COUNCIL OF DELEGATES

OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS
AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Antalya, Turkey
10–11 November 2017

Restoring Family Links in the Twenty-First Century

BACKGROUND REPORT

**Document prepared by the International Committee of the Red Cross
in cooperation with the other members of the RFL Strategy Implementation Group (20
National Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent
Societies)**

Geneva, September 2017

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We find ourselves at a crossroads: our services to help people search for missing relatives, to restore contact with them and to clarify the fate and whereabouts of those who remain unaccounted for are facing major new challenges. Armed conflict, increasingly fought in urban areas, and perilous migration journeys, often caused by violence, are dramatically increasing the number of separated families and people who are unaccounted for or die without being properly identified, leading to tremendous suffering for the individuals affected or those left behind.

Strict data protection will be critical for the provision of Restoring Family Links (RFL) services in the future. Digital technologies are transforming people's lives – opening up new opportunities while creating new risks. Communication technologies and social media enable a great number of people to maintain contact on their own, but depend on the provision of connectivity which will be an important pillar of the work of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement).

Searching for people whose family members are unable to contact them through such means becomes increasingly complex and continues to require a personalized search effort and long-term engagement. The Family Links (FL) Network must also focus on the needs of vulnerable groups such as children, detainees and the elderly.

RFL embodies our Fundamental Principles of humanity, unity and universality. The essential humanitarian nature of helping people find answers about the fate of their loved ones, and the unique position of the Movement to provide this service, is uncontested. However, the spectrum of stakeholders offering RFL-related services is becoming broader.

Results of ongoing analyses of the FL Network's performance demonstrate achievements in some domains, while in other areas progress is only modest or stagnating.

It is crucial that the Network is strengthened, and its services modernized and adapted to meet the new challenges, as in certain areas the Network is weak and more virtual than real. Adequate capacity and coherence across the Network are required to enhance performance and demonstrate the global scale of our work and the collective impact of our services.

Nine preliminary **strategic orientations for the future of RFL services** have emerged from a process led by the International Committee of the Red Cross Central Tracing Agency and driven by the RFL Strategy Implementation Group, which includes National Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies:
1. **Meaningful participation of affected people in developing RFL services**
2. **Ensuring missing persons and their families are positioned at the heart of RFL**
3. **Provision of connectivity as aid, and investment in modern information and communication technology (ICT)**
4. **Active, personalized and enduring searches as a unique feature of the Movement response**
5. **Meeting data protection requirements**
6. **Global focus on RFL in the context of migration**
7. **Investment in strengthening RFL capacity and the emergency response of the Family Links Network**
8. **Systematic and targeted RFL promotion and communication**
9. **Mobilization of and partnerships with other actors**

It is proposed that an **RFL Leadership Platform** be set up – made up of Movement leaders and involving leaders of other relevant organizations – as a crucial means to tackle some of

the new challenges collectively, to drive forward the strategy development, implementation and adjustment process and to forge innovative global partnerships.

This report concludes with a recommendation to those attending the 2017 Council of Delegates to participate in the workshop on RFL and to adopt the draft resolution, paving the way for and supporting the continuation of the strategy development process, with a view to adopting a new RFL Strategy for the Movement at the 2019 Council of Delegates.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian crises in all their forms leave countless people seeking news of family members. Restoring Family Links (RFL) is the generic term given by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement) to the range of activities that aim to prevent separation and disappearance, clarify the fate and whereabouts of people reported missing, restore and maintain contact between family members and facilitate family reunification whenever possible. These activities are often carried out alongside programmes providing psychological, legal, social and material support, as well as the management of human remains and forensic identification.

The Movement has provided this unique range of services for decades, all the while reaffirming that people have a right to know the fate of their missing family members, as provided for in international humanitarian law and other relevant international obligations. The role of the Movement in searching for missing persons and putting families back in contact is underpinned by those international commitments, as well as the Movement's Statutes, resolutions of the Council of Delegates and the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, and the Movement's internal policies. The fundamental relief that RFL brings to families lies at the heart of the Movement's work. Every year, RFL services benefit hundreds of thousands of people.

> *"Reuniting my family is greater than all other humanitarian services.*
> *Being a complete family gives us strength to face a new life as refugees."*
> *A beneficiary of the RFL programme in Uganda*

We are entering a crucial new phase with regards to RFL services. The current RFL Strategy[1] is coming to an end and important questions need to be examined critically to ensure that our services remain relevant in a rapidly changing environment. What is our collective vision for the future? How do modern means of communication impact on RFL service delivery and engagement with communities? How do we adjust to these and make best use of new technologies? How do we best integrate RFL into related Movement services in response to migration and disasters? How can we best organize ourselves as a global network and optimize our cooperation with a growing number of other actors who have a stake in RFL activities?

Many migrants lose contact with each other and family separation is pervasive along migratory routes, leaving people in need of news of their loved ones. Meanwhile, advances in digital technology mean that such technology is increasingly being used to find out what happened to missing persons and to address the needs of their families. Once an uncontested field of action by the Movement, this important humanitarian space is now inhabited by a growing number of actors.

Some great achievements have been made in implementing the current RFL Strategy, but in other areas progress has been limited; some of these are summarized in section 3.1, although analysis is ongoing.

The status quo is not an option. The Movement's expertise in the field of RFL is unquestioned by other agencies, but competition is growing – bringing with it varying data quality and protection standards. The Movement as a whole, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in particular, given its lead role in RFL, must urgently project its RFL services into the future in order to take full advantage of new technologies that meet beneficiary needs and to forge stronger partnerships with relevant actors to provide timely and comprehensive services.

2. BACKGROUND: DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW RFL STRATEGY

Following the 2015 Council of Delegates, where a progress report was submitted on the RFL Strategy 2008–2018, the ICRC Central Tracing Agency, together with National Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), began the process of analysis and consultation in order to develop a new RFL strategic framework for the period after 2018. We are currently midway through this process; what follows is a summary of the preliminary analysis and the strategic orientations that have emerged, both of which will be developed further in 2017 and 2018.

A new RFL Strategy Implementation Group was established to spearhead this process for the 2016–2019 period. The Group is made up of representatives of a geographical spread of National Societies,[2] the IFRC and the ICRC. The Group held three meetings so far between September 2016 and July 2017. To inform the Group's discussions, a survey was conducted to assess important aspects of National Societies' RFL service capacity (see section 3.1.2); research on the relevance of RFL services was conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and several studies were undertaken on information and communication technology (ICT) developments.

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[1] Restoring Family Links Strategy (and implementation plan) 2008–2018:
https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/0967-restoring-family-links-strategy, all web addresses accessed July 2017.
[2] Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Jordan, Kenya, Mali, Mexico, Nepal, Qatar, Rwanda, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Members of broader thematic working groups, the leadership of a number of National Societies and external actors supported the Implementation Group in developing preliminary strategic orientations based on the proposals coming out of this process, with the aim of submitting a vision of the key dimensions of the new strategic framework to the 2017 Council of Delegates. The proposals outlined in section 3.2 reflect these outcomes. It is anticipated that in 2019 the Council of Delegates should be able to formally adopt the finalized new RFL Strategy, which will guide the Movement in the future.

3. ANALYSIS AND PROGRESS

3.1 ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT

3.1.1 New external challenges for 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 trace and contact family members through such means. The request for connectivity is among the first made by beneficiaries. But helping those who are unable to get back in contact with their families through these means is becoming ever more complex and difficult.

While ICT cannot replace the multifaceted and exhaustive activities carried out by the Family Links (FL) Network, it does nevertheless offer tremendous new opportunities to enhance proximity with beneficiaries and cooperation with other stakeholders, and to partner with technology companies. The use of such technology will have a substantial impact on internal processes, which will require a fundamental review, overhaul and upgrading of the capacities of the Network.

Preventing access to communication is also a means to exert control over a population – especially in situations of armed conflict and other emergencies. Modern technology exposes people to the risk that their personal data could be used to harm them or accessed as part of cyber warfare. These concerns may prevent individuals from using new technologies when searching for missing loved ones. The Network's trusted RFL service, with its privileged access and enforced data protection standards, therefore remains an important option for many individuals.

With this in mind, the proposed strategic orientations emphasize the need to invest in the provision of connectivity as aid and modern ICT, in particular as a means to reinforce proximity with beneficiaries and use digital search technology to cross-reference with other stakeholders, while also ensuring compliance with internationally accepted data protection standards. Furthermore, the proposal to set up a Leadership Platform (see section 3.2) made up of Movement leaders and other stakeholders aims to provide a forum where concrete progress can be made on such considerations.

Migration

Migration is a complex global phenomenon. More than 244 million people[3] around the world are migrants. The routes they take are transregional. Rates of migration have grown unprecedentedly in many regions of the world, increasingly affecting all continents and leading

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[3] According to United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs figures:
http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/index.shtml

to family separations from countries of origin, through countries of transit, to countries of destination.

While many migrants arrive safely in their destination countries and integrate into new communities, others endure great hardships and face countless risks. Losing contact with family members is one of these risks. This can cause considerable distress and lead to greater vulnerability of migrants and their families. Children are especially vulnerable;[4] they may either travel on their own or lose contact with their family during the journey.

There are many reasons why migrants lose contact with family members. Illness, injury, lack of resources or detention 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 to be in an "irregular"[5] situation by the authorities.

Every year, thousands of migrants die or disappear on their journey, leaving their families waiting in anguish for answers about their fate and whereabouts. When migrants die, their bodies are not always cared for properly nor are steps taken to ensure they can be identified by the relevant authorities.[6]

Considering both the scale of the needs and the transregional nature of the specific challenges involved in RFL services for migrants and their families, it is essential that the new RFL Strategy outlines how to develop the work of the FL Network accordingly for 2018 onward.

The missing

People have gone missing as long as humanity has been fighting wars or facing natural and man-made disasters. They might be captured or abducted and then held incommunicado in secret locations (enforced disappearance) or die in custody. They might be victims of mass executions and thrown into unmarked graves (summary executions). Sometimes they are civilians fleeing fighting, or children separated from their families, or the elderly or people with disabilities who are unable to flee and get left behind. Civilians and weapon bearers might be killed during clashes and their remains not managed or disposed of properly. A growing number of people flee their homes because of violence, insecurity, destruction, endemic poverty, poor governance and changing climate conditions. Today the phenomenon has taken on global proportions in its overlap with migration. And this is unlikely to change. A significant number of migrants go missing along the global migration routes; for many their final locations are not determined and, for those that die, their bodies are often never found. In all these situations, families are left in despair, not knowing the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones. The trends and numbers are appalling and there is no sign of decline. The people who go missing today join the ranks of others about whom nothing has been known for years, even decades, leaving families in anguish and uncertainty and jeopardizing any prospects of restoring the social fabric of the communities and societies affected.

The phenomenon of missing persons remains one of the most damaging legacies of past and current armed conflicts, internal violence, migration and natural disasters – adversely affecting the individuals who disappear, their families and the community at large. Families want to know the fate and whereabouts of their loved ones. They will not stop searching until they do.

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[4] The number of unaccompanied minors is significant: for instance, Eurostat estimated that around 90,000 unaccompanied minors sought asylum in Europe in 2015, while UNICEF reported that some 26,000 unaccompanied children arrived in the US in the first semester of 2016.

[5] i.e. entering or remaining in a country without the necessary authorization or documents.

[6] According to the International Organization for Migration, between 2014 and mid-2017 over 21,000 migrants died or went missing in countries of transit and destination, along migratory routes around the world. These are only the reported cases.

Authorities should act as soon as people are at risk of going missing and make sure that appropriate means, mechanisms and processes exist to collect information and allow these at-risk people to stay in touch with their families and let them know how and where they are. Because the phenomenon has taken on such global proportions, the authorities should extend their efforts beyond their own national borders and ensure that their initiatives are compatible with those being developed in other countries. Full advantage should be taken of local networks, including those of National Societies, and of all sources of information, including big data, while complying with protection of personal and sensitive data. Authorities should make sure that the families of missing persons have access to all the services they may need, including psychosocial support and legal, economic and administrative assistance. Even after death, no circumstance justifies depriving an individual of their identity. In their effort to respect the families' right to know, authorities should develop sound procedures in the search, protection and recovery of unidentified human remains and work together in order to increase the chance of providing answers, including on identification.

3.1.2 The internal RFL environment

A critical look is required at what has been achieved in terms of strengthening the FL Network since 2007, when the current RFL Strategy was adopted, and at areas where we have not achieved the expected results. A first step in this direction was taken with the National Society capacity survey carried out in 2016.[7] The responses are currently being analysed and compared with data from a similar survey conducted in 2006. Final results will be presented in 2018, together with a more specific assessment of the ICRC's and the IFRC's efforts to implement the current RFL Strategy.

Understanding what people need

Family separation as a result of armed conflict, disasters and other emergencies, or in the context of migration, can at times be resolved quickly and independently by the individuals affected through their own means, social media or other networks. Connectivity and a power supply are therefore an essential need. On the other hand, helping those who are not able to get back in contact with their families in this way becomes ever more complex. Vulnerable groups such as children, detainees, the elderly and people with disabilities also require specific attention.

Migration was identified as one of the primary drivers of individuals approaching the Movement's RFL services (see annex, graphs 1 and 2). A significant majority of National Societies report that they address the needs of migrants, highlighting the prominence of migration as a social phenomenon and the resulting humanitarian needs.

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[7] 142 National Societies responded to the survey, although the findings in this report are restricted to the 136 National Societies who replied in time for analysis. It should be noted that the survey results are limited insofar as they rely on National Societies' self-perception, rather than independent evaluation or checking against external data sources. Rigorous evaluation methods are lacking from the FL Network. The preliminary strategic orientations call for consistent needs-assessment methodology, data recording and response planning, allowing for more accurate compilation of RFL statistics across the Network.

RFL and technology

A key achievement in terms of digital technology is the development of the FL Network's web-based ecosystem (see figure 1). This is a collection of online tools comprised of (1) a publicly accessible website which provides beneficiaries and the public with information on the Movement's RFL services as well as an online database where users can register people as missing or safe in relation to certain major crises; (2) information-sharing platforms restricted to members of the FL Network, which are used to transfer files and develop best practice; and (3) two databases exclusively used by National Societies and the ICRC to manage individual RFL cases.

Figure 1

The full rollout,[8] proper use and interoperability of the FL Network's online system is an important focus for the future. Alongside that, greater efforts are required to ensure that all the Movement components are compliant with the data protection legislation applicable to them (currently less than half of the National Societies surveyed indicated that they were compliant – see annex, graph 3).

Range of services

i. Tracing

The continued ability to offer tracing services across the globe, drawing upon the extensive reach of the FL Network, remains a unique feature of the Movement. The National Societies handling high volumes of tracing requests are geographically diverse, in every region of the world, demonstrating the worldwide need for RFL services.

ii. Red Cross messages

Some National Societies are handling a very high volume of Red Cross messages, highlighting the scale of the need being met by these National Societies in areas where mobile phone coverage or access to services is limited.

iii. Phone calls

The high volume of phone call services to enable people to contact their families, particularly in Africa,[9] illustrates a responsive and adaptive solution by the National Societies there. By regularly assessing the needs of the population and offering RFL tools that are best adapted to meet them, they enable large numbers of beneficiaries to obtain immediate results.

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[8] The National Society database (FL Answers) is in use by almost 40 National Societies, and a further 15 National Societies are planning to start using it in 2018.
[9] Numbers fluctuate greatly depending on the status of crises in the region.

iv. Family reunification

Family reunification services were provided by 50% of survey respondents. Requests to the FL Network to assist with family reunifications have become a prominent issue, and one emphasized by National Societies during the strategy consultation process.

Graph 4 in the annex provides an overview of the range of RFL services being offered.

Strengthening RFL service capacity

The overall picture which emerges from a first look at the results of the survey is that significant progress has been achieved in some areas over the last ten years. While this positive trend should be sustained, there are other important areas where progress is limited and which deserve greater attention. The entire Movement leadership must reaffirm its commitment to sustaining and building the FL Network.

There has been an increase in recognition for RFL services among National Societies, which manifests itself through better strategic integration of RFL into development and disaster-preparedness plans. Unfortunately this has not translated into a corresponding increase in resource allocation for RFL, with more than half of all National Societies that responded depending exclusively on ICRC funding for their RFL work (see annex, graph 5).

Structured assessment of RFL needs and the National Societies' capacity to address them appears to have increased somewhat since 2006, reflecting the usefulness of the needs assessment guidelines produced for this purpose.[10]

The FL Network relies fundamentally on cooperation across the Movement. Responses to the survey point to strengthened interaction within at least part of the FL Network. This is further supported by greater levels of participation in regional RFL coordination forums. Two thirds of National Societies reported having run operational activities with the ICRC in the past year and having worked with the ICRC on capacity-building activities. However, figures are low for support between other components of the Movement, and longer-term peer-to-peer engagement to strengthen capacity remains extremely rare.

Interaction with external stakeholders increased; survey responses showed that UNHCR is the main stakeholder, followed by local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNICEF and a range of other organizations (see annex, graph 6), which makes the case for exploring framework agreements at the global level. A majority of National Societies report that their authorities recognize RFL as a humanitarian service; though only half indicate having a specific role in the country's disaster-response plan and only half of those again have that role formalized in a specific agreement.

A growing number of National Societies have realized the importance of community outreach activities and efforts to raise awareness of their RFL services. Communication guidelines were produced to support this, but a third of National Societies reported that they had not established relationships or undertaken any community outreach work to promote RFL. As such, a majority of National Societies still consider awareness of RFL services to be limited among a number of target audiences.

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[10] ICRC, *Assessing Restoring Family Links Needs: Handbook for National Societies and the ICRC*, ICRC, Geneva, 2010: http://icrcndresourcecentre.org/books/assessing-restoring-family-links-needs-handbook-for-national-societies-and-the-icrc/

More National Societies report producing statistics on their RFL activities. However, data collection across the Network is inconsistent and done using significantly differing criteria,[11] which prevents the Movement from communicating the global scale of its work and achievements in a consolidated, compelling way. Our inability to demonstrate the fundamentally humanitarian and truly universal impact of our RFL services prevents us from leveraging them for funding opportunities.

3.2 PRELIMINARY STRATEGIC ORIENTATIONS AND ESTABLISHMENT OF A LEADERSHIP PLATFORM

The following section contains a summary of the recommended draft strategic orientations for a future RFL Strategy as they emerged from the consultation process up to July 2017.

Part 1	Generic policy framework and situation analysis

Part 1 of the future Strategy will set out the long-term direction and overall vision of the Movement regarding its services to prevent family separation and to help people search for missing family members, ascertain their fate and whereabouts, and restore contact with them.

It will outline the scope of RFL services and establish operating principles for RFL services. This will include clarifying key concepts and definitions, delineating the roles and responsibilities of the components of the Movement and the structure of the FL Network, and proposing guiding principles for cooperation with other actors.

An analysis of key features of the evolution of the broader environment will be provided, along with a discussion of how the Strategy is linked to and has synergies with other important Movement policy documents.

Part 2	Strategic orientations

Part 2 of the future RFL Strategy will contain the main strategic orientations (SO) for a period of four to six years, the expected results and required implementation action. The main points identified to date are briefly summarized below.

SO1	Strategic orientation 1	Meaningful participation of affected people in developing RFL services

1. An important dimension that cross-cuts all the strategic orientations is accountability to, and involvement of, beneficiaries in assessing needs and developing the operational strategies and response. Affected people will be increasingly connected, allowing them to better voice their concerns and be part of developing solutions.

SO2	Strategic orientation 2	Ensure missing persons and their families are positioned at the heart of RFL

2. Clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing persons and trying to prevent family separation will be emphasized as a core task of the Movement, at the heart of RFL.

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[11] Critical to remedying this in coming years will be a commitment to developing a shared definition of workload data collection and investing in shared technology, such as the Family Links Answers database, to produce statistics that accurately reflect the impact of the FL Network.

3. Preventing people going missing is an essential dimension of RFL and should be developed contextually at the community level, with the authorities and all other relevant stakeholders, based on an assessment of the causes of separation and disappearance.

4. Accelerated early action is required when people go missing, along with the enduring commitment of long-term action. Missing persons should be searched for as soon as the situation allows, and cases of missing persons should be documented as soon as possible.

5. An integrated, multidisciplinary approach is required, which will combine searching for missing persons, encouraging forensic identification of the deceased, engaging with the authorities, and addressing the multifaceted needs of the families of missing persons.

6. A better way will be found for the ICRC to share with National Societies the experience it has acquired in its work for missing persons and their families, including the "accompaniment" approach. National Societies should consider broadening their involvement.[12] The division of roles between the ICRC and National Societies must be based on contextual considerations and the most effective mechanisms to achieve results for families.

SO3	Strategic orientation 3	**Provision of connectivity as aid, and investment in modern information and communication technology (ICT)**

7. The relevance of existing ICT services and tools within the ecosystem developed by the ICRC and National Societies for the FL Network under the current RFL Strategy will be maintained through continuous service management, in line with evolving business needs, and processes will be up to date and harmonized across the FL Network.

8. Beneficiaries and Movement partners will continue to benefit from quality ICT RFL tools and services. Such technology will be adopted by the entire FL Network, the aim being that all components will use a coherent, integrated system, enabling cases to be transferred and searches to be carried out securely across the Network, as well as consolidating the reporting process at national, regional and international levels.

9. As a major part of its RFL response, the FL Network will provide communication tools, power and connectivity as an integrated form of aid delivered through global, regional and local partnerships with other actors. This is a prerequisite for making digital RFL services accessible to beneficiaries.

10. Proximity to and empowerment of beneficiaries will be developed as a crucial feature of RFL services. This will be achieved by improving digital proximity to affected people through an interactive self-service digital platform which will enable beneficiaries to store sensitive data safely, request services and communicate in real time with the FL Network. Workflows and business processes will need to be revised accordingly.

11. New technologies, developed through partnerships between Movement components, and between the Movement and other humanitarian organizations, institutions and the private sector, will enable comprehensive, secure searches for missing persons, including identification of potential matches between the databases of the relevant stakeholders.

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[12] The results of the survey show that a third of National Societies are already engaged in a range of different activities beyond traditional RFL services to support families of missing persons. This highlights the growing needs and the importance of this domain.

SO4	**Strategic orientation 4**	**Active, personalized and enduring searches**

12. Notwithstanding the growing importance of technology and connectivity, the unique, personalized and active search will remain a core task of the Movement for families who are unable to trace or contact their loved ones using their own means. Specific vulnerable groups, such as detainees, children and the elderly, and contexts where there is no connectivity or where the use of communication technology poses a risk, will require particular attention.

SO5	**Strategic orientation 5**	**Meeting data protection requirements**

13. Data protection will constitute a key pillar of RFL; first and foremost to safeguard service users who entrust us with their personal information, but also because of the risks posed by new digital technologies and the proliferation of data protection laws globally. Meeting minimum standards will be essential to ensure the proper management of data and secure transfers within the Movement and to other actors.

14. The *RFL Code of Conduct on Data Protection*[13] (including data protection impact assessments) will be systematically promoted across the Network and externally, and will be integrated into the training, working procedures and policies of all components.

SO6	**Strategic orientation 6**	**Global focus on RFL in the context of migration**

15. While RFL services across the full spectrum of humanitarian crises will remain as important as ever, it will be critical to reinforce the Network's RFL services along migratory trails, including for detained migrants and other vulnerable groups. In these situations in particular, better transregional coordination, cooperation and coherence within the Network will be essential.

16. The importance of family reunification will be recognized and promoted by the Movement. Reuniting separated family members, when an individual and contextual assessment confirms that it is in the best interest of all, will be supported by the FL Network.

17. In light of the specific and evolving vulnerability of migrants, measures to prevent family separation along migration routes must be integrated in RFL standard activities. Preventing the disruption of family links will be an essential part of the work of the FL Network.

SO7	**Strategic orientation 7**	**Investment in strengthening RFL capacity and the emergency response of the Family Links Network**

18. National Societies and the ICRC will regularly assess existing and potential needs for RFL services and their capacity to meet those needs. Their findings will be systematically integrated in development and operational plans, and partnerships across the network will be broadened and leveraged to ensure their success.

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[13] A code of conduct implementation group has been set up to assess and implement the changes needed to meet compliance with the growing number of data protection laws.

19. National Societies will strengthen their RFL capacity and emergency response, which will require up-to-date skills, and importantly also means integrating RFL into their strategic plans, resource allocation, and structural and organizational development – including ICT capacity and resources, a coherent performance-management system and cross-departmental cooperation. The support of the IFRC will be indispensable in these domains.

20. The Movement will explore innovative resource-mobilization schemes specifically for RFL at the global, regional and national levels.

21. At the operational level, a multidisciplinary approach will be adopted to contingency planning and emergency preparedness and response mechanisms at national, regional and global levels.

SO8	**Strategic orientation 8**	**Systematic and targeted RFL promotion and communication**

22. Communication on RFL will be strengthened at national, regional and global levels – using targeted messages and contextualized means and tools – to ensure that beneficiaries are aware of and accept our work and that relevant stakeholders support us.

23. Based on a shared global vision for RFL and a coherent value proposition for our services, simple and meaningful key messages will be developed which are adapted to the context and the target audience.

24. The same system will be used across the board to enable key statistics to be consolidated at the national, regional and global levels. Each component of the Movement will be able to leverage the worldwide caseload of the Network and the evidence of the impact of its services.

SO9	**Strategic orientation 9**	**Mobilization of and partnerships with other actors**

25. In order to optimize and extend the reach of RFL services in the future, the authorities and other relevant actors (systematically identified in each context, for all issues relevant to separated and missing persons) will be mobilized, and strategic and operational partnerships will be forged with other humanitarian actors and the private sector.

Part 3	**Proposal to establish an RFL Leadership Platform**

It is proposed that an RFL Leadership Platform be set up, involving leaders of selected National Societies, the IFRC and other important stakeholders, convened by the ICRC at regular intervals. Its purpose will be as a strategic, consultative and participatory forum, driving the process of transforming RFL services and exploring and forging innovative partnerships between the Movement components and other relevant stakeholders from the humanitarian, technology, communication and academic sectors.

The platform will collectively tackle some of the global challenges the Movement is facing in terms of RFL, drive forward further development of the RFL Strategy, reinforce and monitor implementation of the Strategy, and deliver the flexibility required in a rapidly changing environment for future adjustments. It will provide a forum to initiate the development of policy, standard-setting and frameworks for cooperation, and to discuss and explore innovative approaches and initiatives for external partnerships to develop global solutions.

Figure 2: Visual concept map of the RFL Leadership Platform and its areas of strategic involvement.

Figure 2

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key issues raised in this report will be debated in a workshop dedicated to the future of RFL services during the 2017 Council of Delegates and submitted to the plenary session. The global nature of RFL services and the importance of collectively debating the future vision for RFL call for maximum participation by National Society leaders, the IFRC and the ICRC in the workshop. The Council of Delegates will then be invited to adopt the draft resolution.

The draft resolution represents a milestone in the process of developing a new RFL Strategy for the Movement, as it recalls and underlines the crucial humanitarian value of RFL services, the unique position of the Movement to carry out this work and the importance of investing in the relevance and the functionality of the FL Network. The draft resolution also confirms the importance of data protection by calling on the Movement components to implement and comply with internationally accepted data protection standards.
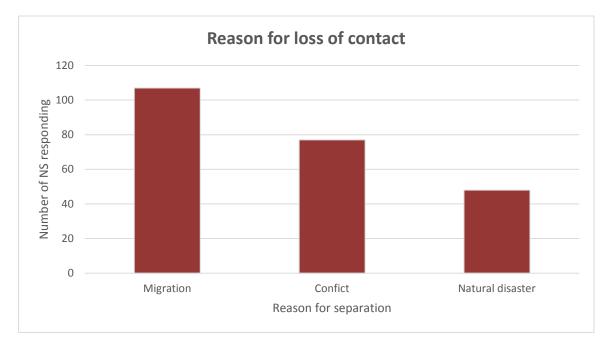
In expressing its support for the preliminary strategic orientations summarized in the report and for the proposal to set up an RFL Leadership Platform, the resolution paves the way for the continuation of this policy development process, while emphasizing the ongoing relevance of the current RFL Strategy until a new RFL Strategy is put forward for adoption in 2019.

> *"Yes! Yes! Of course it is my brother. Oh God, thank you! Thank you so much. Me and all of my family members were together on the night we were about to cross the border. Due to gunfire we missed him and until now I don't have any kind of information nor any contact with him. We miss him very much. Please, please tell me where he is and give me his contact information. I'm waiting for your kind response."*
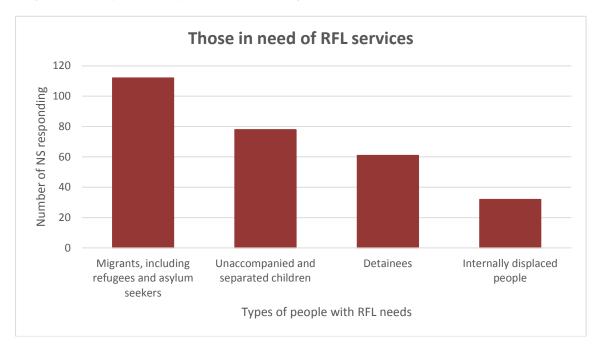>
> *Testimony of a beneficiary who found his brother through the Trace the Face website*

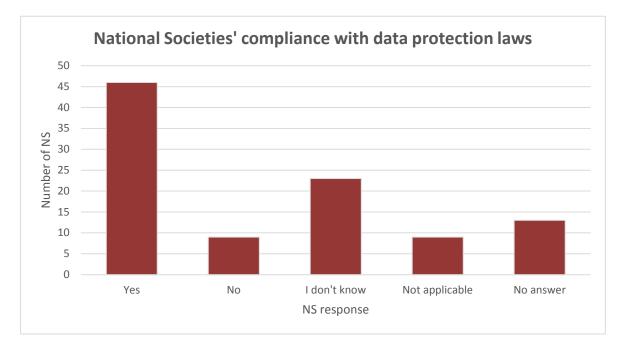### ANNEX: HIGHLIGHTS OF 2016 NATIONAL SOCIETY RFL CAPACITY SURVEY

NB: All survey findings are preliminary and will undergo further analysis in 2017 and 2018. The results below are initial findings (based on the responses of the 136 National Societies that replied in time for analysis) used to help inform the development of the strategic orientations.

Reason for loss of contact

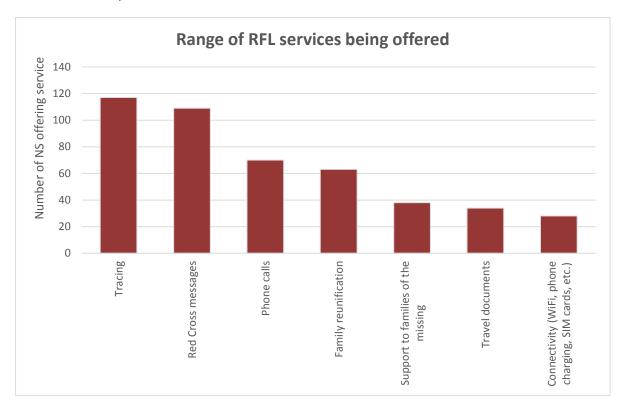(y-axis: Number of NS responding; x-axis: Reason for separation — Migration, Conflict, Natural disaster)

Graph 1 – Reason for loss of contact: Migration is the main cause of separation, with over three quarters of National Societies reporting to be responding to the needs of migrants. Over half of the National Societies reported responding to RFL needs caused by conflict, while only a third respond to separation caused by natural disaster.

Those in need of RFL services

(y-axis: Number of NS responding; x-axis: Types of people with RFL needs — Migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers; Unaccompanied and separated children; Detainees; Internally displaced people)
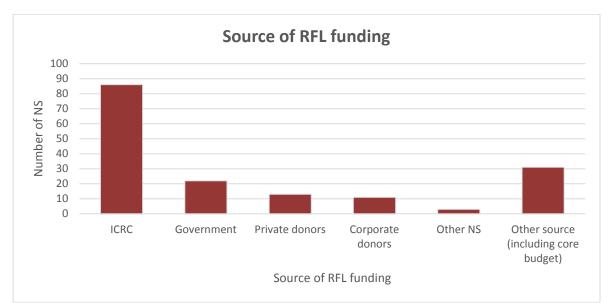
Graph 2 – Those in need of RFL services: Migrants (including refugees and asylum seekers) are the most common type of person approaching National Societies with RFL needs. This is followed by unaccompanied and separated children, and detainees. Only a quarter of National Societies provide RFL services to internally displaced people.

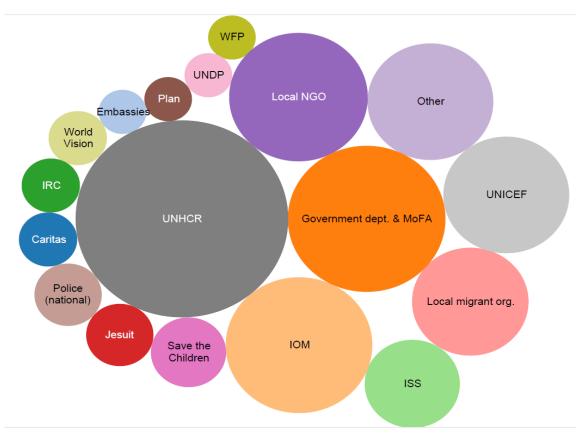## National Societies' compliance with data protection laws

Graph 3 – National Societies' compliance with data protection laws: Less than half of the responses indicated that the National Society was following data protection legislation in terms of RFL case management, and a further quarter were unsure what was needed in order to be compliant.

Range of RFL services being offered

Graph 4 – Range of RFL Services being offered: The range of services offered by National Societies across the FL Network highlights that tracing requests and Red Cross messages continue to be the primary services offered. Increasingly, connectivity is being requested, as demonstrated by the 28 National Societies already offering this in some form.

Graph 5 – Source of RFL funding: Over 60% of National Societies rely on the ICRC to fund their RFL activities. This is despite the fact that 82% of National Societies confirm that RFL is recognized as a humanitarian service by their public authorities, and that half of these National Societies have RFL recognized in the national disaster-response plans of their public authorities. Only 16% of the 136 National Societies that responded receive government funding. Peer-to-peer funding support between National Societies is also particularly low.

Graph 6 – External partners for RFL activities: National Societies reported UNHCR as being the primary partner when working with external institutions on RFL cases, making the case for exploring framework agreements at the global level.