

**Power of humanity**

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**COUNCIL OF DELEGATES**  
**OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS**  
**AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT**

Geneva, Switzerland  
8 December 2019

**Restoring Family Links: Strategy for the International Red Cross  
and Red Crescent Movement 2020–2025**

**Draft resolution**

**Document prepared by  
the International Committee of the Red Cross in cooperation with the other members  
of the RFL Leadership Platform and the RFL Strategy Implementation Group (28  
National Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent  
Societies)**

Geneva, 9 September 2019

## DRAFT RESOLUTION

### Restoring Family Links: Strategy for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement 2020–2025

The Council of Delegates,

*deeply concerned* about the suffering endured by those who have lost contact with, have no news of or are separated from their loved ones as a consequence of armed conflicts, disasters and other emergencies as well as in the context of migration,

*stressing* the importance of clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing persons, *highlighting* in this regard the right of families to know the fate and whereabouts of their relatives, as provided by international humanitarian law (IHL), *recalling* other relevant international obligations, as applicable, and *taking into account* the important role of States in this respect,

*further stressing* the importance of restoring contact between separated family members and *recalling* other relevant obligations, including international humanitarian law obligations, as applicable, to facilitate, in every possible way, the reunion of families dispersed as a result of armed conflict and to allow for the exchange of family news,

*recalling* the respective mandates of the components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement), based on the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977, the Statutes of the Movement and resolutions of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, including the role of the Central Tracing Agency of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the auxiliary role of the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies) in providing support to their respective public authorities in the humanitarian field,

*recalling* the Restoring Family Links (RFL) Strategy 2008–2018 adopted in Resolution 4 of the Council of Delegates in 2007 and *noting with satisfaction* the achievements made during the course of its implementation, while *recognizing* that further efforts are required to strengthen the capacity of the Family Links Network to assist people who are without news of or separated from members of their families and *acknowledging* the need to deliver Restoring Family Links within a broader framework of protection activities conducted by the Movement,

*recalling* the RFL resolution adopted at the 2017 Council of Delegates and the Background report which outlined the preliminary main orientations of the new draft RFL Strategy, *expressing appreciation* for the efforts and commitment of the ICRC and the RFL Strategy Implementation Group in developing the RFL Strategy for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement 2020–2025 and *recalling* the Global Strategy on Migration adopted by the 2017 General Assembly of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC),

1. *adopts* the Restoring Family Links Strategy for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement 2020–2025 (annexed to this resolution);

2. *calls upon* all National Societies, the ICRC and the IFRC to:
  - a. promote knowledge and understanding of this Strategy at all levels of their respective organizations
  - b. implement the measures outlined in this Strategy as part of their organizational strategies and plans at national, regional and international level and
  - c. allocate the necessary resources to carry them out;
3. *encourages* the ICRC and the IFRC to enhance their cooperation with a view to supporting National Societies in their efforts to implement the Strategy and *encourages* National Societies to establish partnerships to support each other in building their RFL capacity;
4. *requests* the components of the Movement to bring the RFL Strategy 2020–2025 to the attention of the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent with a view, in particular, to encouraging the member States of the Conference to support the RFL activities carried out by the Movement and its efforts in aspects concerning privacy, including as it relates to personal data protection;
5. *invites* the ICRC to continue to chair the RFL Strategy Implementation Group for the purpose of supporting and monitoring the implementation of the RFL Strategy 2020–2025;
6. *commends* the work undertaken by the RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection Application Group, *encourages* it to continue to support the application of the RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection and *calls upon* the components of the Movement to provide expertise and resources for this process, including a dedicated resource to assist National Societies with implementing the RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection;
7. *commends* the establishment of the RFL Leadership Platform and *calls upon* it to continue to address critical issues for the future of RFL services, to steer the implementation of the RFL Strategy 2020–2025 and to encourage other leaders in the Movement to champion it;
8. *welcomes* the proposal to create a Movement RFL Medal for outstanding services in the field of RFL and *invites* the RFL Leadership Platform to develop regulations and conditions for the Medal, in consultation with all the components of the Movement, and submit them to the 2021 Council of Delegates for adoption, together with the nominations of the first recipients of the Medal;
9. *invites* the components of the Movement to report to the 2023 Council of Delegates on the results achieved through the implementation of the RFL Strategy 2020–2025 and the RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection.

**Restoring Family Links Strategy for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement 2020–2025**

# RESTORING FAMILY LINKS STRATEGY FOR THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT 2020–2025

Document prepared by the Central Tracing Agency of the International Committee of the Red Cross together with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, September 2019 (Original: English)

## Introduction

Clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing persons<sup>1</sup> and ensuring contact between separated family members is first and foremost the responsibility of the State authorities. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement), however, has a crucial role to play. Restoring Family Links (RFL) lies at the origin of the Movement and at the heart of the work of its components. RFL is the embodiment of the principle of humanity, and it is in this domain that the unique character of the Movement's global network is truly demonstrated. Every year, hundreds of thousands of people benefit from the Movement's RFL services.

The Family Links Network comprises the Central Tracing Agency (the CTA), the RFL units at the International Committee of the Red Cross (the ICRC) delegations and the RFL/tracing services of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies). RFL can only be successful if the Family Links Network can count on each of its members. All the components – the ICRC, the National Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (the IFRC) – have a shared responsibility to maintain and strengthen this Network and its services. To this end, the Movement adopted the first Restoring Family Links Strategy for the Movement 2008–2018 at the 2007 Council of Delegates.<sup>2</sup> The present RFL Strategy 2020–2025<sup>3</sup> builds on and follows up on the first Strategy, ensuring that RFL is fit for purpose and taking into account the important new challenges of today and the developing complexities of the future.

## PART I: RESTORING FAMILY LINKS STRATEGY

### 1. Vision

- All people are able to maintain links with their loved ones and are protected from separation and going missing.
- All people are able to access Restoring Family Links services and interact with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Family Links Network wherever they are.
- All people without news of their family members receive answers about the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones as rapidly as possible.
- Throughout the time of search and separation, the families of missing persons and separated families are supported by the Movement to ensure their dignity and well-being and, where possible, to restore family unity.

### 2. The Restoring Family Links mission of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Whenever people are at risk of being separated or going missing, have been separated or are without news of their loved ones as a result of armed conflicts, disasters and other emergencies or in the context of migration, the Movement responds efficiently and effectively by mobilizing its own resources and the authorities to prevent families

<sup>1</sup> "While there is no legal definition of a missing person under international law, the ICRC understands missing persons as individuals of whom their families have no news and/or who, on the basis of reliable information, have been reported missing as a result of an armed conflict – international or non-international – or of other situations of violence or any other situation that might require action by a neutral and independent body. (Definition based on ICRC, *Missing Persons: A Handbook for Parliamentarians*, Geneva, 2009, available at: [www.icrc.org/en/publication/1117-missing-persons-handbook-parliamentarians](http://www.icrc.org/en/publication/1117-missing-persons-handbook-parliamentarians)). This includes disasters and the context of migration ... There is no element of time and no presumption of death included in the ICRC's definition of a missing person. Hence, the ICRC considers persons to be missing from the moment their families report them missing, meaning there is no 'waiting period' before considering a person missing. At the other end of the spectrum, a person is considered no longer missing when the family has received sufficient, reliable and credible information on the fate and whereabouts of their sought relative." ("The Missing", *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 99, No. 905, 2017, pp. 536–537).

<sup>2</sup> The duration of the RFL Strategy 2008–2018 has been extended by the RFL Resolution of the 2017 Council of Delegates until the adoption of the new RFL Strategy by the Council of Delegates in 2019.

<sup>3</sup> In view of the rapidly changing environment, it was deemed preferable to set the duration of the present RFL Strategy at six rather than eleven years.

from being separated and people from going missing, maintain and restore family links and family unity, clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons and support the families left behind according to their needs.

### 3. The scope of Restoring Family Links services

Our RFL services cover the full spectrum from prevention of family separation and disappearances and maintaining family contact, to searching for missing persons, providing answers to their families, restoring family links and providing support to families during the search and supporting family reunification.

We provide RFL services in the context of armed conflicts, disasters, emergencies, migration and other situations requiring a humanitarian response.

### 4. Restoring Family Links operating principles and approach

1. We place people at the centre of our services; we develop and deliver our services together with affected people and ensure a personalized, long-term follow-up.
2. We ensure the protection of personal data and strictly abide by the Fundamental Principles and the mission of the Movement so that people are able to fully trust our services.
3. We are committed to systematically providing the full spectrum of RFL services to migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers,<sup>4</sup> regardless of their legal status, all along migration routes from countries of origin through countries of transit to the countries where they settle.
4. We operate on the basis of assessed needs, giving first priority to the most vulnerable groups and individuals, such as unaccompanied and separated children, detainees, the elderly, persons with disabilities and individuals with specific protection needs, including survivors of trafficking, torture, violence or other forms of trauma.
5. We integrate RFL services into a multidisciplinary response to the needs of the families of missing persons and separated families which may include mental health and psychosocial support and legal, administrative and socioeconomic assistance. This is a long-term process and requires a shared long-term commitment by all stakeholders both politically and in terms of resources.
6. We operate as a truly global and grass-roots network and invest in strengthening our response capacity and improving regional and supra-regional cooperation and coherence within the Movement.
7. Notwithstanding the utilization and growing importance of technology and connectivity, we commit to maintaining personal contact and personalized searches as a core strength of our RFL services.
8. We invest in research and analysis and in the continuous development of modern technology across the Network. We monitor and leverage the means and tools offered by digital technology and integrate them into our RFL services.
9. We mobilize and engage in partnerships with all actors and stakeholders who implement a principled approach and can contribute to RFL services without compromising the security of the people concerned and the Movement's identity and Fundamental Principles.
10. We maintain our independence from States, parties to a conflict and other stakeholders and cannot be instrumentalized.

### 5. The external environment

This section attempts to take stock of new, emerging and fast-changing issues that have impacted the way we deliver RFL services globally since the previous RFL Strategy 2008–2018.

#### Missing persons and their families

The uncertainty associated with not knowing the fate and whereabouts of a loved one causes great suffering and can be extremely distressing. For a parent, child, sibling, wife or husband, knowing what has happened to their loved one can be even more important than water, food or shelter. The family members of people that have gone

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<sup>4</sup> The Movement uses a deliberately broad description of migrants to include all people who leave or flee their place of habitual residence to seek safety or better prospects, which includes, among others, labour migrants, stateless migrants and migrants deemed irregular by public authorities as well as refugees and asylum seekers, notwithstanding the fact that they constitute a special category under international law (IFRC Policy on Migration, 2009, available at: [https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/03/Migration-Policy\\_EN.pdf](https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/03/Migration-Policy_EN.pdf)).

missing will not stop searching until they know their fate and whereabouts. In trying to find an answer, they exhaust their resources and might even put themselves and other family members at risk.

People go missing as a result of armed conflicts, disasters and other emergencies as well as in the context of migration, and this has damaging and long-lasting humanitarian consequences. People going missing in situations of conflict and violence is not only an immeasurable tragedy for the families and communities affected but might also affect the peace process.

The problem of the missing takes on a truly global dimension in its overlap with migration. Thousands of people go missing every year along precarious migration routes around the world. The vast majority of people who die in such circumstances remain unidentified. Improving the response to these challenges in order to provide answers to the families of missing migrants requires the coordination and harmonization of practices among a wide range of actors across multiple countries, regions and continents.

## **Internal displacement**

Armed conflicts, violence and disasters can force people to leave their homes, leading to accelerated and collective movements. Displaced people might seek assistance and protection within their own country or might find refuge across international borders.

Of the 70.3 million people displaced globally at the end of 2018, the majority – 41.3 million people – remained displaced within their own country due to conflict and violence. In 2018, an additional 17.2 million people were newly displaced by disaster.<sup>5</sup>

In situations of internal displacement, people face specific needs and vulnerabilities as they often live in precarious conditions, unable to meet their basic needs and at heightened risk of violence, including sexual violence or other forms of abuse. They often face obstacles in rebuilding their lives because they lack official documentation and adequate access to essential services, accommodation and employment. All these situations bring about complex assistance and protection needs, including those arising from family separation. Large numbers of people go missing and families become separated when displaced by conflict, violence and disasters.

This is often due to the unplanned nature of flight, i.e. people might flee in different directions and have trouble finding one another again, or children and older or disabled people may remain behind and/or lose contact with their families and care-givers. Screening procedures carried out by the authorities upon arrival at the displacement location may separate families because women and children, who are not usually perceived as a security threat, are let go without being adequately informed as to the fate and whereabouts of their male relatives who are taken into custody. Concerns about family unity are sometimes disregarded when newly displaced people are accommodated in camps or during large organized returns carried out by the authorities. Unaccompanied children are particularly vulnerable to forced recruitment into armed groups, exploitation, sexual and gender-based violence and trafficking.

Protracted displacement due to conflict, violence or disaster often exacerbates the suffering of the families of people that have gone missing. These families find themselves in a “double limbo” because they do not know what has happened to their relatives and because they face uncertainty about whether or when they will be able to resolve their situation of displacement.

## **Migration**

Migration is a complex phenomenon touching all parts of the world. Migration trails stretch across entire regions and continents, often through dangerous areas and countries affected by conflict, violence and adverse conditions. Routes change very frequently, making the response to humanitarian needs even more difficult. The United Nations estimated the number of migrants at 191 million in 2005 and more than 257 million in 2017.<sup>6</sup> While many migrants arrive safely in a country of destination and integrate into new communities, others endure great hardships and face countless risks. Losing contact with family members is one of these risks. Children are especially vulnerable; some travel on their own, and others lose contact with their family during the journey.

There are many reasons why migrants might lose contact with family members, including incidents in their country of origin or as they travel through countries of transit to their destination as well as illness, injury, detention, trafficking, deportation and a lack of means, access or resources. A recent assessment has shown that migrants hardly ever anticipate or prepare for the possibility of being separated.<sup>7</sup> Every year, thousands of migrants die or go missing on their journey, leaving their families waiting for answers about their fate. The International Organization

<sup>5</sup> See Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2019*, available at: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2019/>. See also [www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html](http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html).

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/>

<sup>7</sup> Restoring Family Links Assessment: Migration Europe, December 2018.

for Migration (IOM) recorded nearly 25,000 migrant deaths globally between January 2014 and July 2017, 14,500 in the Central Mediterranean alone. The real figure could be much higher, and for other regions few figures are available and there is less visibility. When migrants die, their bodies are not always properly cared for nor are steps taken to ensure they can be identified by the relevant authorities. In addition, in the context of migration, it is much more difficult to identify, contact and organize the families of missing persons as they may be dispersed across different countries.

## **Climate and the environment**

Climate change is one of the most serious challenges of our and future generations. The frequency and severity of extreme weather events and climate uncertainty have increased and will continue to do so. Over the past decade alone, there have been around 3,000 weather-related disasters, not including other crises, such as conflicts or population movements, where climate may have been a threat multiplier. This amounts to one weather- or climate-related disaster almost every day.<sup>8</sup>

Climate shocks are experienced acutely in coastal areas and some of the world's poorest regions, including large parts of Central and South-West Asia, the Horn of Africa and North Africa,<sup>9</sup> and these same countries and regions are consistently affected by recurring disasters. This results in the poorest and most vulnerable communities suffering the greatest consequences through loss of life, economic setbacks and livelihood erosion. Armed conflict, unplanned urbanization, environmental degradation and social marginalization, together with factors such as disability, age, gender and social and economic inequalities, all exacerbate the impacts.

The expected future trends of more frequent and severe weather extremes and an increase in climate events will potentially contribute to growing population movements both within countries and across international borders, requiring a scaling up of humanitarian response, including the provision of RFL services.

## **The digital revolution**

Rapid advances in digital technology and the exponential increase in mobile phone use, social media networks and access to the internet are having a transformative impact on all aspects of people's lives and on RFL services. An ever-increasing number of people can keep in contact with family members and trace a missing relative through such means as well as find information and access services. Therefore, connectivity must be part of RFL services as it is one of the first things affected people ask to be assisted with.

However, digital technology cannot replace the multifaceted activities carried out by the Family Links Network. It is when people are unable to find their relatives and restore contact with them on their own that a personalized, active and sustained search by the Family Links Network becomes essential. This work is therefore also becoming more complex and difficult.

Technology offers tremendous new opportunities to the Family Links Network for leveraging enhanced proximity to affected people, searching for missing persons and improving collaboration with other stakeholders. On the other hand, new information and communication technology may lead to new risks which need to be carefully addressed, in particular through strict personal data protection standards.

The use of such new technology will have a substantial impact on internal work processes and require a fundamental overhaul and upgrading of the capacities of the Family Links Network.

Individuals may have limited means to search for their loved ones. Authorities and stakeholders may prevent access to communication or may monitor it as a means to exert control over a population – especially in situations of armed conflict. Modern technology exposes people to an increased risk of their personal data being used to harm them. These concerns may prevent individuals from using new technologies when searching for missing loved ones. The Family Links Network's trusted RFL services, with their effective access and compliance with data protection standards, therefore remain an important and secure option for many individuals.

## **Data protection**

Attention to personal data protection has grown substantially in the last decade, with the introduction of new data protection regulations in many countries to keep pace with the tremendous development of digital technology and the opportunities it offers. As the transfer of personal data across international borders is a core dimension of RFL services, these new legal frameworks and technologies have a fundamental impact on them. The cross-border nature of RFL activities and this evolving landscape in which the components of the Family Links Network operate

<sup>8</sup> *The Red Cross Red Crescent ambition to address the climate crisis*, IFRC, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> European Commission, European Political Strategy Centre, [10 Trends Shaping Migration](#), 2017.

require adherence to strict data protection standards as well as careful and regular assessment of the impact of new technologies on RFL.

The RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection<sup>10</sup> has been developed to address this challenge and is the first such document applicable to all the components of the Movement. It serves as a guide, setting out minimum principles and commitments aimed at enabling the flow of personal data needed within the Movement to perform RFL activities while ensuring that personal data is collected and processed lawfully, fairly and only for humanitarian purposes. Such limitations are necessary to safeguard the fundamental rights and freedoms of affected people and maintain their trust in the Family Links Network. This is particularly true in the face of increasing data security risks and a concerning trend towards the adoption of legislation and measures at the domestic level to gain access to such data for non-humanitarian purposes.

## 6. The Family Links Network

### Roles within the Movement and the structure of the Family Links Network

#### The role of the ICRC

As a neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian organization, the ICRC has the role of protecting and assisting people affected by international and non-international armed conflict and other situations of violence. Article 5.3 of the Movement's Statutes expands this role to include other types of situations and establishes a permanent basis on which the ICRC can take any humanitarian initiative compatible with its status as a specifically neutral and independent organization and intermediary.

The ICRC has the important task of reminding the authorities of their obligations under international humanitarian law and other relevant bodies of law with regard to family links and carrying out direct action in the field when and for as long as required and possible.

The part played by the ICRC in RFL, including its lead role within the Movement, is more precisely defined by the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977; the Statutes of the Movement, in particular Article 5.2(e) specifying the role of the ICRC in ensuring the operation of the Central Tracing Agency (CTA) as provided in the Geneva Conventions; resolutions of the Movement's statutory bodies, in particular those of the 25th and 26th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (International Conference) (Geneva, 1986 and 1995), which recall and commend the role of the ICRC's CTA as coordinator and technical adviser to National Societies and governments; and resolutions of the Council of Delegates, including the Seville Agreement and its Supplementary Measures.

Based on these resolutions, in addition to its operational responsibilities, the ICRC, through the CTA, is tasked with coordinating, providing advice and strengthening the capacity of its partners within the Movement in RFL matters in all situations requiring a humanitarian response from the Movement. The CTA promotes consistency within the Family Links Network, provides methodologies and guidelines<sup>11</sup> and builds information systems<sup>12</sup> for the whole Family Links Network.

As coordinator, the CTA, in consultation with Movement partners, decides what action is to be taken in armed conflicts or other situations of violence, based on its mandate. In other circumstances requiring an international effort, it coordinates the international activities of other National Societies' RFL services, when needed and in close consultation with the National Societies of the affected countries, to ensure the most effective response possible to RFL needs.

As technical adviser, the CTA establishes guidelines and working procedures for RFL services in all situations. It helps organize and conduct training seminars and regional meetings for the purpose of sharing and consolidating knowledge and experience and planning and reflecting on progress in implementing the RFL Strategy.

<sup>10</sup> RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection, 2015, available at: [www.icrc.org/en/document/rfl-code-conduct](http://www.icrc.org/en/document/rfl-code-conduct).

<sup>11</sup> <https://flextranet.familylinks.icrc.org/en/Pages/home.aspx>

<sup>12</sup> "Information system, an integrated set of components for collecting, storing, and processing data and for providing information, knowledge, and digital products." (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*) "Any specific information system aims to support operations, management and decision-making. An information system is the information and communication technology (ICT) that an organization uses, and also the way in which people interact with this technology in support of business processes." (Wikipedia)



The CTA manages the RFL Pool of Specialists<sup>13</sup> and deploys it when required, in coordination and consultation with the National Societies, and with the IFRC in situations where the latter acts as Lead Agency.

### **The role of the National Societies**

The functions of National Societies are set out in Article 3 of the Movement's Statutes. National Societies must carry out their humanitarian activities in conformity with the Fundamental Principles of the Movement. They must act in accordance with their own statutes and national legislation and are recognized as auxiliaries to their public authorities in the humanitarian field. In particular, their role is to assist the victims of armed conflict, as provided in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols, and the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies who are in need of help (Arts 3.1 and 3.2 of the Movement's Statutes). They contribute, as far as they are able, to the development of other National Societies (Art. 3.3). The Seville Agreement stresses that a National Society is responsible for its own development. The National Society Development Framework<sup>14</sup> of the IFRC further develops this concept.

As outlined in Resolution XVI of the 25th International Conference, National Societies have an important role as components of the international network for tracing and reuniting families. They must continue their work as long as needs exist, and this may extend well beyond the end of a conflict, disaster or other emergencies.

National Societies are also called upon to act in accordance with resolutions adopted at the statutory meetings of the Movement, resolutions of regional Red Cross and Red Crescent conferences and policy frameworks adopted by the IFRC covering migration and natural disasters.

In view of the Movement's responsibility for helping to preserve or restore family unity, National Societies need to incorporate their RFL activities into an overall plan of action. They also draw the attention of the public, humanitarian agencies and governments to the existence and significance of their RFL activities. In addition, National Societies are responsible for setting up or consolidating an effective national RFL network. Depending on the circumstances, they work with the CTA, the relevant ICRC delegations and/or the tracing/RFL services of other National Societies. They decide what action is to be taken during disasters and may call on the ICRC to deploy the RFL Pool of Specialists where the RFL response required is beyond their capacity.

### **The role of the IFRC**

The functions of the IFRC are defined in Article 6 of the Movement's Statutes and in the Seville Agreement and its Supplementary Measures. Amongst other functions, the Secretariat has the lead role regarding the development of National Societies and the coordination of support for their institutional development.

Although the Movement's Statutes do not specifically mention the part played by the IFRC in RFL, it strives, in coordination with the ICRC, to support National Societies in including RFL in their development plans and ensuring that disaster preparedness and response plans emphasize the role and importance of RFL.

In the event of a disaster,<sup>15</sup> the Secretariat ensures that assessments take into account the need for RFL and the degree to which the National Societies of affected countries can respond. The role of the Secretariat also includes liaising with the ICRC to support the CTA in its lead role in RFL and cooperating in the deployment of the RFL Pool of Specialists.

### **The RFL Leadership Platform, the RFL Strategy Implementation Group and the Application Group for the RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection**

Established on the basis of the RFL Resolution adopted by the 2017 Council of Delegates, the RFL Leadership Platform serves as a forum in which the leadership of the ICRC and its CTA, together with leaders from National Societies active in this field and from the IFRC, representatives of affected people and RFL experts, engage collectively to address critical issues with a view to shaping the RFL services of the future.

The Leadership Platform steers the implementation of the RFL Strategy 2020–2025, tackling obstacles encountered in this process and making any necessary adjustments. It identifies priority issues of common concern on which the

<sup>13</sup> A group of RFL specialists who can be deployed at short notice for RFL as an integral part of the Movement's response. The RFL Pool of Specialists was created in 2009 as part of the implementation measures set out in the RFL Strategy for the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement 2008–2018 and within broader initiatives to strengthen the Movement's RFL rapid deployment capacities to provide a reliable and flexible response to RFL needs in disasters, conflicts or other emergencies. The RFL Pool of Specialists contains practitioners from National Societies and the ICRC and is led by the ICRC Central Tracing Agency, which is responsible for managing the pool and activating it at the request of the Movement component(s) in question, in accordance with clearly defined procedures.

<sup>14</sup> The National Society Development Framework, adopted by the IFRC's General Assembly in 2013 and available at: <https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/201505/1269801-NSD%20framework%202013-EN-LR.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> "Natural or technological disasters and other emergency and disaster situations in peace time which require resources exceeding those of the operating National Society" (Art. 5.1 B, Seville Agreement, 1997).

group as a whole, a subgroup or individual members commit to follow-up and implement specific initiatives and work to be undertaken within the RFL Strategy Implementation Group.

Relevant external actors in the humanitarian, academic and private sectors are involved in the Platform to explore and follow up on the realization of relevant partnerships with a view to strengthening RFL operations and the capacity of the Movement to prevent family separation, help clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons and support separated families and the families of missing persons.

The members of the group act as ambassadors of RFL services at the global and regional level internally within the Movement and also externally to enhance the recognition, coherence and strength of the Family Links Network.

In line with the provisions of the first RFL Strategy for the Movement 2008–2018, the Implementation Group, composed of National Societies from all the regions, the ICRC and the IFRC, was set up and has met regularly since 2008 to monitor the implementation of the RFL Strategy and provide guidance and support for this process. Between 2016 and 2019, the Implementation Group led the development of the RFL Strategy 2020–2025.

In follow-up to the development of the RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection in 2015, the Application Group for the Code of Conduct (Application Group) was set up in 2016 with the participation of National Societies from the different regions, the ICRC and the IFRC. Its role is to support National Societies and the ICRC in the promotion and systematic implementation of the Code of Conduct internally within the Movement and externally. The mandate of the Application Group was confirmed by the RFL Resolution adopted at the Council of Delegates in 2017.

## **Status of the Family Links Network and implementation of the RFL Strategy 2008–2018<sup>16</sup>**

A considerable number of achievements have been made in the course of the last ten years, and sustained efforts are now essential to maintain and drive them forwards. They include the following:

- in-depth assessments of RFL needs and the capacity of the Family Links Network to respond to them have been carried out in more than 50 countries
- the Family Links Network has significantly increased its service provision, casework and operational cooperation amongst its members
- the establishment of regional RFL platforms in many parts of the world has provided the basis for growing exchanges on practices, cooperation and coordination and the development of RFL strategies at the regional level
- an RFL Pool of Specialists and a rapid response mechanism have been established for emergency situations and deployed 28 times since their activation in 2009 to support the local response
- advances have been made in integrating RFL into National Society strategic and development plans and emergency preparedness and response plans
- a series of important methodology guidelines have been produced for the Network<sup>17</sup>
- a key achievement in terms of digital technology has been the development of a web-based ecosystem with several components<sup>18</sup> for the entire Family Links Network
- the development of the RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection has been an essential step to ensure that all members of the Family Links Network are able to take the necessary measures to fulfil data protection requirements.

In some important areas of the RFL Strategy 2008–2018, progress has been limited or measures have only been implemented by parts of the Network:

- while the RFL services of some National Societies are strong, well-functioning and adequately resourced, many others remain weak for a variety of reasons, including lack of commitment by the leadership, organizational weaknesses and high turn-over of staff and volunteers
- an RFL performance management tool for the Network has not so far been developed; monitoring and evaluation is not standardized across the Family Links Network, and it is not yet able to consolidate global RFL statistics

<sup>16</sup> Main sources are the progress reports to the Council of Delegates in 2009, 2011 and 2015, a global survey carried out with National Societies in 2017, the background report to the 2017 Council of Delegates and numerous needs and capacity assessments conducted between 2010 and 2018.

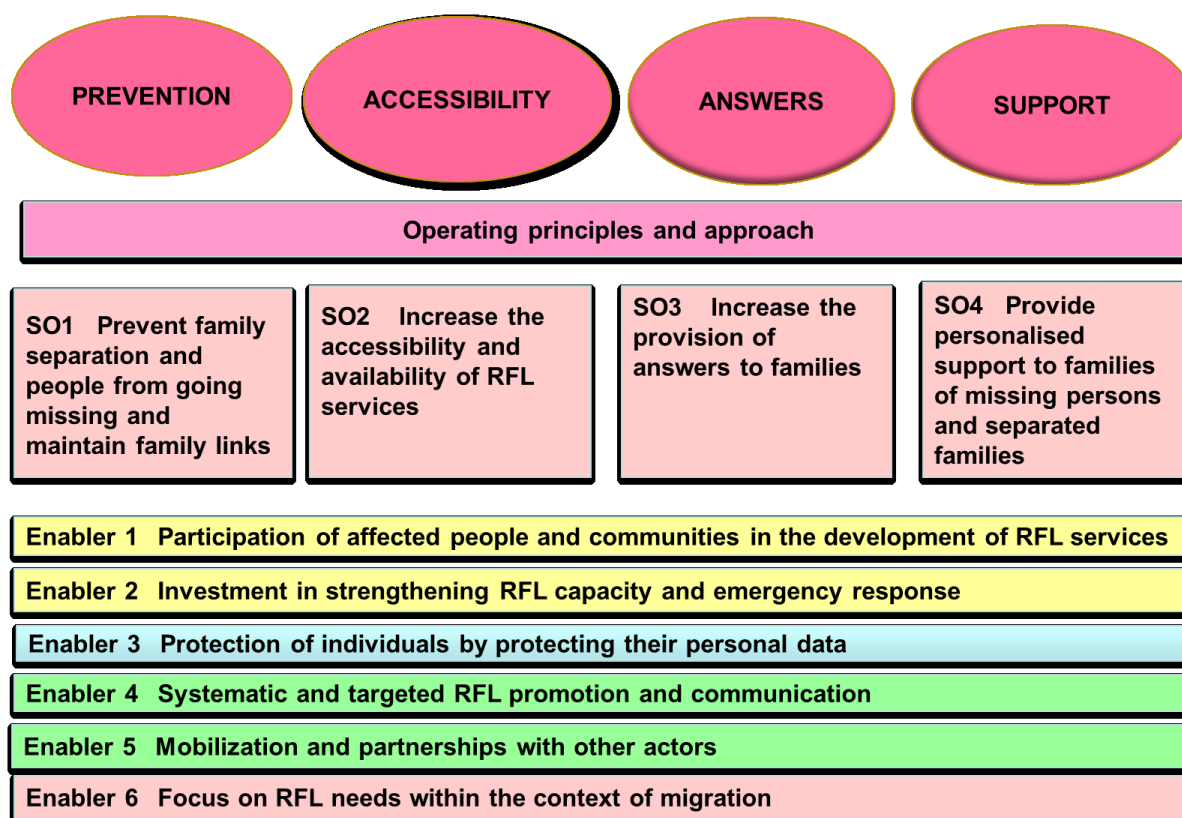
<sup>17</sup> Guidelines have been developed regarding, in particular, RFL needs assessments, RFL in disasters, RFL in migration and RFL communication plans. All guidelines can be found on the Family Links Extranet at: <https://flextranet.familylinks.icrc.org/en/Pages/home.aspx>.

<sup>18</sup> The online tools comprise 1) a publicly accessible website which provides information on available services as well as an online tracing database where users can register people as missing or safe in relation to specific crises and consult photos of people searching for their family members, 2) information-sharing platforms restricted to members of the Family Links Network to transfer files and develop best practice, and 3) two databases used exclusively by the National Societies and the ICRC to manage individual cases (Family Links Answers and Prot6 respectively).

- resource allocation for RFL remains limited in a large number of National Societies, and a majority are wholly dependent on the ICRC for funding; investment by the ICRC in some areas has also been lower than initially planned
- only about half of the countries' disaster preparedness and response plans include a role for their National Society in RFL
- numerous assessments have shown that RFL services are not sufficiently known by affected people and other stakeholders
- the growing importance of RFL in relation to migration has exposed weaknesses in the standardization and harmonization of data collection and processing, intensified the need for transregional cooperation and coordination and further underlined the need for the Family Links Network to use unified ICT tools
- there is still only a limited awareness of personal data protection requirements, which need to be integrated into all the Network's working methods, based on the RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection, in order to guarantee that such requirements are adequately fulfilled; this will also require additional support in terms of expertise and resources for the Family Links Network.

Sustained efforts are needed to maintain the achievements made, to extend their reach and to continue implementing those measures identified in the RFL Strategy 2008–2018 that remain relevant. The RFL Strategy 2020–2025 therefore combines dimensions of continuity with important new areas that have become relevant and require urgent attention in today's environment.

## 7. Summary chart for the Restoring Family Links Strategy 2020–2025



## 8. Strategic objectives, enablers and expected results

Strategic objectives	Expected results
<b>Strategic Objective 1</b> Prevent family separation and people from going	Preventing families from being separated and people from going missing is a cornerstone of RFL services and is systematically addressed through efforts

**missing and maintain family links**

aimed at mobilizing and persuading the authorities and direct action by the Family Links Network.

Affected people receive locally adapted information, means and tools from the Family Links Network to maintain or restore contact with their loved ones when they are unable to do so by their own means.

Affected people can securely upload, store, access and manage personal information and preventively register with the Family Links Network.

When communication systems have broken down or risk putting people in danger (particularly in situations of conflict and violence), people are offered connectivity by the components of the Movement, in cooperation with other stakeholders, to maintain and restore contact with their loved ones, obtain information and communicate with the Family Links Network.

**Strategic Objective 2**

**Increase the accessibility and availability of RFL services**

Affected people are aware of RFL services, trust them, know how to access them and, wherever possible, are able to make personal contact with staff and volunteers of the Family Links Network.

Affected people are able to interact with the Movement in real time and receive services safely and remotely wherever they are.

To the full extent possible, all affected people are given the possibility to receive RFL services from the Family Links Network, based on the information they are able to provide concerning the relatives they are searching for.

**Strategic Objective 3**

**Increase the provision of answers to families**

People receive answers about the fate and whereabouts of missing family members as rapidly as possible.

The authorities are mobilized to take all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing and to provide families with an individualized response on the fate and whereabouts of their missing relatives, particularly if they were deprived of their liberty. The authorities benefit from the support of the components of the Movement, including forensic expertise.

As a matter of priority, the Family Links Network collects information on missing persons as early as possible and explores all avenues to find answers through individual, long-term follow-up.

The Family Links Network maintains and develops its global, grass-roots level, personalized, exhaustive and sustained searches for missing persons as a unique feature of its RFL services.

The Family Links Network uses and further develops a unified, global, interconnected, coherent and secure system to collect, process and manage personal data. It develops technology and methods to efficiently search for potential matches in the data of the Family Links Network and the data of other organizations and relevant stakeholders in full respect for the protection of personal data. It also ensures that information is provided to families in an individualized and secure manner.

**Strategic Objective 4**

**Provide personalized support to the families of missing persons and separated families**

The emotional suffering of the families of missing persons and people separated from their families is relieved through the personal contact and mental health and psychosocial support provided by the components of the Movement.

Families are supported in their efforts to be reunited with their relatives.

The multifaceted needs of the families of missing persons and separated families are addressed without discrimination and through a holistic, multisectoral approach in collaboration with the authorities and other stakeholders.

**Enablers**

**Expected results**

**Enabler 1**

**Participation of affected people and communities in the**

RFL needs and capacities are assessed, and services are developed and delivered flexibly together with affected people and communities, taking into account the local context and the rapidly changing environment. In keeping with

**development of RFL services**

its commitment to transparency and accountability, the Family Links Network is in regular dialogue with affected people about their needs.

People receive feedback on action taken, and the Family Links Network demonstrates its commitment to being influenced by those who have lived experience of family separation or a missing family member and involve them in decisions. The resilience of affected people is strengthened, and they are empowered to take action by themselves.

**Enabler 2**  
**Investment in strengthening RFL capacity and emergency response**

RFL is recognized as a core service of the Movement and is fully integrated into the operational response and adequately resourced to meet needs.

The capacities of the Family Links Network and the sustainability of RFL services are strengthened to make it a truly global and efficient network that is able to respond rapidly to help prevent family separation and people from going missing, conduct searches, provide answers to families, address needs arising from family separation and support family reunification.

Preparedness and surge mechanisms allow for a rapid and effective response in emergencies.

**Enabler 3**  
**Protection of individuals by protecting their personal data**

The safety, dignity and rights of affected people are protected through the way the Family Links Network protects their personal data, thus preserving and reinforcing the trust of people in the Movement.

Personal data is collected, stored and otherwise processed by the Family Links Network in accordance with its RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection and applicable data protection laws.

The risks and impact of the processing of personal data by the Family Links Network are systematically assessed.

The principle of “do no harm” is upheld in all actions undertaken in relation to the personal data of affected people.

**Enabler 4**  
**Systematic and targeted RFL promotion and communication**

Affected people are aware of, understand and trust the RFL services of the Family Links Network.

Through systematic, coherent, targeted and contextually adapted promotion and communication, the relevant stakeholders with whom the components of the Movement aim to cooperate and from whom they need political and operational support and financial and material resources understand the importance and value of RFL. They understand and respect the required independence and exclusively humanitarian purpose of RFL, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles.

**Enabler 5**  
**Mobilization and partnerships with other actors**

Coordination, cooperation and partnerships with relevant stakeholders, such as State authorities, humanitarian organizations and private companies, are developed and strengthened at the global, regional, national and local level. This engagement is carried out in accordance with the respective mandates and working modalities of the components of the Movement, in full compliance with the Fundamental Principles and personal data protection standards, and increases access to people and data, improves the response to the needs of affected people and strengthens the capacity of the Family Links Network.

**Enabler 6**  
**Focus on RFL needs within the context of migration**

Migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, and their families are able, regardless of their legal status, to safely access the full range of RFL services along migration routes from countries of origin through countries of transit to the countries where they settle.

The fate and whereabouts of missing migrants and the identity of deceased migrants is clarified by the authorities concerned through mobilization and active support by the Family Links Network.

The Family Links Network realizes its potential through strong and active transregional cooperation among its components to ensure a coherent approach with harmonized systems, criteria and working modalities.



## PART II: IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

### Strategic Objective 1: Prevent family separations and people from going missing and maintain family links

<b>Expected results</b>	<p>Preventing families from being separated and people from going missing is a cornerstone of RFL services and is systematically addressed through efforts aimed at mobilizing and persuading the authorities and direct action by the Family Links Network.</p> <p>Affected people receive locally adapted information, means and tools from the Family Links Network to maintain or restore contact with their loved ones when they are unable to do so by their own means.</p> <p>Affected people can securely upload, store, access and manage personal information and preventively register with the Family Links Network.</p> <p>When communication systems have broken down or risk putting people in danger (particularly in situations of conflict and violence), people are offered connectivity by the components of the Movement, in cooperation with other stakeholders, to maintain and restore contact with their loved ones, obtain information and communicate with the Family Links Network.</p>
<b>Implementation</b>	<p>The <b>National Societies</b> and the <b>ICRC</b> will:</p> <p>1.1 Systematically analyse the causes of separation and of people going missing, engage with the authorities and other stakeholders to raise their awareness of the risk and humanitarian consequences of family separations and people going missing, and advise them on implementing legislation and strategies, including contingency plans, disaster response plans, early warning systems and other means, to prevent families from being separated and people from going missing.</p> <p>1.2 Develop and share updated information and messages with people to prevent family separation and help people maintain family links, and develop contextualized operational guidance, practices and tools and effective means to reach and engage with affected communities and people.</p> <p>1.3 Register and follow up on specific vulnerable groups and individuals, such as unaccompanied and separated children, detainees, the elderly, persons with disabilities, injured and sick persons and vulnerable migrants, where appropriate.</p> <p>1.4 Offer appropriate means to maintain family links (e.g. traditional means such as Red Cross messages and safe and well messages) in situations where there is no connectivity or where the use of communication technology poses a risk and for categories of people whose RFL needs cannot be covered using such technology.</p> <p>The <b>ICRC</b> will:</p> <p>1.5 Develop and offer, in cooperation with National Societies, online services to enable affected people to self-register and securely store their data with the Family Links Network as a safe depository and allow them to control and manage their personal data themselves.</p> <p>The <b>National Societies</b>, the <b>ICRC</b> and the <b>IFRC</b> will:</p> <p>1.6 Provide, to the extent possible, energy, connectivity and communication tools (charging stations, internet and Wi-Fi hot spots, airtime, mobile devices and free calls) as an integrated form of aid to affected people, while ensuring full compliance with the “do no harm” principle.</p> <p>1.7 Explore public and private sector partnership agreements to provide a large-scale response to enable affected people to access the internet and other communication networks, and strengthen the Movement’s preparedness and response, particularly in emergencies, by ensuring a better and more timely use of available resources and better coordination with key stakeholders.</p>

## Strategic Objective 2: Increase the accessibility and availability of RFL services

<b>Expected results</b>	<p>Affected people are aware of RFL services, trust them, know how to access them and, wherever possible, are able to make personal contact with staff and volunteers of the Family Links Network.</p> <p>Affected people are able to interact with the Movement in real time and receive services safely and remotely wherever they are.</p> <p>To the full extent possible, all affected people are given the possibility to receive RFL services from the Family Links Network, based on the information they are able to provide concerning the relatives they are searching for.</p>
<b>Implementation</b>	The <b>National Societies</b> and the <b>ICRC</b> will:
2.1	Strengthen branch networks and outreach in areas of high needs so that the Family Links Network can interact personally with affected people, raise their understanding of RFL and offer RFL services.
2.2	Assess the feasibility of appropriate online services, contact centres and hotline solutions, integrate them into their respective contexts and evaluate and adapt business processes and human resources set-ups accordingly.
2.3	Ensure their acceptance criteria for requests to search for missing persons and help clarify their fate and whereabouts are aligned with the definition of missing persons <sup>19</sup> and, in this way, allow families approaching the Family Links Network to receive all feasible RFL services.
2.4	<p>Appropriately manage the expectations of enquirers by clearly explaining priorities in active casework and follow-up of tracing requests, the limitations, the timeframe and arrangements for re-contacting the enquirers and explore measures to mitigate loss of contact with enquirers.</p> <p>The <b>ICRC</b> will:</p>
2.5	<p>Develop, together with National Societies, affected people and technology partners, a digital interface ("single-entry portal") and online services solution, through which people can provide and receive information and request, access and choose services digitally.</p> <p>The <b>National Societies</b>, the <b>ICRC</b> and the <b>IFRC</b> will:</p>
2.6	Regularly assess how and through which channels affected people search for information and communicate in order to identify the best ways to engage with them and enhance awareness of RFL services.

## Strategic Objective 3: Increase the provision of answers to families

<b>Expected results</b>	<p>People receive answers about the fate and whereabouts of missing family members as rapidly as possible.</p> <p>The authorities are mobilized to take all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing and to provide families with an individualized response on the fate and whereabouts of their missing relatives, particularly if they were deprived of their liberty. The authorities benefit from the support of the components of the Movement, including forensic expertise.</p> <p>As a matter of priority, the Family Links Network collects information on missing persons as early as possible and explores all avenues to find answers through individual, long-term follow-up.</p> <p>The Family Links Network maintains and develops its global, grass-roots level, personalized, exhaustive and sustained searches for missing persons as a unique feature of its RFL services.</p>
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<sup>19</sup> See footnote 1.



The Family Links Network uses and further develops a unified, global, interconnected, coherent and secure system to collect, process and manage personal data. It develops technology and methods to efficiently search for potential matches in the data of the Family Links Network and the data of other organizations and relevant stakeholders in full respect for the protection of personal data. It also ensures that information is provided to families in an individualized and secure manner.

**Implementation** The **National Societies** and the **ICRC** will:

- 3.1 Remind the authorities of their obligation to take all feasible measures to account for persons reported missing, assess the authorities' capacities and willingness to provide answers to the families of missing persons and offer relevant support.
- 3.2 Whenever needed, take action as early as possible when people go missing by collecting all the relevant information available and reinforce personal, proactive, sustained and long-term searches and searches using digital technology.
- 3.3 Ensure the quality, standardization and coherence of data collected on missing persons across the Family Links Network and consistent individualized follow-up by each component.
- 3.4 Review work processes to ensure that quality casework is carried out in a timely manner, assess business processes<sup>20</sup> and make any modifications required as a result of the integration of new technologies.
- 3.5 Mobilize and engage with all relevant authorities and institutions (e.g. health care, morgues, immigration and detention) and other stakeholders to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons and provide answers to their families.
- 3.6 Ensure that National Society staff and volunteers who might be called upon to collect human remains possess the required know-how, equipment and psychological support.

The **ICRC** will:

- 3.7 Provide guidance to the Family Links Network to review work processes, with a view to improving the quality of casework and adapting work processes in line with new technologies, and encourage National Societies to adopt the new tools developed.
- 3.8 Ensure the relevance of existing RFL information and communication technology (ICT) services and tools within the ecosystem already developed for the Family Links Network, including roll-out, interoperability and integrated search mechanisms, using a service management approach to keep them in line with business needs and processes.
- 3.9 Explore, leverage and integrate digital technologies, such as facial, visual and pattern recognition technology, translation and transliteration technology, big data and satellite imagery, and research for tracing purposes with a view to identifying potential matches in databases.
- 3.10 Leverage the use of digital technologies which enable automatic, safe and secure cross-checking and matching of personal data between the databases of the Family Links Network, other humanitarian organizations, the authorities and other stakeholders.
- 3.11 Establish agreements with relevant stakeholders to enable secure cross-checking with their databases for solely humanitarian purposes and cooperate with the stakeholders concerned to ensure harmonization and quality of collected data to optimize digital searches.
- 3.12 Collect and centralize information about protected persons during armed conflict and transmit it, through the CTA, to National Information Bureaus or similar mechanisms, with a view to preventing such persons from becoming unaccounted for and helping ensure that families are informed of their fate and whereabouts.
- 3.13 Provide support, including technical advice, to authorities and, when relevant, National Societies, for the establishment of National Information Bureaus or similar mechanisms.

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<sup>20</sup> Internal processes to carry out RFL work.

- 3.14 Offer its expertise and support, where needed, to reinforce the capacity of relevant authorities and structures, such as medico-legal systems and forensic services.

## Strategic Objective 4: Provide personalized support to the families of missing persons and separated families

- Expected results**
- The emotional suffering of the families of missing persons and people separated from their families is relieved through the personal contact and mental health and psychosocial support provided by the components of the Movement.
- Families are supported in their efforts to be reunited with their relatives.
- The multifaceted needs of the families of missing persons and separated families are addressed without discrimination and through a holistic, multisectoral approach in collaboration with the authorities and other stakeholders.
- Implementation**
- The **National Societies** will:
- 4.1 Broaden their operational involvement to include multidisciplinary services for the families of missing persons, such as protection and legal, administrative and economic support, in collaboration with other actors, according to existing needs, contextual constraints and their strengths and capacities.
- The **National Societies** and the **ICRC** will:
- 4.2 Maintain contact with the families of missing persons for the entire duration of the search and holistically assess their particular needs with them, including broader protection and assistance needs.
- 4.3 Provide emotional and mental health and psychosocial support to separated families and the families of missing persons as well as to Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers.
- 4.4 Ensure a contextualized division of roles between the ICRC and National Societies in addressing the needs of the families of missing persons and engaging with the authorities, based on their respective capacities.
- 4.5 Ensure a transfer of expertise and know-how and provide guidance to National Societies that are ready and have the capacity to engage in programmes to address the multifaceted needs of the families of missing persons.
- 4.6 Support the reunification of separated families, in line with the applicable legal framework and taking into account the specificities of each context and each individual case.
- 4.7 Conduct activities to support family reunification, such as:
- provision of information, referral to qualified institutions and organizations, and legal, administrative and practical support
  - help with obtaining documents, including ICRC Emergency Travel Documents
  - facilitation of physical reunification
  - follow-up of and support to families after reunification in coordination with the relevant authorities, institutions and organizations.
- The **National Societies**, the **ICRC** and the **IFRC** will:
- 4.8 Assess the capacities of the authorities and other stakeholders and mobilize, coordinate and engage with them to address the multifaceted needs of families.
- 4.9 Recognize and promote the right to family life and the principle of family unity.

## Enabler 1: Participation of affected people and communities in the development of RFL services

<b>Expected results</b>	<p>RFL needs and capacities are assessed, and services are developed and delivered flexibly together with affected people and communities, taking into account the local context and the rapidly changing environment. In keeping with its commitment to transparency and accountability, the Family Links Network is in regular dialogue with affected people about their needs.</p> <p>People receive feedback on action taken, and the Family Links Network demonstrates its commitment to being influenced by those who have lived experience of family separation or a missing family member and involve them in decisions. The resilience of affected people is strengthened, and they are empowered to take action by themselves.</p>
<b>Implementation</b>	The <b>National Societies</b> , the <b>ICRC</b> and the <b>IFRC</b> will:
1.1	Conduct context analysis and assessments involving affected people and communities to understand the diversity of the RFL needs, priorities, preferences, vulnerabilities, capacities and coping mechanisms of affected people and communities.
1.2	Empower affected people and communities, including but not limited to volunteers, and use their knowledge, skills and capacities by enhancing their participation in all phases of the RFL programme cycle (assessment, planning and design, implementation and service delivery, monitoring, evaluation and learning).
1.3	Reach out and listen to affected people and communities, provide them with information on channels for submitting feedback, establish mechanisms to collect and respond to feedback and report back on how their feedback has been addressed.
1.4	Empower affected people at the strategic level through meaningful involvement in boards and other decision-making bodies and active participation in advocacy, research and strategy development.
1.5	Strengthen knowledge, skills and competencies in community engagement and the accountability of staff and volunteers.
1.6	Use, adapt and develop community engagement tools, integrate community engagement and accountability into RFL strategies, policies and procedures and share knowledge and experiences with other components of the Movement.

## Enabler 2: Investment in strengthening RFL capacity and emergency response

<b>Expected results</b>	<p>RFL is recognized as a core service of the Movement and is fully integrated into the operational response and adequately resourced to meet needs.</p> <p>The capacities of the Family Links Network and the sustainability of RFL services are strengthened to make it a truly global and efficient network that is able to respond rapidly to help prevent family separation and people from going missing, conduct searches, provide answers to families, address needs arising from family separation and support family reunification.</p> <p>Preparedness and surge mechanisms allow for a rapid and effective response in emergencies.</p>
<b>Implementation</b>	The <b>National Societies</b> will:
2.1	<p>Integrate RFL into their:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ organizational structure at headquarters and at branch level</li> <li>◦ strategic and development plans and statutes</li> <li>◦ regular core budget allocations</li> <li>◦ performance management, financial management and reporting systems.</li> </ul>
2.2	Integrate RFL into their contingency and operational plans and into multidisciplinary activities.

- 2.3 Optimize the recruitment and retention of RFL volunteers and staff through their inclusion in National Society human resources management systems.
- 2.4 Ensure that staff and volunteers have the necessary know-how, guidance and guidelines to respond to protection needs identified during the delivery of RFL services by referring such issues to a relevant protection actor or addressing them with the responsible authorities when possible.
- 2.5 Collect key RFL statistics, based on commonly agreed definitions, and transmit them to the CTA twice yearly.
- 2.6 Adopt processes, guidelines and tools for monitoring, reporting and evaluation, based on guidance from the CTA.

The **ICRC** will:

- 2.7 Develop, in consultation with National Societies, training manuals and guidelines, as required, including on data protection, the use of ICT tools and business processes, data literacy and data management.
- 2.8 Support, enhance and reinforce regular data collection and compilation of global RFL statistics, on behalf of the Family Links Network and based on agreed definitions, and analysis in relation to RFL Strategy implementation measures.
- 2.9 Develop, in cooperation with National Societies and the IFRC, a generic RFL performance management framework and tools, including indicators, monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment.
- 2.10 Manage the RFL Pool of Specialists, reinforce it at the global and regional level and ensure that it has the necessary means, resources and training.

The **National Societies** and the **ICRC** will:

- 2.11 Assess existing and potential RFL needs and their capacity to address them, making use of existing handbooks and guidelines and taking into account the capacity of other actors and coordination mechanisms, and integrate the results of the assessments into operational and development plans, including follow-up and implementation monitoring.
- 2.12 Conduct training of trainers and the training and coaching of staff and volunteers to ensure they possess the required knowledge of RFL methodology and processes (including data protection), the technical skills to use tools (including modern digital technology) and the interpersonal skills (such as empathy) necessary to build a relationship of trust with affected people and provide them with mental health and psychosocial support.
- 2.13 Mobilize and deploy the RFL Pool of Specialists, whenever needed and as early as possible, as part of domestic, regional and international emergency response, doing so in coordination with the IFRC when deployment occurs in disaster situations.
- 2.14 Develop regional plans of action to implement the RFL Strategy, based on contextualized needs and priorities, and identify appropriate indicators.

The **National Societies**, the **ICRC** and the **IFRC** will:

- 2.15 Revise their approach to capacity building and invest in targeted support to strengthen RFL services and related dimensions of National Society development, based on assessed needs and priorities and mutual commitments by the Movement partners.
- 2.16 Establish a pool of experts for supporting capacity building in RFL and strengthen bilateral and multilateral partnerships between National Societies and peer-to-peer learning to strengthen their capacities.
- 2.17 Conduct lessons learnt exercises following emergency operations, in cooperation with other stakeholders, integrate the findings into revised contingency plans and needs and capacity assessments and share them within the Movement.

- 2.18 Integrate RFL into multi-stakeholder scenario-building exercises as part of the contingency planning process at national level and identify capacity gaps and preparedness actions to improve future responses.
- The **IFRC** will:
- 2.19 Promote the RFL Strategy internally, support its implementation at the national, regional and international level and put RFL on the agenda of relevant conferences and other fora, with a particular focus on emergency preparedness plans, strategic integration, National Society development, disaster management and training guidelines.
- 2.20 Integrate RFL into contingency planning mechanisms, including the training of rapid response personnel, standard emergency procedures and multidisciplinary coordination, assessment and response mechanisms and operations.
- 2.21 Integrate the RFL response into its funding mechanisms, such as the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund and emergency appeals.

### Enabler 3: Protection of individuals by protecting their personal data

**Expected results**

The safety, dignity and rights of affected people are protected through the way the Family Links Network protects their personal data, thus preserving and reinforcing the trust of people in the Movement.

Personal data is collected, stored and otherwise processed by the Family Links Network in accordance with its RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection and applicable data protection laws.

The risks and impact of the processing of personal data by the Family Links Network are systematically assessed.

The principle of “do no harm” is upheld in all actions undertaken in relation to the personal data of affected people.

**Implementation** The **National Societies** and the **ICRC** will:

- 3.1 Integrate the provisions of the RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection into their relevant policies, procedures, working methods and training.
- 3.2 Conduct Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs) for all means, tools and partnerships considered for RFL service delivery and communication, analyse possible risks of harm and/or encroachments on the rights and freedoms of data subjects and the impact on the perception of the Movement and take into account additional considerations, where appropriate, in the context of conflict and violence and when processing the personal data of vulnerable groups.
- 3.3 Systematically assess and respect the principle of “do no harm” in any programme and action in relation to RFL and missing persons and their families, particularly when considering the sharing and processing of personal data.
- 3.4 Monitor and evaluate compliance with data protection standards by developing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and integrating them into existing instruments.
- 3.5 Undertake efforts to influence the development of domestic legal and regulatory frameworks to: (1) recognize and respect the exclusively humanitarian purpose of personal data processing by the Movement and the public interest and vital interest bases for such processing; (2) restrict access to personal data collected for RFL activities by the authorities or for purposes that are not exclusively humanitarian; and (3) allow the National Societies to obtain and process personal data, including cross-border transfers, and to store such data wherever it deems necessary in order to safeguard the rights of data subjects.
- The **National Societies**, the **ICRC** and the **IFRC** will:
- 3.6 Systematically promote the RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection.

- 3.7 Provide support in terms of expertise and resources to National Societies requiring such assistance to enable them to meet data protection requirements.

## Enabler 4: Systematic and targeted RFL promotion and communication

<b>Expected results</b>	<p>Affected people are aware of, understand and trust the RFL services of the Family Links Network.</p> <p>Through systematic, coherent, targeted and contextually adapted promotion and communication, the relevant stakeholders with whom the components of the Movement aim to cooperate and from whom they need political and operational support and financial and material resources understand the importance and value of RFL. They understand and respect the required independence and exclusively humanitarian purpose of RFL, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles.</p>
<b>Implementation</b>	<p>The <b>National Societies</b> will:</p> <p>4.1 Position RFL as a reference service in their domestic context and integrate RFL into their national communication and resource mobilization plans.</p> <p>4.2 Develop and implement specific communication strategies for emergency and regular situations with clear objectives, key messages and means and tools adapted to the target audiences.</p> <p>4.3 Provide regular and adapted information about RFL activities and results to affected people, donors, the authorities and other stakeholders.</p> <p>The <b>ICRC</b> will:</p> <p>4.4 Compile and share key global RFL statistics of the Family Links Network with all components of the Movement.</p> <p>The <b>National Societies</b> and the <b>ICRC</b> will:</p> <p>4.5 Produce communication and promotional tools with coherent key messages and guidelines that can be easily adapted to and implemented in different contexts.</p> <p>4.6 Make use of social media and appropriate communication means and tools to promote RFL among affected people, other stakeholders and the general public.</p> <p>4.7 Explore, develop and implement communication campaigns at the regional and global level.</p> <p>The <b>National Societies</b>, the <b>ICRC</b> and the <b>IFRC</b> will:</p> <p>4.8 Produce communication tools and share them across the Movement, making use of platforms such as the FLExtranet, FedNet and the GO Platform.</p> <p>4.9 Reinforce and facilitate interaction between communication, fundraising/resource mobilization and RFL departments and include RFL in related Movement and external fora.</p> <p>4.10 Systematically promote the RFL Strategy at the global, regional and national level vis-à-vis the authorities and other relevant stakeholders and underline the independence of RFL services to prevent them from being instrumentalized.</p>

## Enabler 5: Mobilization and partnerships with other actors

<b>Expected results</b>	<p>Coordination, cooperation and partnerships with relevant stakeholders, such as State authorities, humanitarian organizations and private companies, are developed and strengthened at the global, regional, national and local level. This engagement is carried out in accordance with the respective mandates and working modalities of the components of the Movement, in full compliance with the Fundamental Principles and personal data protection standards, and increases access to people and data, improves the response to the needs of affected people and strengthens the capacity of the Family Links Network.</p>
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**Implementation** The **National Societies** and the **ICRC** will:

- 5.1 Engage with the authorities, civil society actors and other stakeholders able to help prevent separation and clarify the fate of missing persons, and advocate for the rights of affected people in order to ensure that their needs are met.
- 5.2 Mobilize the authorities to facilitate and contribute to the fulfilment of the role and mandate of National Societies and the ICRC in the field of RFL.
- 5.3 Systematically identify stakeholders and update and share stakeholder mapping at the regional and global level within the Network.
- 5.4 Devise appropriate operational agreements and partnerships with national and local authorities and organizations focused on shared standards, cooperation, complementarity and referrals, making use of global and regional framework agreements where they exist, and share practice within the Family Links Network.
- 5.5 Ensure that the authorities understand the personal data protection principles applied by the Family Links Network, so that it is permitted to operate freely, and conclude non-disclosure agreements for affected people's data.

The **ICRC** will:

- 5.6 Devise, with the support of National Societies and the IFRC, appropriate common operational frameworks, framework agreements and partnerships with global and regional organizations focusing on shared standards, cooperation, complementarity and referrals, which can be adapted and implemented contextually.<sup>21</sup>
- 5.7 Work with social media providers to explore mechanisms for referral and/or comparison of personal data from social media to facilitate follow-up by the Family Links Network when people are unable to contact their family members.
- 5.8 Invite relevant external actors to be part of the RFL Leadership Platform with a view to exploring and developing partnerships in relevant domains, e.g. research, technology and resource mobilization operations.

The **National Societies**, the **ICRC** and the **IFRC** will:

- 5.9 Explore private sector partnership schemes to develop and strengthen RFL service capacity, RFL technology, research and resource mobilization.<sup>22</sup>
- 5.10 Develop guidance and establish global partnerships with telecommunication companies and operators and other relevant actors (e.g. Télécoms Sans Frontières, ITU and GSMA) to help frame locally adapted agreements, and share experiences involving local agreements with the other components of the Movement.
- 5.11 Develop cooperation with the media (radio, television, newspapers, etc.) for RFL communication purposes.

## Enabler 6: Focus on RFL needs within the context of migration

**Expected results** Migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, and their families are able, regardless of their legal status, to safely access the full range of RFL services along migration routes from countries of origin through countries of transit to the countries where they settle.

The fate and whereabouts of missing migrants and the identity of deceased migrants is clarified by the authorities concerned through mobilization and active support by the Family Links Network.

<sup>21</sup> Such operational agreements and partnerships should take into account relevant existing Movement policies, such as Resolution 10 of the 2003 Council of Delegates on Movement action in favour of refugees and internally displaced persons and minimum elements to be included in operational agreements between Movement components and their external operational partners, and Resolution 2 of the 2011 Council of Delegates on Movement components' relations with external humanitarian actors.

<sup>22</sup> See Resolution 10 of the 2005 Council of Delegates on Movement Policy for Corporate Sector Partnerships.

The Family Links Network realizes its potential through strong and active transregional cooperation among its components to ensure a coherent approach with harmonized systems, criteria and working modalities.

**Implementation** The **National Societies** and the **ICRC** will:

- 6.1 Strengthen transregional Family Links Network cooperation, communication, peer-to-peer learning, coordination and the exchange of relevant information and personal data along the migration routes from countries of origin through countries of transit to countries where migrants settle.
- 6.2 Harmonize their operational approaches, operational procedures, standards and acceptance criteria along migration routes.
- 6.3 Advocate for migrants in detention or detention-like settings to be able to maintain or restore family links, assess the need for family links services in such settings and, wherever relevant and feasible, provide such services.<sup>23</sup>
- 6.4 Reinforce their efforts to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing migrants through the collection and analysis of data from the families of missing migrants, survivors, witnesses, other organizations, the media, the authorities and other relevant sources.
- 6.5 Collaborate with forensic authorities and other institutions by exchanging relevant data with them, supporting the centralization of data and facilitating contact with families, under the necessary conditions and safeguards and for the exclusively humanitarian purpose of clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing migrants and helping identify the human remains of deceased migrants.
- 6.6 Develop and implement strategies to locate the families of deceased persons who have been identified.

The **National Societies**, the **ICRC** and the **IFRC** will:

- 6.7 Systematically include migrants in needs assessments, taking into account their communication and information needs and the communication means and tools available to them and paying special attention to vulnerable individuals and groups.
- 6.8 Strengthen cooperation and coordination on migration-related activities along migration routes and globally on migration-related issues.
- 6.9 Monitor the evolution of migratory flows, collecting, analysing and exchanging information rapidly to ensure agility and flexibility in their operational response.
- 6.10 Include RFL in relevant strategic and policy documents, including migration strategies.

The **IFRC** will:

- 6.11 Include RFL, to the extent possible, in its migration-related policies, advocacy, communication, training and other activities and liaise with the ICRC in this regard.
- 6.12 Include, with the support of the ICRC, the topic of RFL in the agenda of its Global Migration Task Force and other related platforms and fora and implement actions resulting from them.
- 6.13 Raise the profile of RFL in its contributions to the work of external national, regional and global migration-related fora, events and conferences.

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<sup>23</sup> For further information on this subject, please see "Guidelines for National Societies Working in Immigration Detention" (2018), available at the ICRC.



## **PART III: RFL STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND RESOURCING**

The responsibility for implementing this Strategy is shared by all components of the Movement. The National Societies, the ICRC and the IFRC are individually responsible for incorporating the Strategy's content into their own strategies, plans and training programmes at the national, regional and international level and for enhancing awareness about it internally within the Movement, including at the leadership level, and externally among relevant stakeholders.

It is understood that National Societies, the ICRC and the IFRC are not in a position to carry out every single implementation measure set out in this Strategy in every country. Rather, they will identify priority measures of particular relevance for a specific context and region, based on assessments of needs, their own capacities and those of other actors. While global coherence and harmonization is indispensable, contextual adaptation is necessary in relevant aspects.

The RFL Strategy will serve as the framework for developing contextual action plans. Regional RFL platforms will serve as suitable fora for establishing regional strategies and action plans based on this Strategy, driving forward its implementation and identifying appropriate indicators to monitor its implementation.

The RFL Strategy Implementation Group, the Application Group and the RFL Leadership Platform will, collectively and through their regional members, continue to support and monitor the implementation of this Strategy and report back to the Council of Delegates.

Acknowledging that adequate resourcing has been one of the challenges in implementing the RFL Strategy 2008–2018, the ICRC, National Societies and the IFRC will continue to explore and seek to establish innovative funding tools and mechanisms to secure the financial resources needed to support the successful implementation of the RFL Strategy 2020–2025.