridge International Roundtable examines how DNA can support the identification and family reunification of Ukrainian children subjected to unlawful deportation or forcible transfer. Every child matters, regardless of their age at abduction or the total number taken.

Thousands have been deported to Russia or transferred within Russian-occupied Ukraine. The UN Commission of Inquiry has documented placement in institutions and families, Russian citizenship, and inclusion in adoption databases. Families face substantial barriers to locating children and securing their return. UN Commission findings, March 2026.

Separation can sever family relationships and access to names, language, history, and community. Children taken young—or without living close relatives—may grow up unaware of their heritage or whom to turn to for help.

Understanding the numbers

Yale School of Public Health's Humanitarian Research Lab describes tracking **more than 35,000 children taken from Ukraine** to Russia and Russian-occupied territory. Its September 2025 report identified **at least 210 facilities**, documenting re-education at approximately **63 percent** and militarization at **at least 18 percent**. These percentages describe facilities, not children. Yale Humanitarian Research Lab, October 2026.

The findings document infrastructure used to move children and disrupt family and cultural connections; they do not establish how many remain in Russian custody.

In March 2026, the UN Commission reported verified deportations or transfers involving **more than 1,200 children**, **80 percent of whom had not been returned**. It concluded that Russian authorities' deportation, forcible transfer, and enforced disappearance of children constituted crimes against humanity. These figures cover documented cases, not all affected children. UN Commission findings, March 2026.

Organizations use different definitions and verification methods, so Yale's and the UN's figures should not be added together. Cross-border deportations, transfers within occupied territory, and movement with accompanying family members are distinct categories.

Uncertainty about totals does not diminish the importance of finding each child, preserving opportunities for family reconnection, and documenting human rights violations.

Why preparations must extend beyond the present

Abduction is one of the six grave violations against children in armed conflict identified by the United Nations. The harm extends beyond physical separation: children may lose access to their families, identities, and cultural heritage, while relatives are denied information about their whereabouts.

Human rights documentation is therefore central to this work. Preserving evidence of a child's identity, family relationships, and circumstances of separation can support their search for truth and efforts to hold those responsible accountable. DNA can help establish relationships that have been concealed or denied. Together with testimony and records, it can contribute to documenting violations, even when reunification is not yet possible.

Some children may remain separated for years or decades. They may only gain the information or independence needed to search for their origins as adults. During that time, relatives may move or die, records may disappear, and names may change.

Preserving family histories, reliable records, and appropriately collected DNA reference samples today can help keep future reunification possible. The work requires sustained support beyond a single return, investigation, or funding cycle.

How DNA can help

DNA is biological information inherited from our parents. Because relatives share patterns in their DNA, comparing samples can help establish relationships. Samples can be collected via a swab inside the cheek.

For children and adults separated from their families, DNA can serve three connected purposes:

- **Reconnect family members.** Testing can assess a suspected relationship or help find relatives when a person's family is unknown. Close or more distant relatives may provide leads that other tracing methods cannot resolve.
- **Support the reclamation of lost cultural identity.** Finding relatives can open a path to recovering original names, family histories, languages, and cultural connections. DNA helps establish relationships; it does not itself determine culture, nationality, or belonging.
- **Help document human rights violations.** Genetic evidence can corroborate relationships that were broken, concealed, or denied. Combined with records and testimony, it can support investigations into unlawful separation and falsification of identity.

DNA is one part of a broader process. It does not independently establish the circumstances of a child's removal or determine custody, placement, or the appropriate form of family contact.

Ukraine's wider missing-person context

The search for children is part of Ukraine's broader effort to find missing people and identify the deceased.

In August 2026, Ukraine's National Police reported approximately **114,000 missing civilians and military personnel** and **17,000 unidentified bodies**, according to KURS. These are not counts of abducted children and may overlap, so should not be added together. Missing people may be alive, detained, displaced, or deceased. Ukraine National Police, August 2026.

The International Commission on Missing Persons supports Ukrainian institutions with DNA testing, forensic training, case management, and secure information systems. It also collects information and reference samples from Ukrainian families abroad to support cross-border investigations. ICMP Ukraine program fact sheet, January 2026.

Applying these capabilities to living children requires long-term family tracing, voluntary participation, child protection, and preparation for searches that may continue into adulthood.

Questions journalists may ask

Does every reunification require DNA?
No. Records, photographs, testimony, and family tracing can resolve many cases. DNA is particularly useful when information is missing, identities have changed, or a biological relationship needs clarification.

What if no match is found?
The relevant relative may not have participated, or the test may not detect the relationship. No match does not establish that relatives are absent or deceased.

How should families' information be protected?
Families need clear explanations of what testing can reveal, who can access their information, and how it will be used and retained. Participation should involve informed consent and appropriate safeguards for children. Any use in human rights investigations should be clearly explained.

Interview contacts

Interview requests may be directed to Sara Huston (English, sara@dnabridge.org) or Stan Kukhtyk (Ukrainian, stan.kukhtyk@istu.edu.ua).