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MIGRATION: OUR WORK IN EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA



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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 Roughly a third of them – around 82 million – are in Europe and Central Asia, including an estimated 12 million each in Germany and Russia.

Most people take safe and regular routes. However, every year, millions of people embark on extremely perilous migratory journeys. Some face abuse and exploitation, some die on the way. Others are detained for entering or remaining in a country without the necessary authorization or documents (so-called irregular migrants). 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.

Over a million irregular migrants – many from the Middle East and Africa – are estimated to have entered Europe in 2015.ⁱⁱ More continued to arrive in Europe in 2016 and 2017, but in smaller numbers. With fewer migrants crossing from Turkey to Greece, the main route into Europe is now through Italy from North Africa. Most migrants to Russia are from Central Asia.



Thomas Dworzak / Magnum photos for ICRC

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.

Supporting National Societies' work

The ICRC helps National Societies put migrants and their families back in touch by providing training, guidance, equipment and financial support. We concentrate on countries along the migration routes, including Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Malta, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. We have helped migrants make and send thousands of phone calls and Red Cross messages to their loved ones.

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

Providing humanitarian forensic support

At least 5,000 migrants reportedly died in the Mediterranean while trying to reach Europe in 2016.ⁱⁱⁱ Treating the dead with dignity and notifying their families are matters of great humanitarian concern. We bring these matters to the attention of the authorities as part of an ongoing humanitarian dialogue. 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 them with technical advice, encourage cooperation among forensic services and other organizations, run local and regional training courses for forensic experts and agencies, and provide material support for the National Societies and the authorities.

In **Greece**, we work closely with forensic specialists and the authorities to improve documentation of dead bodies and to collect ante- and post-mortem data centrally; the aim is to increase the likelihood of identifying these bodies. The authorities also receive material support: body bags, surgical masks, gloves, digital cameras and laptops.

In **Italy**, the ICRC helps the Italian Red Cross and the Forensic Anthropology and Odontology Laboratory of the University of Milan to identify dead migrants. Our global presence means that we can help the authorities contact the families of missing migrants and get information from them, in accordance with relevant legislation, to identify the dead.

THE NUMBERS

We gave forensic training to around 180 members of the Greek coastguard in the North Aegean Islands, Crete and Attica in 2016. In Italy, we are helping forensic experts to identify some 900 migrants who drowned when their boat sank off the Libyan coast in 2015.



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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.

Improving treatment and living conditions

The ICRC carries out a variety of activities for detained migrants. We visit migrants detained in Greece and Hungary. Some of them are given hygiene kits, clothes and other essential items. Together with the Hellenic Red Cross, we also help migrants in detention facilities to contact their families by phone. We work with the authorities to find ways to improve living conditions for migrants in detention, for example by organizing workshops for police commanders and officials in Greece.

Supporting National Societies' work with detained migrants

Elsewhere in Europe and Central Asia, we support National Societies' efforts to help detained migrants. More than 20 National Societies run various assistance programmes, offering material support, legal and medical services, and help in restoring contact with their families. The ICRC and the Norwegian and Swedish Red Cross organized a regional workshop for European National Societies, in Oslo in October 2016, to exchange best practices and develop a more effective response to the needs of detained migrants.

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.

Influencing the debate

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

In September 2016, for example, together with the European Union Institute for Security Studies, we organized a conference in Brussels on vulnerabilities and protection of migrants. We also arranged a panel discussion – on migration and humanitarian work – at an international conference in Moscow in September 2016, organized by the Russian International Affairs Council and the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration. And we held an event in Paris in October 2016 on the humanitarian response to migration in Europe which was attended by officials from the European Union, academic and policy experts, representatives of non-governmental organizations and members of the media.



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ⁱ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs

ⁱⁱ <https://www.iom.int/news/irregular-migrant-refugee-arrivals-europe-top-one-million-2015-iom> ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/2013/familles-migrants-senegalais-disparus.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://missingmigrants.iom.int>, accessed 26 December 2016.

^{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.