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DNA, or deoxyribonucleic acid, is genetic material contained in virtually every cell of the body. While the majority of DNA is identical from one person to the next, each person has a small percentage of DNA that is unique to him or herself, and it is this DNA that is analysed in DNA testing.

DNA is frequently used as a tool to facilitate family reunification, upheld as a human right by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 16). Family reunification is also sound social policy with positive economic consequences for countries of immigration. Many resettlement countries allow family members of migrants already in the country to enter through legal channels. Over the last several decades, immigration authorities in various countries have increasingly turned to DNA testing to prove identity or family relationships in cases where the necessary documentary evidence is insufficient, unreliable or impossible to find.

IOM's Migration Health Division (MHD) assists immigration countries and prospective migrants with this process, by providing safe, secure and migrant-friendly sample collection services at its 60+ Migration Health Assessment Centres (MHACs) worldwide, enabling applicants to provide proof of their relationships where evidence is lacking or to accelerate family reunification procedures.

Over the past decade, IOM MHACs in more than 25 countries have provided DNA sample collection services to nearly 100,000 applicants wishing to reunite with their families in over 10 countries of destination.

ELEMENTS OF DNA SAMPLE COLLECTION AT IOM MHACS



Schedule Appointments



Verify Identity Person Providing the Sample



Counsel Applicants About Collection Procedures



Collect DNA Sample (with IOM or other approved witness)



Ensure Sample is Securely Packaged



Complete All Laboratory Documentation



Send Samples to Appropriate Laboratory

DNA SAMPLE COLLECTION SERVICES

IOM works closely with partner visa offices and DNA laboratories to implement DNA sample collection services. IOM supports the process by guaranteeing the security, confidentiality and quality of the samples and ensuring that the specimens are properly delivered to the appropriate reference laboratory. DNA samples are collected by trained health professionals with a buccal mouth swab to obtain the epithelial cells from which DNA will be analyzed. Counseling has an important role in the process, which is voluntary; applicants provide their informed consent prior to sample collection.

The results are returned directly to the partner visa office, which interprets them according to standards set by national reference agencies or legal counsel. The country of immigration which requested the testing issues a final decision to the applicant that is regulatory in nature and is not made by IOM, nor does IOM receive the results.

DNA samples constitute highly sensitive personal data. In the provision of DNA sample collection services, IOM ensures the integrity of the sample through a strict chain of custody, and ensures that implementing missions adhere to IOM's Data Protection Principles, which outline institutional safeguards for handling the personal data of IOM beneficiaries. IOM does not retain DNA samples at its MHACs and does not undertake the actual testing of the sample.

IOM FRAMEWORKS FOR ASSISTANCE

DNA sample collection services form part of IOM's work to facilitate migration and family reunification.

In line with the IOM Migration Governance Framework (MiGoF), IOM works with governments, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and civil societies to achieve safe, orderly and dignified pathways of migration and to advance the human rights and socioeconomic well-being of migrants and society. MiGoF's principles and objectives as they relate to facilitated migration and family reunification are aligned with the objectives of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) and the goals and targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular, SDG 10.7 and objectives 4, 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15 and 16 of the GCM.



DNA Sample Collection. © IOM Viet Nam 2008.

IOM supports the use of DNA testing a tool to facilitate family reunification, but recognizes that family is not only a biological construct. IOM supports the appropriate use of DNA testing. Strict guidelines should be in place to delineate when it is appropriate to call for DNA testing and to ensure that the tests are requested in a non-discriminatory manner.

IOM advocates for:

- The timely processing of DNA results;
- DNA results to make up only one part of evidence;
- DNA testing on a voluntary, informed basis;
- The costs of DNA testing to be accessible for all families.

As the UN Migration Agency, IOM is the leading International Organization for Migration and is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society.



SDG 10.7

Orderly and Safe Migration Through Well-Managed Migration Policies



GCM

Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration



MiGoF

IOM Migration Governance Framework

For more information on the above activities please contact the Migration Health Division (MHD) at mhddpt@iom.int and/or the Immigration and Visas Unit at ibm@iom.int

