

Council of Delegates 2017 REPORT ON THE WORKSHOP

RESTORING FAMILY LINKS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Chair: Mr Gustavo Lara Tapia (Dominican RC), Mr Emmanuel Kouadio (Ivory Coast RC)

Rapporteur: Mr Noel Clement (Australian RC)

(A) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Restoring Family Links (RFL) workshop commenced with the voices of two people, Saleh and Nasfisa, who shared their personal story of how they lost contact for four years due to a conflict and were eventually reunited thanks to the RFL services of the Family Links Network (FL Network).

This set the scene for a panel of experts to explore key issues affecting RFL services, particularly the increased scale and complexity of migration, significant developments in technology and the persistent need for data protection measures. Three ‘Ps’ that could summarize the proposed new direction for RFL – participation of affected people, privacy (data protection) and partnerships – were explored and a fourth proposed – people as a key strength of the Movement.

The audience shared experiences from their own particular context. Participants talked about the need for RFL along migratory trails and in disaster situations. It was agreed that advances in technology have not replaced the need for traditional RFL services. There was strong commitment from National Societies for RFL to be made a priority, although some additional support needs were identified, particularly in relation to data protection compliance. Overall, it was acknowledged that with increased demand and new technology developments there is an opportunity for RFL to use both existing and new approaches to meet the needs of separated families.

(B) GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Testimony – Mr Saleh Musa Adam and Ms Nasfisa Adam Abdi

Saleh and Nasfisa shared their story of how they were separated, got back in touch with assistance from the FL Network and were eventually reunited. Saleh found out about the RFL service through a friend. He spoke of his concern about how his personal information might be used when it was first suggested he place his photo online on the Trace the Face website.

Nasfisa told her story too. She heard about RFL services from others who had fled their homes. When the RFL team was explaining the Trace the Face website to Nasfisa, she saw one of them was her husband. As she had no phone or other means of communication, the RFL team arranged a Skype call with Saleh. She said when she saw his face on the screen it was ‘like a dream, I wept...then we talked for three hours’.

Key points to note: need to better promote the RFL service – Saleh and Nasfisa both found out by word of mouth; do not assume that people have means of communication – Nasfisa did not have a phone or any other means of contacting Saleh; protect data – both Nasfisa and Saleh were initially sceptical and concerned about their privacy.

Future RFL directions – Florence Anselmo (ICRC) and Emily Knox (British RC)

A summary was provided on the conclusions of consultations to date. These included:

- The unprecedented level of migration, with 20 people displaced every minute. Migration transcends borders and regions. While this is a challenge, it also presents an opportunity for the Movement to demonstrate the value of the FL Network, which is both global and rooted in local communities.
- Technology has changed how we live and provides enormous scope for RFL.
- One of the first requests from migrants is connectivity to maintain contact with family and friends and to access essential services. We need to be more systematic in providing connectivity as aid.
- Privacy and data protection are critical. We are handling personal data in complex situations, and people are acutely aware of the risks so they need to be able to trust us. The RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection needs to be built on, implemented and monitored. Above all, we need to do no harm, and that includes digital harm.
- Need for political commitment – establishing an RFL Leadership Platform.

- We need to invest in building the capacity of the FL Network and integrate it fully with disaster management response.
- External communication needs to be systematic and targeted – we must advertise.
- For some people, technology is not a solution; we still need to use traditional methods.

Panelists: Mr Jagan Chapagain (IFRC), Ms Charlotte Lindsey (ICRC) and Mr Ahmed Idris (Kenya RC). Moderator: Mr Yves Daccord (ICRC)

A panel explored the changing context in which RFL is now operating and the opportunities presented for RFL. Some key highlights included:

- There is a universal need to remain connected with family. Advances in technology are primarily about connecting people.
- Migration to Europe is very much in the news, but 86% is happening in other parts of the world. Think about where/why migration is happening and whether people want to be in contact.
- There is a need for a fourth P – people.
- While technology is available, people may need support to access or use it.
- What happens with personal data when entrusted to the Movement is a strong selling point!

(C) KEY POINTS RAISED ON GUIDING QUESTIONS

National Societies were encouraged to provide input on the proposed directions outlined and the challenges and opportunities they identified. These included:

- The importance of RFL in a disaster context (e.g. Ecuador, Peru, Columbia) and the increased demand for RFL in relation to migration (e.g. Italy, Cuba).
- How violence and other situations can prevent people maintaining contact with family along migratory trails. Initiatives are in place (e.g. Mexico) to respond to this and include both traditional tools and new initiatives.
- There is a strong commitment among National Societies for RFL and the resolution.
- There is a need to be more proactive given the problem of minors separated from their families.
- People define their own needs and choose what platforms they want to service them.
- Technology companies are good at scale. We need to consider how to scale our networks.
- Information is power, and providing connectivity is a form of aid.
- There is no single, universal response. We need to be able to tailor to individual situations.
- Technology does not bring interpersonal skills, compassion, etc. Technology should add value to what we do, not replace it.
- National Societies need help to meet data protection regulations. The Code of Conduct for Data Protection is relatively new, and there is some complexity in determining how to roll it out.

(D) CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is critically important that we hear the voices of affected people.
- Connectivity is critical for migrants and, following disasters, is often a first request.
- There have been significant advances in technology that provide opportunity for increased efficiency and scale. We need to partner with others to fully realize this potential.
- Many people still need support to access and use technology; technology alone is insufficient. Traditional and new methods of RFL are needed. We need to connect the opportunities provided by technology with the interpersonal skills, compassion and networks the Movement has to offer.
- Data protection is critical to people trusting us with their personal information and provides an opportunity for the Movement; we need to roll out the framework for data protection. Many National Societies will need assistance with technology and data protection.
- We need to look at how we support people in maintaining family links as well as in restoring them.
- We need to better promote the RFL service – information is power.
- *Participation, Privacy, Partnerships and People* guide the development of the new RFL Strategy.
- RFL is the embodiment of our principle of humanity.