

RFL Bulletin #3 – 17 March 2022

Ukraine-Russian Federation Crisis

ACCEPTED: requests regarding persons believed to be in Ukraine or Russia and the separation is due to the current situation.

NOT ACCEPTED: requests for persons on the move to other locations

Major Changes: We are asked explicitly to collect information from people who have reason to believe their loved one is deceased, both civilian and military, or in detention, both civilian and military.

Situation

Inside Ukraine, given the intensification and the rapid evolution of the situation, the access to the field by URCS and ICRC is still restricted. The situation is affecting the population inside Ukraine as well as neighboring countries. According to UNHCR more than 2 million people have crossed the border. UNHCR estimates that as the situation continues to unfold, an estimated 4 million people may flee Ukraine.

This RFL update will provide guidance on the collection of tracing cases for missing persons, including the deceased/presumed deceased (civilian and military personal), prisoner of war and missing in action (military personal unaccounted for) for which the loss of contact is in Ukraine or Russian Federation AND due to the current situation, as well as for unaccompanied and separated children.

International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement response

[IFRC and ICRC are jointly appealing](#) for 250 million CHF to respond to needs in Ukraine and neighboring countries. In addition, IFRC is supporting all National Societies in the region through its regional office based in Budapest on wide range of institutional, policy and programmatic issue.

ICRC has activated its institutional rapid deployment mechanism and has set up operational structures in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldavia to respond the humanitarian situation, including support to National Societies to respond RFL needs.

RFL needs, capacity and response

Today, there is no consolidated reliable information with regards to the numbers of civilians separated, missing or dead, nor on military personnel missing, killed in action or on number of unaccompanied and separated children. In addition to family separation related to the fleeing of the population while other family members remained in Ukraine, many families have lost the contact with their beloved ones, due to the disruption of communication in some areas in Ukraine.

Despite restricted access preventing immediate action in Ukraine, the collection and preservation of data on **the separated, the missing and the dead at this stage is crucial**. We need to kindly ask for any cases in which people in constant or recent contact have a **loss of contact of their beloved one in Ukraine and/or in Russian Federation.**

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Protection and management of dead bodies (civilian or military personal)

It is the concerned local authorities and parties' **obligation** to ensure the proper protection and handling of the dead for their later identification and handover to respective families. The ICRC has and continues to address the respective parties in reminding them of their obligations towards the proper management of the dead and ensuring they are protected, their dignity maintained, and all identifying information is recorded and shared between the parties through the Central Tracing Agency.

The ICRC is not currently in position to support or organize the evacuation of the deceased. When circumstances permit, the ICRC will address specific requests related to the search and identification of human remains to respective authorities and follow up accordingly.

Exposing prisoners or the remains of combatants to public curiosity is prohibited by International Humanitarian Law. We strongly recommend families do not turn to such websites/public announcements. The Red Cross is not in a position to ensure the veracity of information provided in such website/public announcements.

Children

Many local/regional organizations are offering response to children and their families in the neighboring countries, including digital means to restore family links, and reunify children with their families. Despite the lack of figures, the ICRC and the international actors on Child Protection have serious concern particularly on risk of trafficking. At a global level, UNHCR and UNICEF recognize the leading role of the CTA and consequently the Red Cross Family Links Network in tracing activities. ICRC, UNHCR, UNICEF and other child protection organizations are in regular contact to ensure a coordinated response to children in the neighboring countries.

Regarding the different digital platforms created by number of NGO, do not redirect the families to these sites as the safe use of these platforms cannot be guaranteed, and ICRC has not been able to determine if they comply with the principles of *do not harm* and *data protection*. **We cannot collect tracing requests based solely on a digital source** (i.e., pictures shared on digital media/platforms).

In Ukraine

- Please note that the ICRC and the Ukraine Red Cross Society (URCS) do not evacuate or facilitate the evacuations of affected people outside of Ukraine (see [ICRC communication lines](#)). ICRC is not aware of any organization evacuating people outside of Ukraine. Relatives of persons in need of evacuation are encouraged to approach the relevant consular services.
- In relation to the **“humanitarian corridors”** inside Ukraine, as a neutral and impartial humanitarian intermediary, the ICRC has been facilitating the dialogue between the parties on the safe passage of civilians.

In Russian Federation

The RFL Assessment in Russian Federation is still ongoing.

In Neighboring Countries

The majority of persons arriving from Ukraine are in possession of mobile phones and are in contact with their relatives. It is expected that there will be temporarily disruptions of communication with families. Nonetheless, national societies along the Ukrainian border are trying to organize connectivity services and mobile phone operators in Romania, Poland and Slovakia are offering free of charge services at the border crossings (distribution of prepaid phone/internet cards and WiFi). Therefore, we expect families in the neighboring countries to be able to restore/maintain family link on their own or with the support of the national societies.

Accepted Cases: Detail

The ICRC Central Tracing Authority Bureau will accept the following cases. A definition of each category is provided for understanding and possible categorization but if in doubt regarding which category the sought person belongs to, leave that section of the enquiry form blank.

Military Personnel

This is the status of the sought person at the moment of the loss of contact. If the sought person was NOT military personnel when contact was lost, we need to consider them to be 'civilian'.

- **Prisoners of War ("PoW"):** military personnel detained or allegedly detained by the adverse party.
- **Missing in Action ("MiA"):** military personnel who went missing carrying out his/her duty and from whom the family has no information.

The temporarily loss of contact between military personal and their families is expected in situation of conflict. Nonetheless if a family has good reason to consider their loved one is missing, we will take the case.

- **Killed in Action ("KiA"):** military personnel deceased or presumed deceased, under their authorities or in the hands of the adverse party, for whom:
 1. Families have knowledge of the death of their relative (deceased) but no information on where the human remains are,
 2. Families have knowledge of the death of their relative and know where the human remains are but ask our support to retrieve it,
 3. Families have information that their beloved ones may be deceased (presumed deceased) but no information on where the human remains may be.
- **Foreign fighters ("FF"):** a third country national **individual** fighting for one of the parties to the conflict. If families believe their loved one is a foreign fighter, and is a prisoner, missing, or deceased, we will take the case.

Civilians

Civilian includes all non-combatants, regardless of citizenship. This is the **status at the moment of the loss of contact**. The ICRC CTA Bureau will follow up the cases according to all possible search avenues, and will take into consideration that the person's status (civilian or combatant) may have changed since the original tracing request was filed.

- **Civilian deprived of liberty ("CIV")**: civilians deprived of their liberty in the hands of the adverse Party.
- **Civilian allegedly arrested/detained ("AoA" or "AoD") by "their authorities"**: Unlike civilians mentioned above, they are civilians arrested/detained or allegedly arrested/detained in relation to the conflict by their "own authorities".
- **Missing person ("MP")**: civilian for whom the family has no information on the fate and/or whereabouts in relation with the current conflict. **At this stage, we collect only loss of contact that occurred in Ukraine and in conflict area.**

Only tracing cases should be collected for preserving precise data. At the current time we cannot handle requests for family news (welfare checks or Red Cross Messaging).

As mentioned in the previous RFL Bulletin, if families lost contact while a loved one was about to cross the border, as the contact may be temporarily disrupted, please wait a few days to allow time for the border crossing and restored access to connectivity as families may be able to reconnect independently.

- **Civilian deceased or presumed deceased**: We will take cases of civilians deceased or presumed deceased. The categorization is the same as the above for military personnel.

Contact with enquirers

Because the situation is evolving rapidly, we ask that if you have filed a case with us, have contacted your local Red Cross or have used the hotline number to submit a request, please keep in contact with us going forward and keep us informed if there is a change or if you come upon new information. We must follow up on all requests, and that means that even if your loved one has subsequently made contact, we need to know that. We also need to know if you gain further information about your loved one that would help us. Please also be aware that even if we are unable to immediately search, we still need the information about all missing persons to help with identifying people or their remains.

How to submit an enquiry

Please call your local Red Cross, or the Red Cross Restoring Family Links number, 1-844-782-9441. Service providers in the Bay Area that need guidance for outreach to their clients may contact Hawley Rising hawley.rising@redcross.org with questions.

For inquiries we cannot currently process, like those for persons who have left the conflict area, or Red Cross Messaging, you can make the request, we will keep it on file for when we are able to take such requests, but if you do this, You Must keep us informed if you regain contact or no longer will need our

services on the request. We must not have requests that are no longer needed left open, we truly need to concentrate efforts on those still in need.

Outreach

If you are a service provider, and there would be people who might need our services for the Ukraine/Russian Federation Conflict, please help us by placing our flyers where people will see them in your organization or sending them to clients you believe might need them. We are sending them in English, Russian, and Ukrainian, if you need them in another language, please contact us (Hawley Rising or Christine Medeiros) and we will try to provide them.

US Citizens abroad

Enquiries concerning U.S. citizens should be referred to the U.S. Department of State, Office of Overseas Citizens Services, at 1-888-407-4747 (from US or Canada) or +1-202-501-4444 (from overseas). More information can be found on <http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/emergencies.html>