



ACTIVITIES FOR MIGRANTS



ICRC



ICRC

International Committee of the Red Cross
19, avenue de la Paix
1202 Geneva, Switzerland
T +41 22 734 60 01 F +41 22 733 20 57
Email: shop@icrc.org www.icrc.org
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C. Martin-Chicoiri/CRC

ACTIVITIES FOR MIGRANTS

Migration is a complex, global phenomenon. More than 230 million people around the world are migrants, and the routes they take transcend borders and regions. The causes behind migration are many and varied, often involving a mix of push and pull factors. Whatever the reasons, migrants can become vulnerable at many stages of their journey as they travel from their home countries, often through other countries, to their intended destination.

Although many migrants arrive safely in their destination countries and integrate into new communities, others endure great hardship that can affect their physical integrity, mental health and well-being, and that of their family. Migrants often transit through areas of armed conflict or other situations of violence, where they can

become trapped. And all along their routes, they make easy targets for abuse and exploitation, and face countless other risks.

Some migrants lose contact with their families; many suffer accidents or serious illness and cannot get access to medical care; others are detained for entering or remaining in a country irregularly. Still others face discrimination when they seek help. Every year, thousands of migrants die or disappear along the way, leaving their families to wait in anguish for answers.

It is these vulnerable migrants that the International Committee of the Red Cross seeks to help.



OUR APPROACH

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) does not encourage or discourage migration. Rather, our focus is on helping the most vulnerable migrants, regardless of their legal status. We seek to ensure that migrants receive the protection they are entitled to under international and domestic law, including the special protection afforded to certain categories of people, such as refugees and asylum seekers. We adapt our activities to migrants' needs and vulnerabilities, which vary from one place to another.

"Migrants are persons who leave or flee their habitual residence to go to new places – usually abroad – to seek opportunities or safer and better prospects. Migration can be voluntary or involuntary, but most of the time a combination of choices and constraints are involved. Thus, this policy includes, among others, labour migrants, stateless migrants, and migrants deemed irregular by public authorities. It also concerns refugees and asylum seekers, notwithstanding the fact that they constitute a special category under international law."

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Policy on Migration, 2009



In view of the trans-regional nature of migration, the ICRC and the rest of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement draw on their presence all along migration routes to better understand the needs of vulnerable migrants and help bridge the existing protection and assistance gaps.

The ICRC's work on behalf of vulnerable migrants and their families takes place mostly in areas affected by armed conflict or other situations of violence. At all times, we remain available to provide technical advice and/or operational support to National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies within our areas of expertise, such as restoring family links, activities for detained migrants and other protection-related aspects.

The ICRC seeks to work with States, which bear the primary responsibility for ensuring the safety of everyone on their territory or under their jurisdiction, regardless of their immigration status.

We remind them of their obligations towards migrants under domestic and international law.

The ICRC recognizes that the scale of humanitarian needs requires effective cooperation to meet the needs of vulnerable migrants. Attention is paid to the presence and capacity of other actors, and collaboration is established with those that have experience working with migrant populations. This coordination, both within the Movement and outside it, with civil society and the wider humanitarian community, is an integral part of the ICRC's work.

At a policy level, and when deemed relevant, the ICRC contributes to the debate on migration by taking part in regional and global forums, drawing on our experience in the field. The ICRC welcomes concerted efforts and innovative approaches to enhance the protection of vulnerable migrants and their families at the local, regional and global levels.



PROTECTING MIGRANTS

The ICRC seeks to ensure that States fulfil their obligations to protect the lives, preserve the dignity and alleviate the suffering of vulnerable migrants. To that end, we talk directly and confidentially with all authorities concerned.

We also seek to raise awareness of international humanitarian law, human rights law, refugee law and other applicable norms and standards, and draw attention to issues of concern for migrants.

To increase understanding of migration and the vulnerabilities migrants experience, we also foster exchanges with research institutions. These exchanges draw on our combined experience and use evidence-based research to contribute to the conversation and deepen the analysis of these issues.

In addition, we take action to help migrants and migrant communities become more resilient. By providing advice and material support, we help reduce their vulnerability and relieve their suffering.



C. Martin-Chico/ICRC

ACTIVITIES FOR DETAINED MIGRANTS

The ICRC visits migrants detained in both criminal and dedicated immigration detention facilities. During these visits, we assess whether the detainees are afforded due process of law, treated humanely and held in conditions that preserve their dignity. We also evaluate whether they can maintain contact with the outside world, such as with their families and consular authorities, if they wish to do so. In addition, we make sure that authorities fulfil their obligations under international law – in particular abiding by the principle of non-refoulement. While carrying out our activities, we strive to maintain a constructive dialogue with the detaining authorities and support them in their efforts to make improvements.

Many migrants end up in detention because they entered or remained in a country irregularly. But depriving people of their liberty has

serious consequences. A large body of research has shown that administrative detention is particularly harmful, especially for migrants' mental health, because of uncertainty about the administrative process and fears for the future. These fears compound the trauma migrants have already suffered. We remind authorities that any detention must be deemed necessary, reasonable and proportionate to a legitimate aim. We encourage authorities to make detention a last resort and use alternatives, especially for vulnerable groups such as children and traumatized individuals.

The ICRC also provides expertise and support to National Societies that work with detained migrants. We hold workshops on immigration-related detention, which are an opportunity to discuss best practices and ways the Movement can help detained migrants more effectively.



F. Therrien/ICRC

RESTORING FAMILY LINKS

Losing contact with family is a common consequence of migration, and one that can lead to other difficulties and needs. Illness, injury, lack of resources or being detained may restrict migrants' access to means of communication. Some migrants may be forcibly prevented from contacting their families, while others may hesitate or not wish to make contact. This is particularly true for migrants deemed by the authorities to be in an irregular situation.

Families who remain without news are left wondering whether their loved ones are alive or dead. This uncertainty is not only an emotional strain; it can have economic, legal and administrative consequences for those left behind.

The Family Links Network, made up of the ICRC and 189 National Societies, helps prevent people from disappearing or getting separated, and works to restore and maintain contact between family members when and wherever possible.

It also tries to help people find out what happened to loved ones reported missing. To better serve migrants and their families, the Family Links Network has adapted its services to their specific needs and to the challenges of restoring family links across numerous borders. Its wide range of services and tools include: helping people get in touch with loved ones by phone, handwritten message and our website (familylinks.icrc.org); collecting and centralizing tracing requests; registering and following up on individuals to prevent their disappearance, especially vulnerable people such as unaccompanied children, elderly people and migrants with health problems; reuniting families; and helping the authorities determine what happened to migrants who are unaccounted for. We work in migrants' best interest by taking particular care to ensure that relatives understand and consent to how their information will be handled and by fully protecting that data.



R. Waudo/ICRC

In addition, we remind the authorities of their obligations towards the families of missing migrants and promote the adoption of legal instruments to support families in their search process.

Together with the National Societies, we have also developed programmes aimed at the families of missing migrants. Support programmes, for example, help families cope with the difficulties of having a missing loved one by strengthening their existing resources and capacities to overcome problems, and providing a support network to which they can turn in case of need.

Humanitarian forensic support

When migrants die, their bodies are often not dealt with properly and steps are not always taken to ensure they can be identified. The ICRC offers forensic support and encourages communication and cooperation among forensic services and other agencies and organizations

for humanitarian purposes. We promote forensic best practices for ensuring that bodies are handled in a proper and dignified manner, the death is documented and the person identified as far as possible, and bodies are repatriated or given a proper burial. We also work with authorities to ensure that, where possible, they notify the families and issue an official death certificate.



J. Cornejo/ICRC

ASSISTING MIGRANTS

The ICRC seeks to maintain close ties with individuals and groups affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence so that their specific needs can be accurately identified. During their journey, migrants may have suffered from violence or been abused or exploited. They also often endure extremely difficult conditions, which can lead to injury, disease, dehydration and malnutrition. Depending on the circumstances, we may provide direct relief or help migrants access services provided by National Societies, governments or other actors.

Our assistance to vulnerable migrants along migration routes is often provided in close collaboration with other partners, such as National Societies. This assistance can entail, for instance, supplying drinking water and personal hygiene supplies or providing primary health care and physical rehabilitation for people who are seriously injured or have an amputated limb. We also assist in repairing and renovating infrastructure and improving the quality of sanitation facilities in places where migrants stay during their journey.

MISSION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.



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