



ICRC

Searching for the Missing, Reconnecting Families and Respecting the Dead



The human cost of separation and absence



The least I can do is keep searching – the story has to have an ending.

– Adib, searching for information about his grandfather, who went missing during the 1975 civil war in Lebanon.



Around the world, countless families endure the anguish of not knowing what has happened to their loved ones. Armed conflicts, violence, disasters, migration and detention separate children from parents, spouses from one another, and siblings from their families. This uncertainty – whether their loved ones are alive or dead – leaves families in a state of limbo, unable to grieve, heal or move forward. In many cases, the remains of those who die are not handled with dignity and are left unidentified, which further compounds the anguish of families searching for answers. The emotional and psychological toll of this “ambiguous loss”¹ is profound, often resulting in frozen grief that can last for decades. Families of the missing often face not only emotional devastation but also economic and social hardship. When breadwinners go missing, dependents are left in financial distress. Without clarity on the fate of their loved ones, families may struggle to access social benefits, inherit property and exercise other rights.

The impact of people going missing extends far beyond individual families. Communities and societies bear the scars of these losses, as unresolved grief and unanswered questions fuel resentment, hinder reconciliation and undermine efforts to rebuild trust and peace.² Future generations may inherit the pain and injustice caused by the loss of their relatives and neighbours, further straining relationships between groups and countries. And the fabric of society itself can fray, with the effects lingering long after the conflict or disaster that caused the separation has ended.

Families have the right to know what has happened to their loved ones. Addressing this issue is not only a humanitarian imperative but also a crucial step toward rebuilding trust, fostering reconciliation and laying the foundation for lasting peace and development in societies torn apart by conflict and violence.

For more than 160 years, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been at the forefront of this humanitarian concern. Preventing separation in the first place, locating missing people, reconnecting loved ones and supporting those involved in the search are central to our mission to alleviate human suffering. Every year, we help account for, restore contact between, trace and reunite thousands of family members and other loved ones separated by conflict, violence, disasters and migration.

Our distinctive role: a unique humanitarian mandate and operational expertise

The ICRC’s mandate and role in searching for missing people and supporting their families are widely recognized by states, international organizations and civil society. As a neutral, impartial and independent organization with unparalleled expertise and decades of experience in this field, we are uniquely equipped to carry out this critical humanitarian mission.

A mandate enshrined in the Geneva Conventions

For over 160 years, the ICRC has worked to protect people from threats to their lives, physical integrity and dignity, while striving to prevent people from going missing, restore family links and ascertain the fate of missing people. This mission lies at the heart of our mandate, as outlined in the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.

Our efforts to trace missing people date back to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, when families received news of their captured relatives through prisoner lists delivered by the Basel Agency, a precursor to today’s Central Tracing Agency (CTA). During the First and Second World Wars, the ICRC faced some of its greatest challenges; through the International Prisoners-of-War Agency and the Central Agency for Prisoners of War, respectively, we helped millions of families reconnect with loved ones or learn the fate of missing relatives. In collaboration with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, we recorded information about missing people on more than 41 million index cards, serving as a vital link between separated families.

Although the world has changed significantly since the 19th century, the tragedy of people going missing due to armed conflicts, violence and other humanitarian crises persists. The work of the ICRC's CTA³ remains as essential today as it was over a century ago.

With its long-standing expertise and commitment, the ICRC continues to provide hope and relief to families torn apart by armed conflict, violence, disasters and migration, ensuring that the fundamental right of families to know the fate of their loved ones is upheld.

The Central Tracing Agency (CTA) is a permanent and integral part of the ICRC, explicitly mentioned in the Geneva Conventions. It is mandated to re-establish family links, search for and identify missing persons, protect the dignity of the dead and address the needs of families of missing persons.

As a neutral intermediary, the CTA passes information on protected persons between parties to international armed conflicts. It aims to prevent people from going missing, facilitate the exchange of prisoners and human remains, and establish coordination mechanisms between parties to a conflict.

The CTA registers and searches for missing people, supports their families and helps states and parties to conflict fulfil their obligations. This includes setting up national mechanisms to search for missing persons, strengthening the ability of medico-legal institutions to systematically manage and identify the deceased for eventual return to families, and creating systems to prevent people from going missing in the first place.

Crucially, the CTA coordinates the Family Links Network, which includes 191 National Red Cross and Red Crescent societies. By leveraging this global network, the CTA provides vital support to separated people and the families of missing persons.

Ukraine. Our CTA Bureau for the conflict between the Russian Federation and Ukraine centralizes requests to trace missing people and works with ICRC delegations and National Societies to inform families of the fate or whereabouts of missing relatives. "We are all waiting for him. And we will wait [until he's back]," says Liudmyla, whose grandson is missing.





Chad. In Kerfi, Sila Province, three Sudanese refugee women look through photographs, hoping to find their loved ones.

A. Oumar Cherif / ICRC

Protection: upholding the rights of people affected by armed conflict

The ICRC holds a unique mandate under international humanitarian law (IHL) as the only humanitarian organization specifically tasked in the Geneva Conventions with protecting and assisting people affected by armed conflict. Our neutral, impartial and independent approach enables us to build trust with all parties to a conflict, ensuring we can carry out our vital humanitarian work, such as reconnecting families separated by armed conflict or other crises. This approach also allows us to operate in complex and often inaccessible environments, including conflict zones, border areas and places of detention.

Both IHL and international human rights law protect missing people and their families during international and non-international armed conflicts⁴ as well as in peacetime. The ICRC reminds parties to a conflict of their legal obligation to prevent people from going missing and ensure families' right to know the fate of their loved ones. Importantly, the obligation to search for missing people continues even after hostilities have ended, often requiring a long-term and sustained approach.

To uphold the rights of those affected by conflict, we undertake several critical actions. We negotiate with all parties to secure access to affected people, assess their needs and gather information about incidents that may lead to people going missing. Based on our findings, we provide confidential recommendations to authorities and other stakeholders to address victims' needs and prevent further cases of people going missing.

Additionally, the ICRC visits people deprived of their liberty, registers their names and monitors their status, in order to prevent them from going missing. We advocate for authorities to notify families when individuals are detained or transferred, and we help detainees restore and maintain contact with their loved ones. In cases where detainees pass away, we may assist in informing families and returning personal belongings when the authorities are unable to do so.

Cooperation: leveraging the world's largest humanitarian network

The ICRC, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the 191 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies – the three components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – work closely together. The Restoring Family Links⁵ (RFL) programme is central to the Movement's mission and the work of its components. The Family Links Network⁶ is a unique, global partnership that leverages the Movement's unparalleled geographical reach and local expertise to address the needs of families separated by armed conflict, migration, natural disasters or other crises. By combining the ICRC's experience in conflict and emergency settings with the National Societies' deep connections to local communities, the Movement provides a coordinated and effective response.

Through the Family Links Network, which is grounded in shared operational principles and a common approach, the Movement works to prevent people from getting separated or going missing, assist those searching for missing loved ones and support the process of reunifying families.

This partnership also extends to advocacy and capacity-strengthening efforts. By pooling resources, expertise and networks, the Movement provides a unified and comprehensive response that is designed to protect families and address the devastating impact of separation and loss.

Protecting the separated, the missing and the dead

Family separations and people going missing are complex and multifaceted situations that require a comprehensive and coordinated response. To address this, the ICRC takes a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on its expertise in protection, humanitarian forensics, mental health and psychosocial support, economic security and legal frameworks. Our teams work tirelessly to conduct searches; ensure that the dead are treated with dignity and in ways that facilitate eventual identification; and consolidate information in order to provide updates on the fate and whereabouts of missing people and separated family members and to reunite families. At the same time, we address people's needs holistically, providing support on multiple levels.

We work in both international and non-international armed conflicts, seeking to ensure that parties to a conflict fulfil their obligations to prevent people from going missing and to search for those who do. The ICRC's ability to work with both state and non-state armed groups allows us to operate across front lines, keeping families connected and seeking to clarify the fate of people who have gone missing.

Taking preventive action

Working with states and other stakeholders

At the ICRC, we work closely with states and other stakeholders to promote and implement measures that prevent people from going missing in the first place, including in situations of armed conflict, violence and disasters. This includes reminding state authorities of their obligations under IHL⁷ and other legal frameworks, such as the United Nations International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.⁸ We also provide technical support to help states develop and strengthen policies and legal frameworks that uphold the rights of missing people and their families.

In international armed conflicts, we support the establishment and operation of National Information Bureaux, which facilitate the flow of information between parties to a conflict through the ICRC's CTA, as required under IHL. These bureaux are responsible for gathering and sharing information about prisoners of war, civilian internees and deceased people in the hands of the other party. Additionally, we help military authorities implement measures to identify military personnel before deployment, such as through identity tags or other identification methods.

By sharing best practices and strengthening local capacities, the ICRC emphasizes the importance of both preventive and early action to reduce the risk of people going missing and provide answers to families in need.

Democratic Republic of the Congo. Training of trainers in IHL took place at the Congolese Armed Forces training centre in Kitona, Kongo Central province. Forty-eight instructors from the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) participated in the training. In addition to this training, an IHL-themed parade was held for 805 officers from the various schools within the FARDC base (artillery, infantry, air force, etc.).





A. Mohamed/ICRC

Somalia. An ICRC team consisting of a delegate and an interpreter conducts a group interview with detainees in Mogadishu Central Prison in order to assess their living conditions and how they are treated.

Protecting people at risk of going missing

In emergency situations, the ICRC acts quickly to help families stay in touch with their loved ones, preventing the loss of contact and reducing the risk of people going missing. In conflict situations, we are committed to protecting the rights of affected people, with a particular focus on safeguarding those most at risk of going missing and addressing their needs – and those of their families – urgently and attentively.

In some cases, we register particularly vulnerable individuals, such as unaccompanied minors, displaced people and evacuated civilians, and follow up to ensure their safety and well-being. The registration process plays a crucial role in efforts to reunite them with their families and prevent people from going missing.

Additionally, we remind parties to a conflict of their obligations under IHL and work to ensure compliance, including documenting violations when necessary. Through these actions, we are committed to protecting those affected by conflict and violence and addressing the needs of both missing people and their families.

Visiting people deprived of their liberty

As a neutral and impartial intermediary acting purely on humanitarian grounds, the ICRC strives to visit all people deprived of their liberty owing to armed conflict or other situations of violence. These visits are conducted under specific conditions to safeguard the security, dignity and physical integrity of detainees. They also help prevent people from going missing, and they help people restore or maintain contact with their families.

During these visits, we register detainees and document their detention status, as this enables us to monitor their whereabouts and track any transfers, releases or other movements. This process promotes accountability and reduces the risk of individuals becoming unaccounted for.

ICRC delegates hold private and confidential discussions with detainees, providing a safe space for them to share their concerns without fear of reprisal. We also ask the authorities to notify families when a person is detained or transferred, and we facilitate communication between detainees and their loved ones to help restore and maintain family links. In cases where a detainee passes away while in custody, we urge the authorities to inform the family and return the deceased's remains and personal belongings. If the authorities are unable to fulfil this responsibility, we may step in to ensure these critical tasks are completed.

In 2025, for example, the ICRC gained access to approximately 1,500 people who had fled the city of El Fasher in Sudan and were subsequently detained by an armed group in connection with the conflict. Some of these detainees were able to reconnect with their relatives through the ICRC's family links service and received other forms of ICRC support.

Searching and accounting for people

The ICRC reminds parties to a conflict of their obligation under IHL and other legal frameworks to prevent people from going missing and, if they do, to ascertain their fate and inform their families. While state authorities hold the primary responsibility for preventing people from going missing, responding to cases of missing people and addressing the needs of affected families, these efforts are often hampered by a lack of awareness, political will, technical capacity, resources and coordination. As a result, the response provided to families searching for answers is often inadequate or entirely absent.

As a result of this gap, countless families turn to the ICRC and National Societies for help in obtaining news of missing relatives. These efforts are further complicated by increasingly complex environments, including the protracted nature of some conflicts, large population movements across countries and regions, and the growing impact of devastating emergencies.

Restoring Family Links

The Family Links Network – comprising the ICRC's CTA, the RFL and tracing units within ICRC delegations, and the RFL/tracing services of National Societies – plays a vital role in providing Restoring Family Links services in the aftermath of armed conflicts, disasters and other emergencies as well as in migration situations.

Beyond reuniting loved ones, the network proactively seeks to prevent people from going missing and emphasizes the importance of maintaining accurate records of vulnerable individuals, such as detainees and unaccompanied minors. It helps families stay connected and supports those who have lost contact with their relatives. Leveraging its truly global reach, the network ensures that the same principles and methods are applied across borders and front lines, making its services accessible, relevant and effective.

As part of the Family Links Network, we use a variety of tools to restore communication and maintain family connections. Free telephone and video calls are often the quickest way to reconnect loved ones, while written Red Cross messages and short oral messages serve as alternatives when phone calls are not possible. Pre-printed messages, such as "safe and well" or "anxious for news", can also be shared via the Restoring Family Links website or published in local media. For those who have lost contact details or cannot locate their family members, we may publish lists of missing people or photos of relatives on platforms like the Restoring Family Links website to help people restore contact.

In the Central African Republic in 2025, for example, the ICRC and the National Society helped 16 unaccompanied children – some of whom had previously been associated with armed groups – and several adults with specific vulnerabilities get back together with their families. The ICRC then provided them with cash, clothing and school supplies to help ease their reintegration into their communities and conducted follow-up visits to monitor their well-being.

Family Links Network: unique, global and local

The Movement has long helped families separated by armed conflict or other circumstances to reconnect, reunite or learn what has happened to their missing relatives. At the heart of this effort is the Family Links Network, a global system comprising the services of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the ICRC, particularly its Central Tracing Agency.

Thanks to its global reach and strong local presence, this unique network provides a range of essential services, including:

- facilitating the exchange of family news through Red Cross messages, phone calls, internet-based communications and other means
- reuniting and repatriating individuals, including vulnerable adults, unaccompanied minors and people formerly associated with armed groups
- tracing missing persons in order to provide answers to their families
- registering and monitoring individuals, such as vulnerable detainees, to prevent them from going missing and ensure their families know their whereabouts
- organizing family visits for people deprived of their liberty
- collecting, managing and forwarding information on deaths to families
- issuing ICRC travel documents to individuals unable to obtain or renew official papers, so they can return to their country of origin, reunite with their family, or resettle elsewhere
- reminding authorities of their obligation under IHL to support the families of the missing and assisting them in fulfilling these responsibilities.

Every minute, we help three families separated by conflict, violence, migration or disaster call each other*

Every hour, the fate/whereabouts of four missing people are clarified during the search process supported by the Family Links Network*

Every day, we support the reunification of ten people with their families*



* 2025 statistics from the Red Cross and Red Crescent Family Links Network

Tracing requests

At the ICRC, we provide a range of specialized services to help people search for their relatives, including those who are unaccounted for. Central to these efforts are the ICRC's tracing services, managed by the CTA, which coordinates global initiatives to locate missing people and reconnect families.

At the request of families, we collect and analyse information about missing people, drawing on the CTA's resources and expertise. This often involves visiting refugee camps, detention centres, hospitals, morgues and cemeteries, as well as engaging with authorities to investigate the fate and whereabouts of specific individuals.

Our tracing efforts also include preserving information for as long as necessary,⁹ so that families can receive answers years or even decades after a crisis. For example, the CTA continues to respond to tracing requests related to prisoners and missing people from the Second World War¹⁰ using data stored in its archives in Geneva. These archives are now being digitized to support future searches. The early collection of information from families is critical, as it provides vital clues for future investigations when circumstances allow.

In 2025, we received 178,329 new tracing requests and determined what happened to 28,693 people whose fate or whereabouts were unknown. By the end of 2025, we were actively following 411,500 missing persons cases worldwide.

Uganda. Ghalya Yacoub Ali, 32, fled Sudan with her five children and is searching for her husband, from whom she was separated during the conflict. She submitted a tracing request to the ICRC's Restoring Family Links team. Here, at the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, she meets with an ICRC staff member following up on her case.



Supporting mechanisms to clarify the fate of the missing

Although the ICRC actively works on cases of missing people, the primary obligation to search for the missing lies with the parties to a conflict. State authorities should, wherever possible, take comprehensive action to address the issue of missing people by establishing dedicated mechanisms to determine their fate and whereabouts. This obligation extends beyond the cessation of hostilities and often requires a structured, long-term process that may span decades. We support states' efforts to create and sustain national mechanisms or commissions dedicated to clarifying the fate of missing people and addressing the needs of their families. This includes helping states draft the initial legislative framework and providing them with long-term support to ensure they have the multidisciplinary expertise required to sustain such initiatives.

To guide these efforts, we provide extensive resources, including a comprehensive toolbox¹¹ that outlines key considerations for establishing context-specific mechanisms and highlights examples of successful processes implemented in various situations.

As a neutral intermediary, the ICRC facilitates coordination mechanisms, such as those between Iraq and Kuwait, Iraq and Iran, Georgian and South Ossetian participants, and Georgian and Abkhazian participants. We have also supported the establishment of laws and missing persons institutions in Colombia, Sri Lanka, Lebanon and Bougainville. Additionally, we continue to work with medico-legal institutions in countries such as South Africa, Iraq, Georgia and Colombia.

One example of the ICRC's work as a neutral intermediary: the Iraq-Kuwait Tripartite Commission

After the end of hostilities in the 1990-1991 Gulf War, and following UN Security Council Resolution 686, a special committee was created under the auspices of the ICRC to coordinate swift repatriation of prisoners of war (PoWs) in both directions. This "Tripartite Commission" consists of the allied coalition (France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) on one side and Iraq on the other, under the auspices and chairmanship of the ICRC as a third party. When it became evident that there were also many persons missing as a result of the conflict, a specific Plan of Action was adopted for the repatriation of mortal remains, along with tracing of PoWs and civilian detainees who were unaccounted for. The Commission continues to oversee the exchange of information between the parties, and more than 300 people have been accounted for as a result of its work.

Responding to the multifaceted needs of families of missing people

At the ICRC, we are committed to supporting the families of missing people, recognizing the complex psychological, social, legal and economic challenges they face as they cope with the uncertainty surrounding their loved ones' fate. To address these challenges, we take a holistic approach by assessing families' needs, advocating for the establishment or strengthening of state-led systems, and providing tailored support when necessary.

Central to our approach is the concept of "accompaniment", which involves supporting families throughout their journey. This means acting as a bridge between families and the individuals and organizations that can address their needs. We partner with local entities, including NGOs, family associations, service providers and National Societies, to facilitate access to essential services such as mental health care, legal and administrative assistance and economic support, all in line with families' cultural and religious practices. Our work is grounded in empathy, active listening and a commitment to helping families navigate the challenges they face. We also prioritize involving families in legislative reforms and support mechanisms, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are addressed.

Families of missing people are often the primary drivers in the search for their loved ones. Across continents and generations, they have organized, mobilized and engaged with local and national authorities, the military, civil society and international organizations to demand answers and recognition. Over the past four decades, family groups and associations worldwide have played a decisive role in shaping laws and advocating for mechanisms to search for missing people.



Guatemala. Missing people's families participated in the fourth International Conference for Families of Missing Persons through a conference hub that we set up in Guatemala. During the event, the families shared their experience, strengthened their solidarity and garnered support for their plight among the relevant organizations.

The ICRC empowers families to see themselves not just as individuals affected by loss but also as agents of change who can inspire, support and influence others. The biannual International Conference for Families of Missing Persons, an initiative of the ICRC's CTA, provides a global, family-centred and apolitical platform where families can connect, share experiences, amplify their collective voice and learn from one another across borders. Over time, the conference aims to strengthen families' ownership of engagement strategies, enhance their capacity to collaborate with the ICRC and other entities, and help them influence efforts beyond their own circumstances.

Commemoration is another vital aspect of the ICRC's work to support families. On 30 August, the International Day of the Disappeared,¹² we collaborate with family associations and local organizations worldwide to honour the memory of the missing and draw attention to the ongoing suffering of their families. Through discussions, workshops and themed events, the ICRC supports missing people's families in networking with authorities and civil society organizations.

In 2025, for example, in El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico and Panama, we helped organize exhibitions of embroidery created by people searching for missing relatives or paying tribute to those who died without learning the fate of their relatives.

Safeguarding the dignity of the dead

Respect for the dead and their families

In addition to tracing efforts, the ICRC's forensic teams play a vital role in resolving missing persons cases by supporting authorities in the proper handling, recovery and identification of human remains, as well as in ensuring that the information collected is accurately managed and traceable. This work not only helps families receive answers about their loved ones but also ensures that human remains are treated with dignity. It is essential for providing closure to families, upholding humanitarian principles and respecting the memory of those who have died.

Acting as a neutral intermediary and with the agreement of the relevant authorities and parties to a conflict, the ICRC provides support in transferring human remains from areas affected by fighting or internal disturbances to hospitals or mortuaries, where families can participate in the identification process and claim their loved ones. We also facilitate the transfer of human remains across borders or front lines, ensuring they are returned to families either directly or through the appropriate authorities. In some cases, we assist with the provisional burial of remains, carefully recording all relevant information, such as the location and date of discovery, and preserving all relevant items, such as photographs, identity documents and personal belongings, to aid in future identification efforts.

The ICRC's involvement in the identification process is another key component of our forensic work. This includes collecting ante-mortem data from families, such as medical and dental records, and presenting personal belongings found with the remains to help relatives confirm the identity. These sensitive efforts are always conducted with the utmost respect for the families and in close coordination with the relevant authorities.

Strengthening forensic capacities

The ICRC established the field of humanitarian forensic action, using its forensic expertise exclusively for humanitarian purposes. By developing internationally recognized standards and guidelines, we laid the foundation for the dignified management of human remains, a crucial step in resolving missing persons cases and providing closure to families.

A cornerstone of our work is strengthening local forensic capacities and the standards for handling and identifying human remains. This involves assessing the capabilities of local forensic institutions, advising them on their management practices and providing operational support when needed. We also focus on training and building the capacity of forensic specialists and first responders, ensuring they are equipped to safely and respectfully manage human remains in ways that facilitate identification. When local services are unable to meet demand, we step in as a temporary substitute to ensure that human remains are handled with dignity and respect.

To standardize forensic procedures and improve coordination among stakeholders, we develop tools and guidelines. Our efforts include supporting forensic institutions in data collection and management, such as gathering biological reference samples for DNA identification and maintaining records of unidentified remains. By providing expert advice, we help streamline processes and enhance collaboration among forensic institutions, specialists and other key participants.

The ICRC's operational support includes a wide range of practical measures, such as building and upgrading burial niches, renovating morgues to improve the storage of unidentified remains, providing essential supplies such as body bags and protective equipment, working with DNA laboratories to enhance the identification process and conducting training for personnel. In the context of migration, we can support the collection of biological reference samples to assist in DNA identification.

In 2025, for example, we organized workshops in Colombia on managing human remains after hostilities. These workshops were attended by community members, members of armed groups and first responders. With the direct involvement of ICRC forensic staff, the remains of 20 people killed in connection with armed conflict were recovered and handed over to the relevant authorities for identification. This process was carried out in coordination with the parties involved and local communities.



Syrian Arab Republic. With ICRC support, the staff at a forensic centre in Damascus improve their skills in identifying human remains, in order to provide families with answers about the fate of their loved ones.

At the forefront of advocacy

The ICRC plays a central role in shaping global efforts to address the devastating and long-lasting consequences of the issue of missing people. For example, the ICRC teamed up with the Swiss government to launch the Global Alliance for the Missing, a group of states advocating at the diplomatic and political levels to uphold and advance commitments to prevent and respond to cases of missing people. We serve as the Secretariat for the Global Alliance, offering our expertise and experience to strengthen the Global Alliance's representation in intergovernmental forums, issue joint statements and encourage comprehensive action on missing people. The aim of these efforts is to sustain political will, promote technical cooperation and facilitate the exchange of best practices.

Similarly, we support policy processes to enhance cooperation on missing migrants. This includes assisting in the establishment of a network of focal points under the Rabat Process, which brings together key European and African states to coordinate their efforts in the area of missing migrants.

The ICRC also strives to be at the forefront of contemporary policy and expert debates on missing people. In 2025, we explored the potential of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, machine learning and predictive analytics to enhance search efforts.¹³ By fostering cross-sector collaboration and driving dialogue on innovative solutions and other contemporary concerns, we ensure that the global response to missing people remains both effective and principled, prioritizing the dignity and rights of missing people and their families.

Key achievements in 2025



**Reuniting
and
bringing
answers to
separated
families**

1,772

**unaccompanied or
separated children**

newly registered by the
ICRC and/or National
Societies of whom:

- 739 girls
- 79 demobilized children

178,329

people

for whom a tracing
request was newly
registered

178

people

whose names
were listed on the
Movement's
family-links website

28,693

people

whose fates
or whereabouts
were established

796

people

including 715 children,
reunited with their
families

409,855

people

still being sought at the
end of the year, 42,596 of
whom were minors at the
time of disappearance

5,050

children

whose cases were still
being handled at the
end of the year

2,213

civilians

transferred or repatriated, including
across front lines, borders or boundary
lines, with the help of the ICRC acting
as a neutral intermediary

112

sets of human remains

transferred or repatriated including
across front lines, borders or boundary
lines, with the help of the ICRC acting
as a neutral intermediary



Helping
loved ones
reconnect
and keep
in touch

J. B. Nsaimbi/ICRC

92,796

RCMs collected

of which 20,098
from people deprived
of their liberty

1,464,251

phone and video calls

facilitated between family members separated
as a result of conflict or other violence, migration,
detention/internment or other circumstances

73,181

RCMs distributed

of which 11,685 to people
deprived of their liberty

7,074

phone calls

made by the ICRC
to inform families of
the whereabouts of a
detained/interned relative

4,160

**people deprived
of their liberty**

were visited by their
families with support
from the ICRC/National
Societies

631

**sets of
human remains**

were recovered
with ICRC support

6,261

people

trained in the recovery,
identification and
protection of human
remains



Protecting the
deceased

A. Al Waheidi/ICRC

Join us in turning commitment into lasting impact



The suffering, day after day, of people with a missing relative touches us deeply as humanitarians: the pain of a mother who can no longer cook her missing son's favourite meal; the anguish of a brother who has knocked on every possible door in search of answers; the sorrow of a daughter, not knowing when she will embrace her father again.

Yet the number of missing people in the world today is growing. This is a stark reminder that parties to a conflict, and those who support them, are failing to protect people during war. With stronger measures in place to prevent separation, safeguard those in detention and ensure the respectful treatment of the deceased, countless families could be spared a lifetime of anguish.

The ICRC remains steadfast in its commitment to working with families, authorities and parties to a conflict to help alleviate this immense suffering and prevent these numbers from rising even higher.

– Pierre Krähenbühl, ICRC Director-General



The issue of missing people demands immediate and sustained attention. It is both urgent and essential to uphold the families' right to know the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones. This is not just a matter of justice; it's a matter of humanity. While the journey to answers may take years – potentially spanning generations – it is vital to persevere. Every family of a missing person deserves clarity, closure and dignity. Despite the gravity of this issue, not enough is being done. Too many people – both combatants and civilians – are going missing in contemporary conflicts. Too many families are left in the dark, grappling with uncertainty and pain. More must be done to address this pressing issue and provide families with the answers they so desperately need.

Your support is critical: it strengthens our ability to safeguard family unity and uphold the right of people to know the fate of their loved ones. With your help, we can make a difference by:

- supporting states in fulfilling their obligation to prevent people from going missing and to search for those who do go missing
- acting swiftly to restore or maintain contact between separated family members and prevent people from going missing in the first place
- serving as a neutral intermediary between parties to a conflict, facilitating coordination in the search for missing people, and helping states take action to prevent people from going missing and to search for the missing
- continuing to work with National Societies and the Family Links Network to reconnect families across borders and crises
- searching for missing relatives and providing families with the answers, support and dignity they deserve throughout the process.

Your contribution enables the ICRC to continue this vital work, offering hope and healing to families that have endured tragic loss. Together, we can uphold their right to answers and ensure that no family is left to grieve in silence.

Together, we can make a difference.

- 1 Ambiguous loss, which is sometimes also referred to as frozen grief, describes the debilitating impact of losing a family member and not knowing their fate or whereabouts.
- 2 The following briefing note presents the findings of research conducted with families of missing persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus and Nepal to examine their role in fostering peace: <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/missing-persons-and-peacebuilding-role-families-missing>.
- 3 For more information about the CTA, visit <https://missingpersons.icrc.org/about-us>.
- 4 The following publication provides an overview of the international legal framework regarding missing persons and their family: https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file_list/missing_persons_and_their_families_.pdf.
- 5 For more on the Movement's RFL strategy, visit: https://rcrcconference.org/app/uploads/2026/03/CoD24_9-Background-Doc-RFL-EN.pdf.
- 6 For more on the Family Links Network, visit: <https://familylinks.icrc.org/>.
- 7 An overview of IHL provisions that address missing persons can be found here: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/missing-persons-and-their-families-factsheet>.
- 8 For the text of the Convention, see https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?src=treaty&mtdsg_no=iv-16&chapter=4.
- 9 Anyone can carry out a search in the ICRC's archives on prisoners of the First World War here: <https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/>.
- 10 For information on how the ICRC is digitizing its archives, visit: <https://blogs.icrc.org/cross-files/safeguarding-archives/>.
- 11 See *National Mechanisms for Missing Persons: a Toolbox*: <https://shop.icrc.org/download/ebook?sku=4601/002-ebook>.
- 12 For more information on the International Day of the Disappeared, visit: <https://missingpersons.icrc.org/idod>.
- 13 In June 2025, the ICRC co-organized the *Symposium on New Technologies and the Missing*, an event held in Geneva. In June 2026, the Global Alliance for the Missing, together with Croatia, Luxembourg and Switzerland, sponsored and convened a side event of the Human Rights Council to take these discussions to the international community.

Cover image: Democratic Republic of the Congo. Tchonka airfield in Shabunda, South Kivu province.
A girl is reunited with her parents by the ICRC after six years of separation.