

### **What are the ICRC's archives?**

The ICRC's archives contain data about individuals. This information has been collected by our various tracing agencies as part of our work to protect victims of armed conflict around the world since 1870. The files concern prisoners of war, civilian internees, children separated from their families, missing people, detainees visited and other people affected by our humanitarian activities.

### **What services do the ICRC's archivists offer?**

Every year, our archivists respond to around 1,800 requests from members of the public, including from former beneficiaries and their family members. These requests concern the open archives (1870–1950), in particular files from the two world wars, and the closed archives (1951–present). You can find more information in the [Rules governing access to the archives of the ICRC](#).

### **How are requests concerning the Second World War and the Spanish Civil War processed?**

Our archivists receive a large number of requests concerning the Second World War and the Spanish Civil War every year. In order to process these requests, we have had to put a quota system in place. We make a form available on the ICRC website three times per year, in January, May and September, at 8am (CET). Any requests sent outside these times and that do not use the online form will be rejected. One request form may be submitted per household. Once the maximum number of requests has been reached, we remove the online form from our website, and it is no longer possible to submit a request. Please bear in mind that the maximum can be reached quickly, so it is best to be online as soon as the form becomes available.

Outside the three dates, we can still accept requests if they are of a humanitarian nature:

- If you are the person concerned
- If your claim is linked to administrative formalities or a compensation claim
- If you are seeking to determine the identity of a natural parent.

Such requests should be sent to [tracing.archives@icrc.org](mailto:tracing.archives@icrc.org).

Other than these exceptions, we cannot accept any requests outside of the three dates, and we cannot hold any requests on a waiting list.

### **How many requests are accepted once the form becomes available online?**

We accept around 250 requests three times per year, in January, May and September.

### **I have been trying to access the online form for months now without any luck. What should I do?**

You should visit the following web page on the day that the online form becomes available: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/request-information-about-individuals-detained-during-second-world-war-or-spanish-civil-war-quota>.

The form will be available at 8am (CET), so make sure you are online at that time to be one of the first people to complete and submit the form. Unfortunately, we currently have no other option than to operate on a first come, first served basis.

If you experience technical issues with the form, please contact us immediately by email at [tracing.archives@icrc.org](mailto:tracing.archives@icrc.org).

### **Why does it take several months for my request to be processed once it has been accepted?**

The Second World War archives contain many lists of names that detail where prisoners were detained, transfers between camps and prisoners' releases, as well as other named documents, such as death certificates. Each page of the list is labelled with a set of letters and a numerical reference. For each name listed, the Central Agency for Prisoners of War created a file with the same alphanumeric code. These files were then classified by prisoners' nationality and filed alphabetically in folders. By the end of the war, these folders contained more than 36 million files.

Therefore, in order to give you a comprehensive response, our archivists must look for the person concerned in each of the folders, using all of the additional information provided with the request, such as date and place of birth, father's first name and prisoner-of-war number. Once the archivists have identified the relevant files, they then need to consult each of the lists on which the person

concerned appears. When all of the information has been collected, an archivist analyses it and writes a report, which we will then send to you.

Our archives are not yet digitized but instead stored physically in several different locations. That means that for one person, our archivists may need to consult sources in various formats, such as paper, microfiche or microform, and visit different locations across Geneva.

**What type of information can I expect to receive in response?**

You will receive a pdf document entitled "Information contained in the ICRC archives" by email, along with certified copies of certain documents regarding only the person concerned, if any such document exists. If relevant, the archivist may also direct you to other organizations that may have information about the person you are looking for.

**Will any measures be put in place to make it easier to access these individual files?**

The quota system is a temporary solution that was put in place to help us manage the large number of requests we receive. We are currently trying to raise funds so that we can digitize the Second World War archives and make them available online, like we have done with the [First World War archives](#). This allows the public to access the information directly.