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Council of Delegates of the International  
Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

27–28 October 2024, Geneva

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

PROGRESS REPORT

September 2024

**EN**

CD/24/23  
Original: English  
For information

Document prepared by the International Committee of the Red Cross in cooperation with the RFL Strategy Implementation Group (35 National Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies) and in consultation with the RFL Leadership Platform

## PROGRESS REPORT

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

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) has achieved significant progress in implementing the Restoring Family Links Strategy<sup>1</sup> for the Movement 2020–2025 (RFL Strategy), despite the considerable challenges that it has faced. The Movement has remained committed to working efficiently together to prevent family separation, maintain and restore family links, facilitate family reunification, clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons and support affected families.

This report reviews the key achievements and ongoing challenges encountered during the four years of implementing the RFL Strategy. It also offers recommendations for future action. The analysis is primarily based on the results of the comprehensive RFL Strategy monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework.

The planned extension of the RFL Strategy until 2030 will give the Movement more time to address some of the challenges presented in this report, sustain the significant progress achieved so far and continue enhancing quality response and service delivery. To this end, three key priorities have been identified for the next implementation period: continue enhancing RFL capacities and strengthening the resources of the Family Links Network (FLN),<sup>2</sup> improve data protection compliance and enhance emergency preparedness.

All members of the Movement are called upon to remain committed to the RFL Strategy's ambition and renew their support for the successful achievement of its objectives.

## 1) INTRODUCTION

Thanks to the joint efforts of the Movement<sup>3</sup>  
Every **minute**, we help **four families** separated by conflict, violence, migration or disaster call each other  
Every **hour**, the fate and whereabouts of **two missing persons** are clarified  
Every **day**, we facilitate the **reunification of twenty-one people** with their families

Armed conflict, violence and disasters can force people to leave their homes and be on the move. In many circumstances, such movements can lead to people getting involuntarily separated from or losing contact with their families and to people going missing. A total of 108.4 million people worldwide have been forcibly displaced, and 75.9 million people were living in internal displacement at the end of 2023.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Restoring Family Links: Strategy for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement 2020–2025 – Including Legal References, available at <https://shop.icrc.org/restoring-family-links-strategy-for-the-international-red-cross-and-red-crescent-movement-2020-2025-including-legal-references-pdf-en.html>.

<sup>2</sup> The FLN comprises the ICRC's CTA, the Protection of Family units at ICRC delegations and the RFL/tracing services of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

<sup>3</sup> Global RFL statistics 2023: 2,023,934 successful phone calls provided; 16,680 people located; 7,832 people reunited with their families.

<sup>4</sup> See UNHCR figures, available at [Figures at a glance | UNHCR](#), and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre report, available at [2024 Global Report on Internal Displacement \(GRID\) | IDMC](#).

The Movement remains deeply concerned about the suffering of those who have lost contact with or are separated from loved ones due to armed conflicts, disasters, emergencies and migration. While it is primarily the responsibility of State authorities to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing persons and ensure contact between separated family members, the Movement plays a crucial role through its RFL services. Committed to responding efficiently and effectively, the Movement mobilizes its resources and works with authorities to prevent family separation, maintain and restore family links, clarify the fate of missing persons and support affected families.

A RFL response can only be successful if the FLN can count on each of its members. All the Movement components – the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the National Societies (NSs) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) – have a shared responsibility to maintain and continue strengthening the network and its services.

The RFL Strategy 2020–2025, established through Resolution 6 of the 2019 Council of Delegates (CoD), aims to provide a clear vision and mission for our Movement's RFL services. Building on its predecessor (RFL Strategy 2008–2018), the current RFL Strategy ensures that RFL services remain effective and adaptable to new challenges and future complexities. Throughout the implementation period, global RFL statistics<sup>5</sup> have consistently indicated a demand for our services,<sup>6</sup> and in order to address growing needs, it will be essential to leverage the FLN's distinctive strengths, which are critically important in alleviating the suffering of those who have lost contact with, have no news of or are separated from their loved ones. Additionally, the ICRC financial crisis has left some contexts within the FLN without a RFL response.

Despite challenges that have noticeably impacted the implementation of the RFL Strategy since 2020, such as COVID-19, the Central Tracing Agency (CTA) data breach and, more recently, the ICRC's financial situation, the components of the Movement have actively worked towards effectively implementing its four strategic objectives<sup>7</sup> and six enablers.<sup>8</sup>

The analysis presented in this report, particularly on key achievements and (ongoing) challenges, is primarily based on the results of the comprehensive M&E framework, to which a large number of NSs and ICRC delegations have contributed over the last four years.<sup>9</sup> While the M&E survey results reflect the perceptions of the respondents, this report highlights specific initiatives developed to complement the Movement's efforts to implement the RFL Strategy and provides recommendations for future action.

The planned extension of the RFL Strategy until 2030 will give the Movement more time to address some of the challenges identified, maintain and reinforce key achievements and continue strengthening quality service delivery to support people who go missing and families that are separated due to armed conflicts, disasters and other emergencies or in the context

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<sup>5</sup> Annually, the CTA compiles the statistics provided by NSs through a survey, which are then aggregated to ICRC statistics. Global RFL statistics cover the RFL services provided directly by NSs and the ICRC.

<sup>6</sup> In 2023, the FLN opened 65,818 new tracing cases, of which 3,358 involved unaccompanied or separated children looking for their family, collected 168,812 red cross messages and distributed 136,833, provided 2,023,934 successful phone calls and supported the reunification of 7,832 families. With every year of implementation, the figures have generally increased across RFL service delivery.

<sup>7</sup> The four strategic objectives are: 1) prevent family separation and people from going missing and maintain family links; 2) increase the accessibility of RFL services; 3) increase the provision of answers to families; and 4) provide personalized support to families of missing persons and separated families.

<sup>8</sup> The six enablers are: 1) the participation of affected people and communities in the development of RFL services; 2) investment in strengthening RFL capacity and emergency response; 3) the protection of individuals by protecting their personal data; 4) systematic and targeted RFL promotion and communication; 5) mobilization and partnerships with other actors; and 6) a focus on RFL needs within the context of migration.

<sup>9</sup> Every year, the CTA conducts a M&E survey of the RFL Strategy. In 2023, 159 NSs and 86 ICRC delegations responded. The response rate over the years has been very high – 84% in 2021, 80% in 2022 and 93% in 2023.

of migration. All members of the Movement are called upon to remain committed to the RFL Strategy's ambition and to renew their support for the successful achievement of its objectives.

## **2) BACKGROUND**

Resolution 6 of the 2019 CoD requested the components of the Movement to report on progress in implementing the RFL Strategy 2020–2025 and the RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection (RFL CoC) at the 2023 CoD, but as it was rescheduled for 2024, this progress report on the implementation of the RFL Strategy is being presented at the 2024 CoD.

The responsibility for implementing the RFL Strategy is shared by all the components of the Movement. The NSs, the ICRC and the IFRC are individually responsible for incorporating the measures set out in the RFL Strategy Implementation Plan<sup>10</sup> into their own strategies, plans and training programmes at the national, regional and international level.

In order to conduct global monitoring, the RFL Strategy Implementation Group<sup>11</sup> (IG) developed a M&E framework for the RFL Strategy which contributes significantly to analysing progress on RFL Strategy implementation. The IG will continue monitoring implementation and provide guidance and support in line with its role as defined in Resolution 4 of the 2007 CoD. The ICRC, through the CTA, will continue overseeing the implementation of the RFL Strategy as the Movement's RFL coordinator and technical adviser, in collaboration with other Movement components. It will also continue collecting global RFL statistics and analysing and sharing the data from the annual M&E survey developed by the IG.

Resolution 9 on RFL adopted at the 2017 CoD welcomed the establishment of a working group for the implementation of the RFL CoC – the RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection Application Group.<sup>12</sup> It supports NSs and the ICRC in promoting and systematically implementing the RFL CoC and leads the implementation and monitoring of Enabler 3 of the RFL Strategy, which focuses on the protection of individuals by safeguarding their personal data.

Established on the basis of the RFL resolution adopted by the 2017 CoD, the RFL Leadership Platform serves as a forum in which the leadership of NSs active in the field of RFL, the ICRC (including the CTA) and the IFRC will continue engaging collectively to address critical issues to shape the RFL services of the future and strategically steer the implementation of the RFL Strategy.

These global RFL platforms form the architecture that supports the global implementation and monitoring of the RFL Strategy.

## **3) ANALYSIS/PROGRESS**

### **A) FAMILY LINKS NETWORK PERFORMANCE**

#### **The RFL Strategy M&E framework**

The implementation of the RFL Strategy 2020–2025 has included the introduction of a comprehensive M&E framework.

The M&E framework for the RFL Strategy is the system designed to track progress, measure outcomes and assess the effectiveness of implementation. It includes regular annual surveys of RFL statistics and a dedicated M&E survey. The collection and analysis of this data ensures continuous improvement and accountability across the FLN. The system includes a set of

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<sup>10</sup> The Implementation Plan is part of the RFL Strategy (Part II), available at <https://shop.icrc.org/restoring-family-links-strategy-for-the-international-red-cross-and-red-crescent-movement-2020-2025-including-legal-references-pdf-en.html>.

<sup>11</sup> The RFL Strategy IG is composed of 35 NSs from different regions, the ICRC and the IFRC.

<sup>12</sup> The RFL CoC Application Group is composed of 17 NSs from different regions, the ICRC and the IFRC.

ambitious indicators directly related to the strategy's objectives and enablers, ensuring a thorough and effective assessment.

The IG rolled out four M&E surveys for NSs and ICRC delegations (as the providers of RFL services) in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024, with very high response rates.<sup>13</sup> This consistency creates a solid basis for the analysis of data on the value and performance of the global FLN throughout the implementation period. RFL Strategy implementation by non-respondents could not be measured. The data collection mechanism, managed by the CTA, focuses on gathering aggregate figures for the indicators that were developed to monitor the strategy's objectives and enablers. They are then shared across the Movement to provide a broad overview of the achievements and gaps in the implementation of the strategy, which are reflected in this progress report.

The results of the M&E framework have additionally informed the regional priorities set in the regional plans of action<sup>14</sup> that were developed in the first years of RFL Strategy implementation.

The response process and results obtained can make a significant contribution to informing NSs, ICRC and IFRC planning and decision-making and enhancing M&E efforts at the national level. Additionally, these insights can support dialogue and advocacy efforts for RFL, ensuring that the importance of RFL services is recognized and that it receives adequate support.

#### *The RFL capacity tool (RFL scorecard)*

One of the key innovations introduced in the RFL Strategy's M&E framework is a self-assessment RFL capacity tool included in the M&E annual survey – the RFL scorecard. This capacity self-assessment tool complements the M&E framework by enabling NS and ICRC RFL services to analyse and strategize in order to improve their individual RFL capacity. The tool focuses on six dimensions of capacity: *ownership, structure, competencies, relationships, resources and tools*.<sup>15</sup> A score on a scale of one to four is given to each dimension and each element within it, according to the responses provided (one being the lowest and four the highest).

It serves as an initial step in the capacity-strengthening process, providing an understanding of current RFL capabilities and areas needing improvement. Apart from the individual scorecards<sup>16</sup> that each NS and ICRC delegation receives every year, enabling them to monitor their own progress in strengthening capacity, the tool has also proven to be a very useful resource in assessing our collective progress and identifying areas for capacity development.

## **B) KEY TRENDS FROM THE M&E FRAMEWORK DATA ANALYSIS**

This section provides a summary of the analysis of the main trends of the past four years and describes some key achievements and challenges. There is a specific focus on three of the strategy's enablers where, according to the M&E data, progress needs to be made and more targeted investment is required.

The latest M&E survey results<sup>17</sup> show that 78% of the NSs and ICRC delegations surveyed are engaged in providing RFL services, of which 3% only do so in emergencies and 4% only carry out RFL capacity-strengthening. In 2023, 144 NSs provided RFL services as part of their

<sup>13</sup> NSs responding to the survey: 153 NSs in 2021; 149 NSs in 2022; 175 NSs in 2023; and 159 NSs in 2024. ICRC delegations responding to the survey: 93 delegations in 2021; 88 delegations in 2022; 100 delegations in 2023; and 86 delegations in 2024.

<sup>14</sup> Regions in Africa, Americas subregional platforms AmerCan, AmerCar and AmerSur, Asia-Pacific, Eurasia and the Near and Middle East have developed regional plans of action and/or defined key priorities for the implementation of the RFL Strategy.

<sup>15</sup> NS and ICRC scorecard templates are featured as annexes to the Family Links Network Guidance On Strengthening National Societies' RFL Capacities, available at <https://shop.icrc.org/family-links-network-guidance-on-strengthening-national-societies-rfl-capacities-pdf-en.html>.

<sup>16</sup> The RFL scorecard is part of the specialized National Society assessment and development processes included in IFRC guidance for National Societies, available at

<https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/IFRC%20Overview%20Assessment%20Development%20processes%20EN.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Reporting year 2023: 159 NSs and 86 ICRC delegations.

portfolio of activities, with 7 of them only activating the service in the event of an emergency. These figures have remained steady in recent years. The high percentage of NSs engaging in RFL activities means that RFL is the single most common protection activity carried out by NSs (after protection mainstreaming), according to surveys conducted under the Protection in the Movement initiative.

### **Strengthening the RFL capacities of the FLN**

RFL, as a core service of the Movement, requires full integration into operational responses and adequate resourcing to meet demands. The strategy aims to strengthen the capacities of the FLN for an efficient global response to prevent families from being separated and people from going missing, clarify the fate and whereabouts of those who go missing, provide answers to their families, support families in addressing needs arising from family separation and missing relatives and facilitate family reunification.

The scorecard results highlight ownership of RFL services as the strongest dimension globally. However, sustaining and translating RFL into operational capacities remains a challenge. Relationships<sup>18</sup> and resources<sup>19</sup> have consistently scored lowest<sup>20</sup> in RFL Strategy implementation. This emphasizes the need to pay particular attention to these areas, taking into account their interconnectedness. It is worth noting, however, that according to the data collected, the indicator for Enabler 5 – effectiveness of partnerships with external actors<sup>21</sup> – currently stands at 50%, making it one of the indicators that has shown most progress against the baseline data.

Monitoring results show no progress in budget allocation for RFL services.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, many NSs are overly dependent on ICRC support, and this has now been quantified – a consistent 40% of NSs with RFL services who responded to the M&E surveys remain between 76% and 100% dependent on ICRC support. This reliance has continued unchanged over the four years of strategy implementation, persisting despite the recognition of RFL as a core NS activity. The ICRC financial crisis further highlighted this dependence, and NSs were urged to diversify funding sources within and outside the Movement. The IFRC has currently no permanent dedicated human or financial resources to support RFL outside of specific emergency operations. Consequently, support is provided through the Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI), Migration, Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (PMER) and NS Development teams, subsumed within existing resources.

The scorecard results also reveal disparities in capacities and resources within the FLN, signalling opportunities for more strategic peer-to-peer support and partnerships, which should be tailored to specific capacities, common issues or caseloads of interest. It is crucial, however, to ensure that NSs with RFL capacity needs continue to receive the support they require to contribute to a well-functioning FLN. Some NSs can support sister NSs, fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous learning within the FLN.

While the ICRC financial crisis has highlighted funding challenges, it has also accelerated positive initiatives such as peer support within the FLN. These initiatives should be further strengthened and encouraged in the future, although mechanisms for effective and sustainable support have not yet been optimized.

A significant achievement during the implementation period was the collaborative development of the FLN Guidance on Strengthening National Societies' RFL Capacities.<sup>23</sup> This guidance,

<sup>18</sup> Relationships involve partnerships within the FLN and the Movement and with external actors.

<sup>19</sup> Resources encompass budget allocations, human resources and infrastructure.

<sup>20</sup> On average, "relationships" has consistently scored 2.7 and "resources" 2.8 throughout the implementation period.

<sup>21</sup> External actors may be government authorities, other humanitarian organizations, community organizations, representatives from the private sector or others.

<sup>22</sup> The M&E data show that both NSs and the ICRC have maintained practically the same level of budget allocation for RFL services (NSs consistently scored 2.3, and the ICRC 2.9).

<sup>23</sup> <https://shop.icrc.org/family-links-network-guidance-on-strengthening-national-societies-rfl-capacities-pdf-en.html>

developed as a result of cooperation among Movement components, draws on years of experience and consolidates best practices. It aims to show NSs, the ICRC and staff involved in partnerships with other NSs how to enhance RFL capacities effectively and is informed by and aligned with IFRC guidance on NS development.

### **Investment in RFL emergency preparedness and response**

Preparedness and surge mechanisms facilitate swift and effective emergency responses. The FLN consistently demonstrated its rapid response capability, deploying its RFL pool of specialists in 12 emergencies since 2020. A total of 19 specialists were deployed for contexts such as conflicts, disasters and mass population movements. This mechanism, with 80 trained members – 25 from NSs and 55 from the ICRC – and managed by the CTA, has proven to be consistently successful.

Coordination with the IFRC on emergency deployments was enhanced by integrating the RFL pool of specialists into IFRC-led deployments<sup>24</sup> and developing a workflow process for future deployments. The IFRC included RFL responses in emergency funding mechanisms (Disaster Response Emergency Fund – DREF, appeals) upon request, facilitating funding for deployments and enhancing response capacities. A systematic approach to integrating RFL responses into emergency funding is needed to address separation and disappearances in all humanitarian emergencies.

A further example of the integration of RFL into IFRC emergency response processes was the inclusion of a RFL module in the National Response Team (NRT) global training package and a specialized NRT RFL training course for the Americas region to enhance the knowledge and preparedness of first responders. RFL staff were included in global training events and processes for rapid response, and it is important to continue coordinating with IFRC rapid response delegates, including PGI delegates. Additionally, specialized e-modules on RFL in emergencies were prepared for RFL practitioners by the ICRC in consultation with NSs. They will soon be accessible to the FLN on the IFRC Learning Platform.

During the implementation period, the FLN responded effectively to emergencies, including challenging global ones such as COVID-19 in the years 2020 and 2021, the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan in 2021, the CTA data breach and the international armed conflict in Ukraine in 2022, and in 2023 successfully addressed large-scale needs generated by disasters<sup>25</sup> and armed conflicts.<sup>26</sup>

Despite these achievements, there is a need to strengthen preparedness measures. Current data indicate that only 5% of NSs and ICRC delegations are well-prepared<sup>27</sup> to address RFL needs during emergencies and that 66% are partially prepared, with little progress observed.

To improve response, it is vital to better integrate RFL into emergency plans, which requires internal coordination within NSs and the provision of guidelines, tools and training for RFL practitioners. Efforts are under way to enhance preparedness, including the operationalization of contingency planning templates,<sup>28</sup> e-module training and ongoing training for the RFL pool of specialists. Additionally, there are plans to revise the Restoring Family Links in Disasters Field Manual. Guidance on engaging with disaster management and embedding RFL in preparedness and response is also in the pipeline. Ensuring RFL practitioners are aware of available resources and know how to use them effectively in preparedness and response efforts is crucial.

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<sup>24</sup> For example, Haiti in 2021.

<sup>25</sup> For example, the Syria–Turkey earthquake and the Libya floods, which triggered the deployment of the RFL pool of specialists.

<sup>26</sup> For example, Sudan, Azerbaijan–Armenia and Israel–Palestine, which triggered the deployment of the RFL pool of specialists.

<sup>27</sup> “Well-prepared” means that the NS or ICRC delegation has 1) fully integrated RFL into their operational response; 2) pre-positioned and maintained RFL kits; 3) trained personnel; and 4) put standard operating procedures in place for RFL response.

<sup>28</sup> Developed in consultation with the IFRC and based on IFRC contingency plan tools.

### **Protection of individuals by protecting their personal data**

The implementation of data protection compliance in the FLN has faced challenges, most notably brought to light by the 2022 CTA data breach that seriously disrupted FLN operations. This breach underscored the high price paid by the FLN when data protection is compromised. However, it also highlighted the effectiveness of our mitigation efforts and the relevance of our RFL and data protection resolution<sup>29</sup> and the RFL CoC on Data Protection.<sup>30</sup> The FLN demonstrated remarkable resilience and solidarity. NSs and the ICRC swiftly mobilized to address the disruption so that services could be restored as quickly as possible. This collaborative effort not only mitigated the immediate impact but also reinforced the importance of a unified approach to data protection across the network. Raised awareness and the efforts of previous years proved to be invaluable assets in responding effectively to the crisis.

The 2022 data breach has reinforced our commitment to data protection. Full compliance with data protection frameworks is one of the most ambitious indicators of the M&E framework. Although some progress has been made in this regard against the 2020 baseline data, the figures show that in the FLN in 2023 full compliance<sup>31</sup> stood at 5%, and medium compliance at 21%. Moving forward, we must continue to prioritize responsible data handling practices, ensuring that we safeguard the sensitive information entrusted to us by those we serve. The Application Group has developed a robust action plan to be rolled out in 2024, with key priorities and deliverables.<sup>32</sup> It will continue to observe the key monitoring indicators on data protection that were established in the M&E survey and inform the IG on what action is needed.

### **A conducive (digital) environment for the FLN**

Digital technologies present unprecedented opportunities and enhance our efficiency as a network, allowing us to focus more on individual support and follow-up with families. But they also pose new risks, as the 2022 CTA data breach so clearly showed. It is key that the CTA, as technical advisor and coordinator for the FLN, ensures that the development of new digital solutions by and for the FLN does not expose affected individuals to additional dangers and that digital tools ensure accessibility and efficiency, complementing rather than replacing human interaction and judgment.

The CTA will continue to leverage technology to improve the accessibility (Strategic Objective 2) and effectiveness of RFL services, in collaboration with the FLN, with a view to increasing the answers provided to families (Strategic Objective 3). Key developments include, for example, enhancing service accessibility through remote interactions with RFL services.<sup>33</sup> Other developments include tools to help provide leads to trace missing persons effectively, contributing to increasing the provision of answers to families.<sup>34</sup> The CTA's digitalization efforts for the FLN reflect the delicate balance between leveraging technological advancements and upholding the core values of safety, security, "do no harm" and human connections in our RFL service delivery.

<sup>29</sup> Resolution "Restoring Family Links while respecting privacy, including as it relates to personal data protection", adopted at the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 2019, available at <https://rcrcconference.org/app/uploads/2019/12/33IC-R4-RFL- CLEAN ADOPTED en.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement Family Links Network Code of Conduct on Data Protection, available at <https://rcrcconference.org/app/uploads/2019/07/rfl-code-of-conduct.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> There are nine key monitoring indicators (KMIs) for NSs and six for the ICRC. Six are considered foundational for NSs and four for the ICRC. The rating received by a NS or ICRC delegation is high compliance if it answers "yes" to all the KMIs, medium compliance if it answers "yes" or "partially" to the foundational KMIs, low compliance if it answers "yes" or "partially" to less than six (or four) foundational KMIs and no compliance if it answers "no" to all nine (or six) KMIs.

<sup>32</sup> For example, the implementation of the simplified information notice and templates for data protection for some RFL services, the development of a child-friendly information notice, the revision and operationalization of the RFL CoC, the development of training materials, such as a data protection module, to be integrated into RFL training and data protection impact assessments.

<sup>33</sup> The Remote Enquiry and Assistance Connecting Hub (REACH) is a tool that enables affected people to self-register a RFL request, providing integrated management of contacts from different channels, information collection and follow-up. It is currently being deployed across NSs and ICRC delegations.

<sup>34</sup> For instance, the Missing Persons Digital Matching system is another tool that has been developed. It enables automated, safe and secure data cross-checking and matching across multiple internal and external databases. Today, it allows the ICRC to search in all its protection databases for information matching that of the missing person. It will soon be expanded to NSs and, in the future, to other humanitarian organizations.



## BRIEF REVIEW OF OTHER STRATEGY OBJECTIVES AND ENABLERS

Affected people in need of RFL services need to be aware of our services, and the Movement needs to continuously invest in RFL promotion (Enabler 4). In 2023, 34% of the FLN had taken significant measures to enhance RFL promotion and communication.

It is important for affected people to continue to trust the Movement, know how to access RFL services and, wherever possible, make personal contact with FLN staff and volunteers. In this regard, 19% of the FLN have provided personalized support to families of missing persons and separated families (Strategic Objective 4) by establishing a RFL service user satisfaction system, with this indicator showing an increase compared to the baseline data.<sup>35</sup>

However, the meaningful participation of affected people in the development of RFL services needs to be reinforced. No significant progress has been made on the indicator for Enabler 1 of the RFL Strategy, with just 11% of the FLN stating in 2023 that they actively seek the views of affected people. Nevertheless, other initiatives can be highlighted, such as the International Conference for Families of Missing Persons<sup>36</sup> and the Movement Family Links Medal selection process, as outstanding examples of how the Movement is including affected people in RFL-related decision-making processes.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, 29% of NSs and ICRC delegations are systematically<sup>38</sup> providing a range of RFL services to migrants, a figure that has remained unchanged over the last four years.<sup>39</sup> Efforts continue to adapt to the RFL needs of migrants, one example being the Trace the Face<sup>40</sup> online tool.

## C) PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT PHASE OF IMPLEMENTATION

While it is essential to make efforts to improve performance across all the indicators that monitor RFL Strategy objectives and enablers, with a view to ensuring the continued successful implementation of the RFL Strategy 2020–2025, the IG has established three key priorities for the next implementation period. The first is to continue enhancing RFL capacities and strengthening FLN resources, including targeted training and support for NSs, in order to improve service delivery and operational efficiency. The second is to continue boosting emergency preparedness by developing and implementing preparedness plans, conducting regular simulations and drills and providing training for RFL in emergencies, with a view to ensuring a swift and effective response during crises. The final priority is to continue improving data protection compliance by strengthening adherence to data protection regulations through comprehensive user-friendly tools, training and strict enforcement of the RFL CoC to safeguard personal information and build trust with RFL service users.

<sup>35</sup> The baseline figure was 11%.

<sup>36</sup> Organized by the CTA, this unique forum brings together families whose loved ones went missing due to conflicts, migration or other situations of violence, and the conference agenda is co-designed with the families. The third International Conference for Families of Missing Persons (21–23 November 2023) brought together 700 families of missing persons who participated in 44 local conference hubs hosted by 27 ICRC delegations and 14 NSs around the world.

<sup>37</sup> The regulations of the new Movement Family Links Medal provide, in principle, for the participation in the Medal Committee of at least two representatives of affected people or people who have experienced family separation – CoD 2022 Resolution 4, available at [https://rcrcconference.org/app/uploads/2022/06/CD22-R04-Family-Links-Medal\\_22-June-2022\\_EN\\_FINAL.pdf](https://rcrcconference.org/app/uploads/2022/06/CD22-R04-Family-Links-Medal_22-June-2022_EN_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> “Systematically” means that NSs and ICRC delegations are providing at least five of the following activities: 1) RFL services for migrants in migrant centres, RFL services for migrants in detention centres, the provision of calls/connectivity to migrants outside migrant/detention centres, the provision of tracing services to migrants outside migrant/detention centres (including use and promotion of Trace the Face where relevant), provision of RFL activities for unaccompanied and separated migrant children, collaboration/cooperation with authorities/other stakeholders to clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing migrants, collaboration/cooperation with authorities/other stakeholders to identify the human remains of missing migrants, family reunification support for migrants and the provision of information and orientation to migrants on RFL (including prevention messages).

<sup>39</sup> The data show that ICRC service provision has fallen by 10% against the baseline data, offset by a slight increase in NS service provision.

<sup>40</sup> Trace the Face, which aims to reconnect families who have lost contact or been separated on migration routes, is managed by the ICRC, together with NSs around the world. It is a virtual photo gallery with images of people who have contacted the ICRC for help finding their family members. Available at <https://tracetheface.familylinks.icrc.org/?lang=en>.

By prioritizing these areas, the IG aims to improve the overall performance and resilience of the FLN, ensuring it can meet the evolving needs of those in need of the RFL services offered by the Movement.

#### **4) RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

Movement components should reaffirm their commitment to allocating resources, according to their respective roles, capacities and operational needs, to implement the RFL Strategy Implementation Plan. Resource allocation and implementation will depend on existing RFL programmes, and collective efforts should be emphasized to enhance them.

Additionally, Movement components are encouraged to support each other in implementing the strategy, including by developing sustainable partnerships among NSs to strengthen RFL capacities collaboratively.

#### **5) IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING**

All Movement components will implement the RFL Strategy 2020–2025, set to be extended until 2030, according to their respective roles, integrating the measures it sets out into their organizational strategies at all levels. They will also participate in the M&E survey developed by the IG, which will oversee progress in implementing the strategy. Movement components will be informed yearly on the M&E framework indicator results.

Progress on RFL Strategy implementation will be reported to the CoD in 2028. At that time, work will begin on developing a new RFL policy and strategic framework to prevent a policy gap post-2030. This will require support from the FLN and the leaders of all Movement components and possibly consultation with external actors.

#### **6) CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

All components of the Movement must reaffirm their commitment to achieving the RFL Strategy objectives by 2030. While reflecting on our progress, it is important to acknowledge the ambitious scope of this endeavour and manage expectations realistically. Rapid advancement across all regions and indicators requires additional support and investment. Aligning our goals with the realities of our context will help ensure the strategy's vision becomes a tangible reality.

The unique nature of the Movement's RFL services should remain central to resource mobilization, especially in a shrinking humanitarian funding environment. The RFL Strategy's M&E framework is essential for monitoring progress, driving informed decisions and ensuring continuous improvement.

As we enter the next implementation phase, leaders must recognize their role and take concrete actions for the strategy's successful implementation. Leveraging the distinctive strength of the FLN will be a significant challenge over the next six years, yet it remains an invaluable asset for the Movement.