



Restoring Family Links in the twenty-first century

(Workshop 8)

Outline

Key highlights

Restoring Family Links (RFL) is a core service of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement), embodying our Fundamental Principles of humanity, unity and universality. When developing a new RFL Strategy, we need to ask ourselves some critical questions to ensure we are providing relevant and efficient services to separated families, in an environment that has significantly changed over the past decade:

- How do we ensure coherence across the Family Links Network?
- What kind of external actors are most relevant as global partners?
- How do we integrate data protection requirements in RFL services?
- How do we diversify resource mobilization for RFL?
- What is required of the Family Links Network to perform efficiently in the twenty-first century?

Background information

Following the 2015 Council of Delegates, where a progress report was submitted on the RFL Strategy 2008–2018, the Movement began collaborating on a process to develop the next RFL Strategy for the period after 2018, including consultation with external actors. To inform this process, research began to assess National Society RFL capacity, RFL relevance, and information and communication technology (ICT) developments affecting our operating environment.

To support this process, a new RFL Strategy Implementation Group was established, made up of representatives of each geographical region, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Thematic working groups were tasked with further analysing the context and developing preliminary strategic orientations for the RFL Strategy 2018+. These are set out below, and supported by the resolution submitted to the 2017 Council of Delegates, with the aim of submitting a finalized strategic framework to the 2019 Council of Delegates.

Strategic orientations to be discussed at the 2017 Council of Delegates workshop:

1. Meaningful participation of affected people in developing RFL services
2. Ensuring missing persons and their families are positioned at the heart of RFL
3. Provision of connectivity as aid, and investment in modern ICT
4. Active, personalized and enduring searches as a unique feature of the Movement response
5. Meeting data protection requirements
6. Global focus on RFL in the context of migration
7. Investment in strengthening RFL capacity and the emergency response of the Family Links Network
8. Systematic and targeted RFL promotion and communication
9. Mobilization of and partnerships with other actors

It is proposed that an RFL Leadership Platform be set up to drive forward the strategy development and implementation during this period of adjustment.

Emerging themes affecting RFL include:

- Advances in digital proximity and social media networks. Increasingly beneficiaries are seeking connectivity, as this allows many separated individuals to get back in touch with loved ones themselves. The Movement needs to harness the opportunities of ICT developments by integrating the advantages they bring into the unique and more traditional methods used by the Family Links Network.
- Increasing levels of migration. The 2016 survey revealed that a significant majority of National Societies are addressing the needs of migrants as part of their community work. Migration – particularly that caused by humanitarian crises – can expose people to great hardships and countless risks, including separation from their families. This can lead to increased vulnerability, particularly for children.
- Increased interest in RFL outcomes. The Movement's expertise in this field is unquestioned by other agencies, but competition is growing – and this brings with it concerns regarding data quality and protection standards. Over two thirds of National Societies have reported engaging with external actors regarding RFL services, with UNHCR identified as the main stakeholder, demonstrating the need to explore innovative partnerships.

To assess National Societies' ability to tackle these challenges, a global survey was conducted in 2016. Analysis of the responses will continue into 2018, but initial findings indicate that there has been progress made on building the Family Links Network's ownership, assessment and capacity; integrating the RFL programme into the National Societies' and authorities' disaster plans; coordinating within the Family Links Network and with external partners; and adapting services to meet beneficiary needs. The innovation demonstrated by National Societies in meeting the needs in their communities is to be commended.

However, despite increased levels of ownership within the Network, this has not translated into a corresponding increase in resource allocation. What's more, without a systematic monitoring methodology supported by full roll-out of a data management system across the board, the Family Links Network is failing to demonstrate its impact, which has led to an undervaluing of the programme and missed resource-generating opportunities.

The impact of the changing humanitarian context and the shortcomings in tackling inconsistencies in the Network mean that the Movement as a whole must reaffirm its commitment to sustaining and building the Family Links Network. The Network must urgently project its RFL services into the future, while striking a balance with the need to maintain the unique, personalized service that allows us to address the needs of the most vulnerable. To do this we must strengthen the functionality of the Network, better understand the causes of family separation today, use new technologies to deliver the most comprehensive and effective outcomes for beneficiaries, and leverage the added value of engaging with key stakeholders through global partnerships.

To this end, the Family Links Network is calling for support for a resolution submitted to the 2017 Council of Delegates which aims to pursue the development of an RFL strategy for beyond 2018, reaffirm the unique position of the Movement in carrying out RFL services, strengthen the capacity of the Network, and ensure the implementation of minimum data protection standards.

Objectives of the workshop

1. Exchange views on challenges arising from the fast-changing context in which the Movement is delivering its RFL services and on strategies to address them.
2. Define our common vision for the future of RFL.

3. Discuss the preliminary strategic orientations and the RFL Leadership Platform proposal put forward with a view to shaping the development of the RFL Strategy 2018+.
4. Secure engagement and investment from Movement leadership in strengthening the capacity of the Family Links Network.

Guiding questions

In order to come up with an overarching vision for the future of RFL services, we must ask ourselves:

1. What is our collective vision for the future?
2. How do modern means of communication impact on RFL service delivery and engagement with communities?
3. How do we adjust to these and make best use of new technologies?
4. How do we best integrate RFL into related Movement services in response to migration and disasters?
5. How can we best organize ourselves as a global network and optimize our cooperation with a growing number of other actors who have a stake in RFL activities?

References

- 2017 Council of Delegates background report, *Restoring Family Links in the Twenty-First Century* (see forthcoming mailing)
- 2015 Council of Delegates progress report, *Restoring Family Links Strategy for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (2008–2018)*: http://rcrcconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/CD15-Progress-Report-Restoring-Family-Links-Strategy_EN.pdf
- 2011 Council of Delegates progress report, *The Restoring Family Links (RFL) Strategy for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (2008–2018)*: <https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/red-cross-crescent-movement/council-delegates-2011/council-delegates-2011-progress-report-rfl-strat-11-11-6-en.pdf>
- Restoring Family Links Strategy 2008–2018: <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/0967-restoring-family-links-strategy>