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MIGRATION: OUR WORK IN THE MIDDLE EAST



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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 In total, over 38 million migrants are estimated to be living in the Middle East.ⁱⁱ Today, the Middle East is facing major humanitarian crises. As a consequence, more than 2.4 million refugees from Syria, Yemen and Iraq are registered in other Middle Eastern countries,ⁱⁱⁱ while the region continues to host some 5 million Palestinian refugees, who live in either camps or informal settlements.^{iv}

In addition to migration within the region, many migrants from Asia, notably Afghans, travel through the Middle East on their way to Europe or settle in the region, particularly in Iran, where more than 950,000 Afghans are registered as refugees and another 1.5 to 2 million undocumented Afghans are estimated to be living.^v Despite being in the grip of armed conflict, Yemen remains an important transit route for African migrants on their way to Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf countries. Thousands of other migrants, mostly from South-East Asia or Africa, travel to the Gulf countries, Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan in search of work opportunities and a better life.

Like other civilians, migrants are heavily impacted by the region's devastating armed conflicts. Many become stranded in countries in conflict without community or family support. This can make them particularly vulnerable to violations of international humanitarian law (such as the arbitrary deprivation of liberty) or entail discrimination against them when trying to access basic services. They may lose contact with family members, be detained or go missing along their journey. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) works with the wider International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to alleviate and prevent suffering among the most vulnerable migrants.



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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 NUMBERS

In Jordan, Syrian refugees in the Zaatari and Azraq camps were able to make 12,750 free phone calls to their families in 2016.

Migrants may find themselves without proper identification documents, often because they were lost or stolen during their journey. According to strict criteria and depending on the circumstances, the ICRC can provide travel documents for resettlement to third countries or to enable migrants to return to their country of origin or habitual residence when direct contact with their consular authorities is not possible. ICRC travel documents are not identification documents, but are recognized internationally by most immigration authorities for a single journey. The majority of the ICRC travel documents issued in the Middle East region in 2016 and 2017 were the result of close cooperation with other humanitarian organizations, such as the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

The ICRC helps National Societies put migrants and their families back in touch by providing training, guidance, equipment and financial support.

Supporting National Societies' work

The ICRC and the Middle Eastern and European National Societies hold coordination meetings to improve the quality and the region-wide consistency of their efforts to help migrants and their families who become separated along the migration route. The last such meeting was held in Iran in February 2016. A similar event was held in Kuwait in May 2017, this time bringing together the ICRC and National Societies from the Gulf countries and Asia to discuss their activities for migrants and improve their collaboration.

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 Egypt. For more information, please go to: www.tracetheface.org

Providing humanitarian forensic support

Treating the dead with dignity and notifying their families are matters of great humanitarian concern. 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 encourage cooperation between regional forensic services and other organizations in order to share and promote forensic best practices.

In the Middle East region there is sadly a growing need for forensic expertise, and forensic services are being developed with ICRC support in countries such as Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. In Egypt, the ICRC delegation works with national forensic institutions and provides training in dead body management to the Egyptian Red Crescent, the Zeinhom morgue in Cairo and the Egyptian Ambulance Organization. In Iran, the ICRC conducts training courses with the Iranian Legal Medicine Organization and other relevant organizations on forensic anthropology, which include workshops with experts from other countries, such as Iraq and Syria. And in February 2017 the ICRC delegation in Kuwait organized a conference for some 20 forensic experts from across the region.

Helping vulnerable migrants...

...to meet their basic

THE NUMBERS

In Cairo, every month, around 600 unaccompanied migrant girls receive food and hygiene items distributed by the ICRC and a local partner, while efforts continue to find their families.

In 2016, around 24,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon received emergency household items, such as kitchen and hygiene sets, blankets, mattresses, jerry cans, tarpaulins and diapers. In areas most exposed to harsh winter conditions, the ICRC and the Qatar Red Crescent installed thermal insulation in the tents of 28,000 Syrian refugees.

In 2016, 10,350 Syrian refugees living in Jordanian host communities – the vast majority in female-headed households – received monthly cash distributions to help cover the rent and other living expenses.

... to get health care

In Lebanon, the ICRC supports access to primary health care in 11 facilities; in 2 of those facilities a psychologist is on hand to provide mental health and psychosocial support. We work with five local partners to provide physical rehabilitation services. Coverage is nationwide and services are available to both Lebanese people and Syrian refugees. We have also been facilitating access to emergency health care through a partnership project with Rafik Hariri University Hospital since 2015.

In Jordan, 6,600 Syrian refugees received primary health care at an ICRC clinic and 41,200 medical consultations were provided in 2016.

The ICRC supports an Iranian local partner and the Iranian Red Crescent to provide direct primary health-care services and psychosocial support to thousands of vulnerable people, including migrants, in the Golshahr district of the city of Mashhad. It also helps them run awareness-raising campaigns on health issues.

Working in immigration detention

Migrants are often detained for entering or remaining in a country without the necessary authorization or documents (so-called irregular migrants). Asylum seekers and refugees are often considered to be irregular migrants and are also arrested and detained.

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.^{vi} We visit migrants held in detention facilities in Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrein. During these visits, and through our confidential dialogue with the authorities, we seek to make sure that the principle of non-refoulement^{vii} 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 addition to these activities, since April 2017 we have stepped up our support to some prisons where migrants are held in Yemen in an effort to fight the cholera outbreak. This support includes, for example, distributing cleaning supplies and personal hygiene items, improving water and sanitation infrastructure and donating medicines. We also run cholera prevention awareness-raising sessions with the Yemen Red Crescent Society.

What we say

Talking to governments, influencing the debate

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.

The ICRC seeks to influence the debate on migration policy by drawing attention to issues of humanitarian concern in multilateral regional forums.



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ⁱ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)

ⁱⁱ This figure corresponds to the total number of migrants residing in Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen, as per UN DESA figures:

<http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates15.shtml>

ⁱⁱⁱ See UNHCR figures, in particular: <http://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>, <http://www.unhcr.org/iraq-emergency.html> and <http://www.unhcr.org/yemen-emergency.html>

^{iv} See UNHCR figures: <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work>

^v See UNHCR figures: <http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Iran%20Factsheet%20-%20MAY16.pdf>

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

^{vii} 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.