



François Thierren / ICRC

MIGRATION: OUR WORK IN AFRICA



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The ICRC uses a deliberately broad description of migrants, which includes all people who leave or flee their country of origin or habitual residence to go abroad to seek safer or better prospects. This description includes refugees and asylum seekers, who have special protection under international law.

Background

More than 244 million people around the world were migrants in 2015.ⁱ Africa hosted some 21 million of them, while 34 million migrants in the world originated from the region and 16 million people migrated within Africa.ⁱⁱ Migration within and out of Africa – to Europe, North America, the Gulf and Asia – is dynamic, diverse and complex. While in recent years migration from Africa to Europe has received a lot of attention, the majority of people actually move within the continent.

Most people take safe and regular routes. However, every year, millions of people embark on extremely perilous migratory journeys. Some migrants, especially those who enter or remain in a country without the necessary authorization or documents (so-called irregular migrants), face harassment, abuse and exploitation. Some die during their journey, while others may be detained or face deportation. In many instances, migrants struggle to access basic services such as health care.

Security and economic fears perceived as related to the presence of migrants can fan social tensions within host communities, potentially leading to cases of discrimination and violence that threaten migrant communities. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) works with the wider International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to address some of these issues and to alleviate and prevent suffering among the most vulnerable migrants. journey.



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What we do



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Using our Restoring Family Links network to help migrants

Migrants frequently lose contact with their families. Some may not wish to make contact, but others are prevented from contacting their loved ones. This can cause considerable distress and lead to greater vulnerability of migrants and their families. So we work with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to help prevent families from becoming separated, and to help people get back in touch with their relatives. We also help people who have no news about their loved ones to find out what has happened to them.

The ICRC and National Societies offer family tracing services at key transit points along the migratory trails to enable migrants to reassure their families and/or stay in touch with them. We have set up “kiosks” offering free phone calls in **Morocco** (Nador and Oujda), **Niger** (Agadez, Arlit and Dirkou) and **Mali** (Bamako).

TRACE THE FACE

Launched in 2013, the Trace the Face website enables people to post pictures of themselves online and to display them on Red Cross posters in some European countries to help them find their missing relatives. More than 40,000 people visit the website every month, and dozens of missing people have already been found. So far 27 European countries are taking part, and the website is now being used in non-European countries too, such as Senegal, Ethiopia, and Egypt. For more information, please go to: www.tracetheface.org

Supporting National Societies' work

The ICRC supports Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to put migrants and their families back in touch by providing training, guidance, equipment and financial support.

In **South Africa**, the ICRC and the South African Red Cross are running a pilot project offering free phone calls to newly arrived migrants in Musina, a border town and major entry point for migrants from Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Malawi, Ethiopia and other countries.

In **Libya**, the ICRC helps the Libyan Red Crescent develop its family links services. For instance, local volunteers have attended ICRC-run training courses to develop their skills in this field.



José Cendon / ICRC

Supporting the families of missing migrants

In addition to our Restoring Family Links services, in some places we provide further support to the families of migrants who have gone missing. In Senegal, together with the Senegalese Red Cross, we carried out an assessment to understand the needs of these families and published a [reportⁱⁱⁱ](#) to foster understanding of the situation and encourage the authorities and other organizations to step up their support for these families. Families are offered psychosocial support to help them cope with the absence of their loved one, along with practical information and administrative support to deal with the legal problems that can arise as a result of their relative being missing. The families receive literacy and language classes, vocational training and funding to set up income-generating activities.

Providing humanitarian forensic support

Every year, many migrants go missing or perish at sea or when travelling overland, for example through the harsh conditions of the Sahara Desert. Treating the dead with dignity, recovering and identifying their remains, and

notifying their families are matters of great humanitarian concern and a challenge for the authorities and forensic services.

Our forensic teams help local forensic authorities and institutions to improve their methods for recovering, handling, documenting and identifying the bodies of migrants who have lost their lives. We provide technical advice, encourage cooperation among forensic services within and between countries, and run local and regional training courses for forensic experts and agencies. Material support is also provided to National Societies and the authorities.

CAPACITY-BUILDING

In **South Africa** the ICRC has developed a partnership with a mortuary that manages large numbers of unidentified bodies, including those of deceased migrants. The aim is to improve identification processes by means of a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach. Efforts are also underway to set up a forensic training hub in South Africa by partnering with established academic and forensic institutions. The hub would instruct forensic practitioners from across the continent.

In **Libya**, the ICRC has trained government officials in international standards and good practices in managing human remains. The Libyan Red Crescent volunteers who help recover and manage human remains following deadly accidents involving migrants at sea are also trained and provided with basic materials, including body bags. To continually improve our understanding of current forensic practices and challenges, we pursue a dialogue with the legal and health authorities in Libya in charge of overseeing forensic work and human-remains management.

Collecting ante-mortem information from relatives of missing migrants can improve the chances of identification. In Mali, Senegal and Mauritania, the ICRC is working with the authorities, National Societies and other agencies to collect data to facilitate the identification of bodies recovered from the Mediterranean Sea following a number of shipwrecks, such as the one of 18 April 2015, off the Libyan coast. This important humanitarian task is extremely complex, owing to its unprecedented nature, the number of authorities and actors involved in both countries of origin and destination, and the legal requirements, including on data protection.

Working in immigration detention

Irregular migrants are often taken into custody and held in detention facilities. This can happen when they are at a border, before they are deported, while they are en route to their destination or when they have arrived. We engage with States as part of a dialogue urging them to use

detention only as a last resort and to always consider liberty and alternatives to detention first.^{iv} In addition, we seek to make sure that the principle of *non-refoulement*^v is upheld, and that migrants are afforded due process of law, treated humanely, held in conditions that preserve their dignity, and are able to maintain contact with the outside world – their families and consular authorities – if they wish to do so.

In **South Africa**, the ICRC carries out visits to the Lindela Holding Facility, the only facility in the country for migrants awaiting deportation. In 2016 we carried out eleven visits to monitor the treatment and living conditions of the migrants detained there and enable the detainees to contact their families by phone. The ICRC also supports the **Botswana** Red Cross's work for detained migrants.

Given how many migrants are arrested and held in **Libya**, the ICRC focuses on enabling them to make phone calls and, if they wish, referring them to their consular authorities or relevant organizations, such as the International Organization for Migration and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Based on an independent assessment of their needs, some migrants receive clothes and hygiene kits.

Helping vulnerable migrants

The ICRC works closely with the National Societies and various local and international organizations that can provide specialized services and assistance to migrants.



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THE NUMBERS

In Niger, medical services provided by the French Red Cross with ICRC support give migrants access to curative health care (for common diseases, injuries and chronic diseases) and to psychosocial care. In 2016 around 3,700 migrants received medical consultations.

In 2016 the ICRC and the Mali Red Cross helped some 200 migrants in distress in northern Mali, where an armed conflict has been taking place since 2012, placing migrants at risk of attack or injury from mines or explosive remnants of war. The most vulnerable were offered accommodation, relief and transportation to safer areas, as well as the chance to make free phone calls to their relatives, and some received medical attention.

What we say

Talking to governments

We engage the authorities in confidential dialogue to ensure that they fulfil their legal obligations so as to protect the lives, preserve the dignity and alleviate the suffering of vulnerable migrants.

In **Niger**, for instance, our confidential bilateral dialogue focuses on our concerns surrounding the rights and needs of migrants transiting through the country. In **South Africa** we are closely following the ongoing immigration policy reform and have a dialogue with the Department of Home Affairs.

Influencing the debate

The ICRC also seeks to influence the debate on migration by drawing attention to issues of humanitarian concern in regional forums, such as the African Union.

ⁱ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs

ⁱⁱ <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimatesgraphs.shtml?2g2>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/2013/familles-migrants-senegalais-disparus.pdf>

^{iv} ICRC policy on immigration detention: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/migrant-detainees-icrc-policy>

^v The principle of non-refoulement prohibits the transfer of people to places where there are substantial grounds to believe that they would face violations of certain fundamental rights, such as torture, ill-treatment, persecution and arbitrary deprivation of life.