

# ICRC'S CENTRAL TRACING AGENCY BUREAU FOR THE INTERNATIONAL ARMED CONFLICT BETWEEN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND UKRAINE

The Central Tracing Agency (CTA) Bureau for the International Armed Conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine was activated in March 2022 to help prevent disappearances and alleviate the suffering of families who remain without news of their loved ones due to the armed conflict, either because they have been captured, killed or because they fled their homes and have lost contact.

Acting as a neutral intermediary between the parties to the conflict, the bureau collects, analyzes, safeguards and transmits information, from one party to the other, on the fate and whereabouts of military personnel and civilians who have gone missing or have been separated from their families. It strives to ensure they are accounted for and retain family links.

Based in Geneva, the CTA Bureau comprises of a multidisciplinary team of some 60 experts of 26 nationalities in fields such as family links, data management and analysis, and forensics. It works in close cooperation with ICRC delegations and Red Cross and Red Crescent partners around the world.

## AS OF THE END OF DECEMBER 2025:

- Together with ICRC teams in Russia and Ukraine, the CTA Bureau is striving to clarify the fate of **almost 193,000** persons. This doesn't correspond to the total number of missing persons, as not all cases are reported to the ICRC.
- **More than 15,900 families** have received information from the ICRC and Red Cross and Red Crescent national societies on the fate of their missing loved ones.
- The ICRC has received information from both sides on **more than 20,000 persons**, mainly prisoners of war. It has transmitted this information to their families, for those who have opened a request with the ICRC or Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies, and to the party concerned.
- The ICRC and partner national societies have directly delivered **more than 25,000 personal messages** (Red Cross messages and oral messages/salamats) between prisoners of war and their families.
- In its role of neutral intermediary, the CTA Bureau facilitated the transmission, between the parties to the conflict, of **more than 34,600 letters** from and to prisoners of war and their families.
- Families have contacted the ICRC **almost 603,000 times** by phone, online, or in-person for information about their loved ones.
- A total of **51 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and 33 ICRC delegations** (including the CTA Bureau) work together to help bring families news of their loved ones.

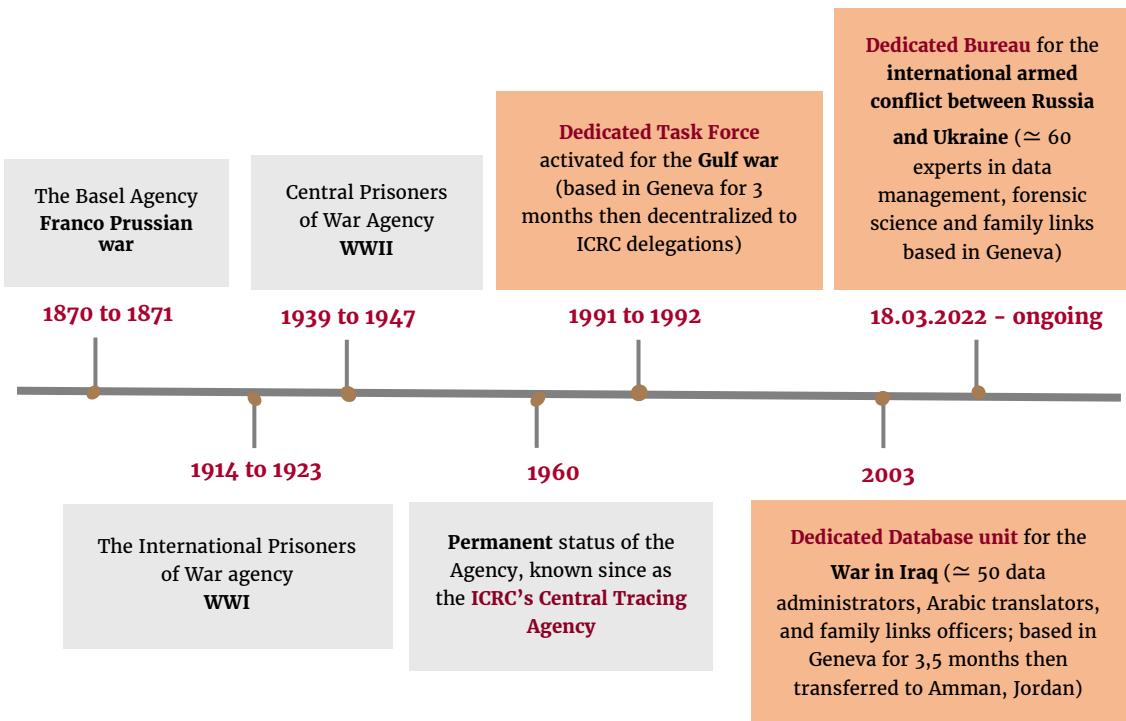
## MANDATE UNDER THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS

In international armed conflicts, the ICRC Central Tracing Agency has a particular role enshrined in the Geneva Conventions (GC) of 1949 and their First Additional Protocol (AP) of 1997. Under Articles 123 GCIII and 140 GCIV, it has the specific mandate to collect information on protected persons (military and civilians, dead or alive) who find themselves in enemy hands, and to transmit it to the country of origin of these persons or to the Power on which they depend.

The CTA conventional mandate in international armed conflict is directly linked with States' legal obligations to account for protected persons in their hands, including the deceased, and with its role of neutral intermediary between the parties, safe repository of information and data orchestrator.

As a result, in March 2022, the ICRC's Central Tracing Agency activated a dedicated Bureau to respond to humanitarian needs arising from the armed conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND



## RESPONSIBILITIES AND OBLIGATIONS OF STATES

Under international humanitarian law, in the case of an international armed conflict, states have the unconditional obligation to account for military personnel and civilians, dead or alive, who have fallen in their hands (protected persons under the Geneva Conventions), and to prevent them from going missing. They must share with each other information on these persons through a neutral intermediary, the ICRC's Central Tracing Agency, and, in the case of the international armed conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, the CTA Bureau.

Parties to the conflict also bear primary responsibility for ensuring that protected persons in their power, including the dead, are treated in a dignified manner. They must also take all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing as a result of the armed conflict and to inform their families about their fate.

## PRISONERS OF WAR & DETAINEES

Captured servicemen or civilian internees are in a particularly vulnerable situation. The accounting system set up under the Geneva Conventions – whereby each and every protected person in captivity must be reported to the adverse party, through the intermediary of the ICRC – represents a lifeline for them.

Communicating their fate and whereabouts to the adverse party and ultimately to their families, and maintaining or re-establishing family links/contacts, not only help to lessen their anguish and alleviate the suffering of their families, but it also protects them from the risk of disappearing.

For this reason, parties to the armed conflict must share this information with the ICRC CTA Bureau in a timely manner and grant the ICRC access to detention/internment places to assess treatment and conditions of detention. Although the ICRC cannot offer physical protection, it works tirelessly to protect the rights of persons and to prevent disappearances.

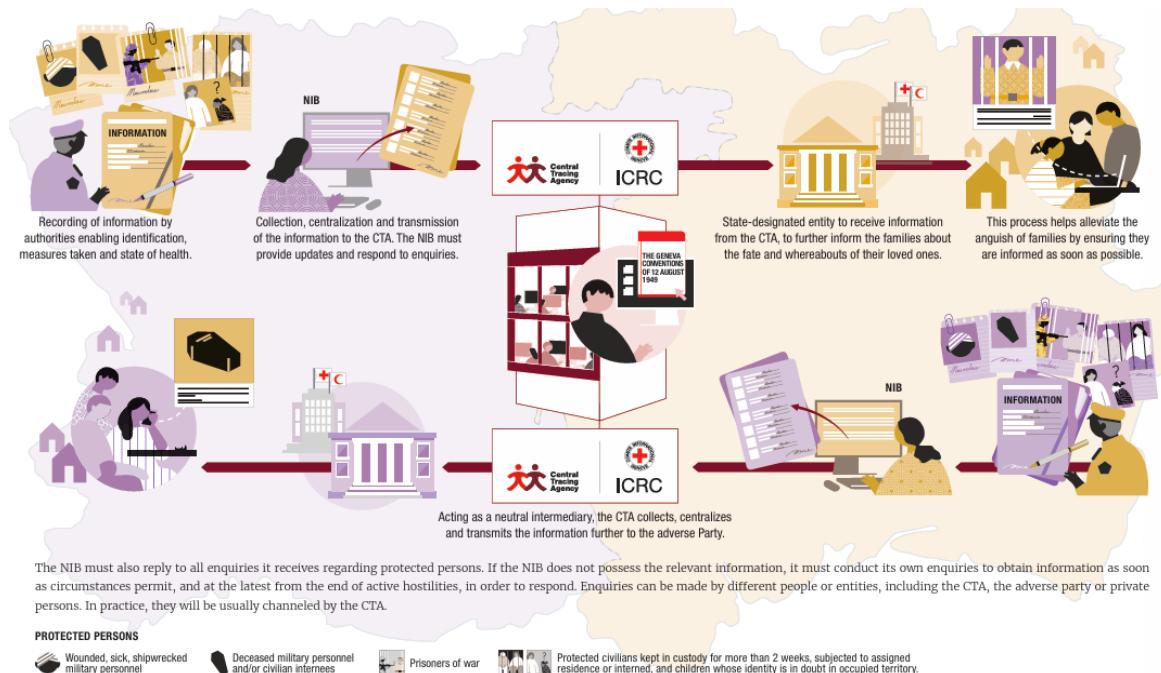
## NATIONAL INFORMATION BUREAUS (NIBs)

States shall establish a National Information Bureau (NIB) from the outbreak of hostilities in case of international armed conflicts and in all cases of occupation, as set down in the third and fourth Geneva Conventions of 1949.

NIBs must collect and centralize information (identity, fate, health status, whereabouts, etc.) on enemy military personnel and civilians, dead or alive who have fallen in the hands of their authorities. They must transmit this information timely, accurately and regularly to the adverse party, through the intermediary of the ICRCs CTA Bureau. NIBs must also reply to enquiries submitted to them about the fate and whereabouts of protected persons.

NIBs are a key source of information for the CTA Bureau to be able to identify possible matches between lists of names provided by the parties to the conflict and sought persons whose families have approached the ICRC or Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies in search for news – and thus to be able to inform families.

To date, the CTA Bureau has received information from authorities on both sides **more than 20,000 persons**, mainly prisoners of war. It has transmitted this information to their families, for those who have opened a request with the ICRC or National Societies, and to the party concerned. This figure does not correspond to the current number of prisoners of war, as some of them have been released since 2022.



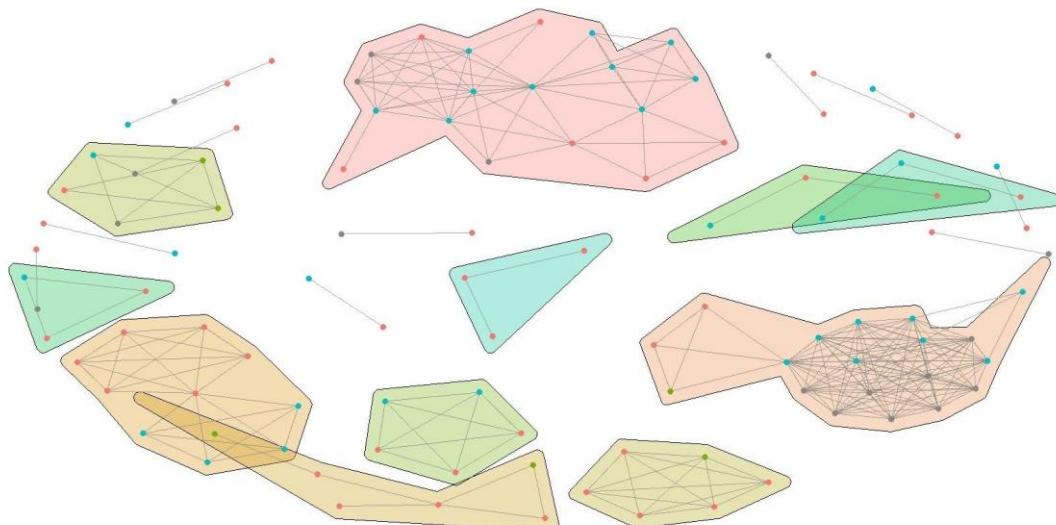
## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

In addition to lists of names provided by the **Russian and Ukrainian National Information Bureaus**, the CTA Bureau collects information from the following sources:

- **Families** looking for their missing and separated relatives.
- **ICRC detention visits**, during which the ICRC registers prisoners of war and protected civilians deprived of their liberty and offers them to contact their families and/or the authorities of their country of origin/nationality.
- **Capture/internment cards** provided by the detaining authorities on both sides, as per their legal obligations.
- **Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies** collecting tracing requests from torn apart families. To date, 51 national societies contribute to this endeavour.
- **Open sources**, such as websites, social media, etc.

All of these constitute essential layers of information that feed the ICRC's action and contribute to ensuring that persons are accounted for and that families are informed of the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones.

This information also allows us to better understand how missing persons are linked to one another – either because they went missing together, were part of the same military unit, etc. – and to help identify persons who might have information on them (i.e., co-detainees, co-soldiers, witnesses). Through network analysis (see graph below), the CTA Bureau aims at ensuring that information on one of them can also benefit others, which in turn can help facilitate and speed up the process to provide families with answers.



*This graph shows the links between groups of people (missing persons, detainees, deceased persons, etc.) based on the location and date of their disappearance. Information on one of them can help clarify the fate of those connected to him or her.*

## DATA MANAGEMENT & PROTECTION

By the very nature of its work, the CTA Bureau receives a large volume of data. Processing information is a complex, time-consuming process. We understand the frustration of families waiting for news and we spare no efforts to provide accurate data in the shortest feasible timeframes.

Personal data is often of a sensitive nature. Safeguarding it, particularly in situations such as armed conflicts and other humanitarian emergencies, is an essential part of accounting for people and protecting their lives, dignity and physical and mental well-being. The ICRC strives to uphold the highest possible standards when it comes to the protection of their personal data, even under the most difficult circumstances.

As a result, the ICRC has adopted [Rules on personal data protection](#). These rules apply to the CTA Bureau's activities, just as to any ICRC office, activity, and operation worldwide. Additional measures include very high cybersecurity standards, protection and control mechanisms, staff training and confidentiality agreements.

## THE FAMILY LINKS NETWORK

The CTA Bureau acts as coordinator and technical advisor to Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies on issues related to separated, missing and the deceased and their families in the context of the international armed conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. It works in close coordination with the extensive network of ICRC delegations and National Societies worldwide.

The [Family Links Network](#) is a key component to ensure proximity to those in need: scattered families can call or visit the nearest Red Cross and Red Crescent National Society branch in the country where they live, not only to obtain information on the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones, but also to receive additional support, such as mental health and psychosocial support, legal advice or other forms of accompaniment.

51 Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies and 33 ICRC delegations (including the CTA Bureau) around the world are currently working together to provide news to families searching for their loved ones.

## FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS

Families of missing persons have the right to know what has happened to their loved ones. The sooner action is taken to collect and preserve data on separated, missing or deceased persons, the more likely is that families will be able to reestablish contact and learn about the fate and whereabouts of their relatives.

Families can contact the nearest Red Cross and Red Crescent office in the country where they are. They can also approach the ICRC by phone, online or in-person, by visiting the CTA Bureau in Geneva and ICRC delegations in Russia and in Ukraine.

The ICRC also strives to ensure that persons held in connection with the armed conflict can, as far as possible, maintain links with their family and exchange personal news. For example, the ICRC collects Red Cross messages and salamats (oral safe and well messages) directly from prisoners of war and civilian internees during its visits to places of detention on both sides. It ensures that these messages are passed on to the families and collects a reply if the family so wishes.

In its role as a neutral intermediary, the ICRC facilitates the exchange of prisoners of war correspondence between both NIBs. However, it is the responsibility of the NIBs to collect and distribute letters from/to families/prisoners of war. The ICRC is therefore not in a position to confirm their actual delivery. Authorities may offer prisoners of war the possibility of calling family members. This is done without ICRC involvement.

## THE DECEASED

Parties to an international armed conflict have the obligation to search for, recover and document dead protected persons. They must share all information that can help identify them and locate their burial site. They must also notify without delay the death of a prisoner of war.

The CTA Bureau has the mandate to receive, process and safeguard this information, and to pass it on to the adverse party, via their respective NIBs. The dignified, timely and proper documentation and handling of the dead, particularly those who died on the battlefield, is crucial to facilitate their identification and prevent them from becoming missing persons. The role of the CTA Bureau is complementary to that of ICRC delegations in Ukraine and in Russia, who work with local authorities to advise them on how best to locate, recover, document, and identify the dead.

In its role as a neutral intermediary, the ICRC remains available to facilitate the repatriation of protected persons who have lost their lives as a result of the international armed conflict, as it has done on dozens of occasions since the escalation of the armed conflict in February 2022. To be noted, families are only informed once human remains have been duly identified by the authorities legally entitled to do so.