

WESTERN BALKANS (regional)

COVERING: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo*, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia



+ ICRC regional delegation
 + ICRC delegation
 + ICRC mission

*UN Security Council Resolution 1244

The boundaries, names and designations used in this report do not imply official endorsement, nor express a political opinion on the part of the ICRC, and are without prejudice to claims of sovereignty over the territories mentioned.

The ICRC has been working in the countries covered since the early 1990s. The organization strives to respond to the needs remaining from armed conflicts in the region. In particular, it seeks to help clarify the fate of missing persons and to address the needs of their families. Throughout the region, the ICRC visits detainees and works with the authorities and civil society to promote IHL and other humanitarian norms. It supports the development of the National Societies, particularly in strengthening their capacities to respond to emergencies and help families separated by migration or other circumstances restore/maintain contact.

KEY RESULTS/CONSTRAINTS IN 2015

- ▶ Progress on ascertaining the fate of people missing in relation to past conflicts remained slow, owing to the lack of new information and the difficulty of identifying the human remains already recovered.
- ▶ The families of missing persons benefited from psychosocial, legal and administrative assistance provided by local actors, including National Societies and Red Cross units, with ICRC support.
- ▶ Migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees, passing through the Western Balkan countries restored/maintained family links with the help of the region's National Societies and the ICRC.
- ▶ People detained on "terrorism"-related charges in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia received ICRC visits conducted in accordance with the organization's standard procedures.
- ▶ With comprehensive ICRC support, the National Societies and Red Cross units in the region strengthened their capacity to deliver humanitarian services.

YEARLY RESULTS

Level of achievement of ICRC yearly objectives/plans of action

HIGH

EXPENDITURE IN KCHF

Protection	2,307
Assistance	162
Prevention	341
Cooperation with National Societies	452
General	67
Total	3,329
<i>Of which: Overheads</i>	203

IMPLEMENTATION RATE

Expenditure/yearly budget	86%
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PERSONNEL

Mobile staff	4
Resident staff (daily workers not included)	36

PROTECTION

	Total
CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)	
Restoring family links	
Phone calls facilitated between family members	7
People located (tracing cases closed positively)	192
PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)	
ICRC visits	
Detainees visited	6,212
Detainees visited and monitored individually	86
Number of visits carried out	17
Number of places of detention visited	15

CONTEXT

The countries of the Western Balkans continued to tackle problems inherited from past conflicts, particularly the thousands of unresolved cases of missing persons. In addition, the unprecedented number of migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees, passing through the region – mostly from conflict-affected countries such as Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic – represented a massive humanitarian challenge.

War-crimes proceedings continued in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter Bosnia-Herzegovina), Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia. Weapon contamination remained an issue in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Following the rejection in February by the International Court of Justice of the genocide charges filed against each other by Croatia and Serbia, cooperation between the two countries on the issue of missing persons saw some improvement. The process was delayed, however, by elections and the formation of a new government in Croatia.

In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, political and ethnic tensions led to mass protests, culminating in a clash between security forces and an armed group of ethnic Albanians in May. The confrontation claimed the lives of 18 people.

The Western Balkan countries were at different stages in their pursuit of membership in the European Union (EU). Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo signed Stabilization and Association Agreements with the EU. Serbia began membership negotiations in December.

ICRC ACTION AND RESULTS

The ICRC in the Western Balkans continued to support the efforts of the national authorities to ascertain the fate of persons missing in relation to past conflicts and, with the pertinent National Societies/Red Cross units, to ensure their families' access to psychosocial and other assistance. Together with international stakeholders, including the EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) and the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP), the ICRC continued to encourage national authorities to fulfil their obligations to the missing and their families. Progress remained slow owing to the lack of new information on gravesites and, in many cases, the difficulty of identifying human remains already recovered.

As at December 2015, a total of 10,718 cases of persons unaccounted for in relation to past conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo were being dealt with. From January to December, 182 cases were resolved in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 53 in Croatia and 4 in Kosovo.

National authorities were urged to intensify their search for new information, for example, by increasing cooperation with other parties concerned. Local actors were persuaded to assume further responsibilities and received support for strengthening their ability to do so.

The ICRC continued to gather information on possible gravesite locations from national/international archives and to share this with stakeholders – for instance, EULEX, which carried out forensic work in Kosovo in place of the national authorities.

Following mobilization efforts, the national authorities provided documents thought to contain information that might help resolve cases of missing persons.

The ICRC chaired meetings of the Kosovo-Serbia Working Group on Missing Persons and its Sub-Working Group on Forensic Issues. The ICRC participated as an observer in a meeting of the Croatia-Serbia Working Group on Missing Persons and in a regional coordination meeting; the latter brought together the two countries' government commissions on missing persons, and associations of families of missing persons from both countries. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Missing Persons Institute (MPI) and the ICRC began a joint project to search for information in international archives.

The families of missing persons availed themselves of psychosocial/legal/administrative assistance provided by family associations and National Societies/Red Cross units, all of which received ICRC support. Several people from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia found some closure after travelling, with ICRC assistance, to identify their relatives' remains.

Migrants passing through the Western Balkans, including asylum seekers and refugees, made use of Movement family-links services to get back in touch with their relatives. Working with the national authorities and other organizations, the National Societies, with ICRC support, sought to prevent families on the move from being separated and, when requested to do so, helped family members reunite. The region's National Societies and the ICRC created a regional information centre to collect and share information that might help migrants restore/maintain family links.

People detained on "terrorism"-related charges in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia received ICRC visits conducted in accordance with the organization's standard procedures. In Kosovo, visits got under way after the authorities and the ICRC signed an agreement formalizing the ICRC's access to detainees within its purview. Following visits, the Macedonian, Kosovar and Serbian authorities received confidential feedback and, where necessary, recommendations to improve detention conditions.

The region's National Societies/Red Cross units continued to receive comprehensive support for strengthening their ability to deliver humanitarian services and promote IHL. For instance, the Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina worked to broaden awareness among communities of the dangers of mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW). The Red Cross of Serbia received ICRC assistance in seeking funding for its activities.

CIVILIANS

Efforts to clarify the fate of persons missing in connection with past conflicts continued. Progress remained slow owing to the lack of new information on gravesites and, in many cases, the difficulty of identifying human remains already recovered. The national authorities were urged to provide new information, support the institutions involved in exhuming and identifying human remains, and enact legislation protecting the rights of the missing and their families. The EU and other key international actors were urged to reiterate to the national authorities the importance of fulfilling their obligation to provide answers to the families concerned.

The ICRC's family-links website (familylinks.icrc.org) had an updated list of the names of persons still being sought in the region.

Local actors continue working to resolve cases of missing persons

Bosnia and Herzegovina conflict 1992–1995

Between January and December, 182 cases of persons missing in relation to the Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict were closed; among them, two persons were found alive. At the end of December, 6,941 cases were being dealt with.

With financial assistance from the ICRC, several people travelled to identify the remains of their relatives; this enabled them to arrange dignified burials afterwards.

The MPI and the State Prosecutor's Office, along with the Mechanism for International Tribunals (MICT), the ICMP, the Embassy of the United States of America in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the ICRC, discussed measures for finding information on missing persons to supplement that which the authorities already had. The MPI and the ICRC began a joint project to search for additional information in international archives, the MICT's archives in particular.

The MPI kept up its efforts to establish a central register of missing persons and to develop its capabilities in preparation for eventually taking over the management of all open cases of missing persons. The handover of cases from the ICRC to the MPI, despite being hampered by delays in locating and informing families, neared completion.

The Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina continued to assume more responsibility for following up cases and maintaining contact with the families of missing persons. It continued to deal with tracing requests – in line with data-protection requirements – using ICRC-developed family-links software.

Kosovo conflict 1999

Between January and December, four cases of persons missing in relation to the Kosovo conflict were closed and 16 new cases were opened; 1,668 cases were being dealt with at the end of December.

Within the framework of the Kosovo-Serbia Working Group on Missing Persons, three possible gravesite locations in Serbia were assessed by the authorities; further investigation was ruled at one, no remains were found at the second, and work on the third was

suspended for the winter. In Kosovo, the remains of 12 persons were recovered from eight sites; other sites assessed yielded no result.

To help resolve more cases of missing persons, the Kosovar authorities provided logbooks from regional hospitals and mortuaries, the Serbian authorities provided police reports, and international stakeholders provided documents from their archives. The ICRC prepared reports on the documents received and submitted them to the EULEX Department of Forensic Medicine for further investigation. These efforts, however, yielded little result.

The ICRC-chaired Working Group on Missing Persons met twice to discuss the gravesite assessments in progress and the search for pertinent documents. Representatives from the international community and from associations of families of missing persons attended both sessions as observers. Technical matters were discussed at an ICRC-chaired meeting of the Sub-Working Group on Forensic Issues in March; the group had last met in August 2013.

In Kosovo, the authorities' efforts to establish a central register of missing persons, using the ICRC's ante/post-mortem data-management software, stalled owing to delays in the allocation of funds.

A draft law on forensic medicine, for which the ICRC had provided technical advice, was submitted to the parliament in October.

Croatia conflicts 1991–1995

The Croatian Red Cross reported that, between January and December, 53 cases of persons unaccounted for in relation to the Croatia conflicts were closed, with one person found alive, and that 2,109 cases were being dealt with at the end of December.

The ICRC participated as an observer at a meeting of the Croatia-Serbia Working Group on Missing Persons, which had last met in June 2013, and at a regional coordination meeting; the latter brought together the two countries' government commissions on missing persons, and family associations from both countries. In December, the Croatian authorities began exhumation work in Gornje Seliste, one of the largest known gravesite locations on their territory. The remains of 58 persons were recovered, and DNA samples were collected.

The families of 54 persons from Serbia found some closure after identifying their relatives' remains at the Forensic Institute in Zagreb, Croatia. They received financial assistance for the trip, and psychosocial support, from the Serbian authorities and the ICRC.

	Albania	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Croatia	Kosovo
Red Cross messages (RCMs)				
Phone calls facilitated between family members		7		
Names published on the ICRC family-links website		7,129		1,655
Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons¹				
People for whom a tracing request was newly registered				28
<i>of whom women</i>				13
People located (tracing cases closed positively)		182	1	9
Tracing cases still being handled at the end of the reporting period (people)		6,941	17	1,696
<i>of whom women</i>		990	3	251
<i>of whom minors at the time of disappearance - girls</i>		84		23
<i>of whom minors at the time of disappearance - boys</i>		273		83
Documents				
People to whom travel documents were issued	30			
Official documents relayed between family members across borders/front lines				2

1. Not including cases of persons missing in relation to the Croatia conflicts 1991–1995, dealt with by the Croatian Red Cross and the Red Cross of Serbia

Families of missing persons lend each other support

During emotionally difficult occasions, hundreds of families of missing persons in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo received psychosocial assistance and, when necessary, first aid, from family associations and National Societies/Red Cross units, all of which received ICRC support. A planned assessment of these families' needs was not conducted, as the ICRC was considering redesigning the activity and seeking partners for carrying it out.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia, families claimed social benefits and addressed other legal/administrative concerns with the help of documents, issued by the ICRC and distributed by National Societies/Red Cross units, attesting that their relatives were missing.

Migrants restore/maintain family links

People passing through the Western Balkan countries stayed in touch with their relatives with help from the National Societies in the region, which received increased technical/financial support from the ICRC (see *Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*). Migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees, made use of family-links services offered by the National Societies, with ICRC assistance, at points along the Western Balkan migration route. Working with the national authorities in the region and other organizations, the National Societies, with ICRC support, sought to prevent separation of families on the move and, when requested to do so, helped family members reunite (see *Actors of influence*). Migrants in the region learnt about ways to avoid being separated from relatives, and about Movement family-links services, through publications in a number of languages, including Arabic, English and French.

The region's National Societies and the ICRC worked together to establish a regional information centre for family-links services. The centre regularly collected information from National Societies along migration routes in the Western Balkans and eastern/south-eastern Europe, and shared it with Movement partners, with a view to helping family members separated by migration restore/maintain contact. Representatives of nine National Societies discussed technical matters relevant to the centre's work during an ICRC-organized video conference. Meetings in Croatia and Serbia, organized by the Croatian Red Cross and the ICRC, respectively, helped the region's National Societies maintain close coordination.

The Red Cross units in Kosovo engaged in discussions with the ICRC and with national/international agencies, with a view to improving their family-links services to address migrants' needs.

National Society personnel in Bosnia-Herzegovina developed their capacities in restoring family links during disasters through a workshop organized jointly with the ICRC; this was supplemented by ICRC-designed training materials.

Thirty people in Albania received travel documents issued by the ICRC, allowing them to resettle in third countries.

People learn more about risks arising from weapon contamination

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, more than 7,000 people, including 5,000 children, in areas contaminated with mines/ERW learnt about safe practices through ICRC-supported National Society sessions, supplemented by the distribution of publications (see *Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*). Community members were at lesser risk of injury after the National Society, with ICRC assistance, marked weapon-contaminated areas with signs and built a children's playground in a safer area.

Bosnia-Herzegovina's Mine Action Centre reviewed its mine-risk education strategy, with ICRC support.

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF FREEDOM

People held for security-related reasons receive ICRC visits

People detained on "terrorism"-related charges in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia received ICRC visits conducted in accordance with the organization's standard procedures. In Kosovo, visits got under way after the authorities and the ICRC signed an agreement formalizing the ICRC's access to detainees within its purview.

Following visits, the authorities of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia received confidential feedback and, where necessary, recommendations to improve detention conditions.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the family of one person held at the US internment facility at Guantanamo Bay Naval Station in Cuba contacted him monthly via ICRC-facilitated video calls. No requests for assistance were received from former internees.

People formerly detained, in connection with past conflicts in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo and Serbia, addressed legal/administrative concerns with the help of ICRC-issued attestations of detention.

	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	Kosovo	Serbia
ICRC visits				
Detainees visited		2,732	1,287	2,193
<i>of whom women</i>		4		
Detainees visited and monitored individually		52	27	7
Detainees newly registered		39	27	1
Number of visits carried out		6	7	4
Number of places of detention visited		4	7	4
Restoring family links				
People to whom a detention attestation was issued	109		13	

ACTORS OF INFLUENCE

National authorities strive to address migrants' humanitarian needs

National authorities in the Western Balkan countries coordinated with the National Societies and the ICRC to prevent family members from being separated along migration routes and, when requested to do so, to help them reunite (see *Civilians*). In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, following several tragic accidents involving migrants along railways, the authorities set up billboards – produced with the support of the National Society, UNHCR and the ICRC – warning migrants in various languages of the dangers along rail routes.

The region's authorities and other actors responding to the migration crisis learnt more about Movement activities for migrants through a bulletin produced by the National Societies/ICRC through the regional information centre. In Serbia, the National Society presented its activities for migrants at a meeting of the national IHL committee. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the authorities were brought up to date on migration-related issues at a round-table organized by the National Society, with ICRC support; the National Societies of other countries along the Western Balkan migration route also took part in the event.

Western Balkan countries keep up efforts to implement IHL

Bosnia-Herzegovina, with encouragement from the ICRC, amended its criminal code in the process of implementing the Convention on Enforced Disappearance and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; the authorities organized a consultation meeting with civil-society organizations to discuss a draft law for implementing the latter treaty. Croatia adopted a law on the rights of people who suffered sexual violence during armed conflict. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro initiated procedures to ratify Additional Protocol III. Montenegro also submitted a draft law – on ratification of Protocol V to the Convention on Certain Chemical Weapons – to the parliament.

Through discussions, the Serbian national IHL committee and the Serbian Red Cross, supported by the ICRC, strengthened their coordination on IHL implementation. Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia participated in the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in April/May, and in the First Review Conference on the Convention on Cluster Munitions in September.

Military officers from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia, bound for peace-support missions abroad, became more familiar with the ICRC's mandate and work through courses at a regional training centre. In Serbia, the National Society/ICRC continued to take part in military simulation exercises, with a view to helping the armed forces learn more about their activities.

National authorities contribute to increasing compliance with IHL

National authorities in the region participated in various ICRC initiatives aimed at increasing compliance with IHL in the conduct of hostilities and at ensuring protection/assistance for people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence. Croatian

and Serbian authorities contributed to the Strengthening IHL process; a Serbian military officer took part in an ICRC-organized meeting on the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas. Judges presiding over war-crimes proceedings in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia shared their experiences at an experts' meeting, organized by the ICRC, on IHL and the judicial sector.

The national authorities of the Western Balkan countries prepared for the 32nd International Conference with ICRC technical support. The Western Balkan countries endorsed all nine resolutions adopted at the conference.

The public learns more about the progress made in clarifying the fate of missing persons

Through an ICRC-produced regional fact sheet for the Western Balkan countries, the national authorities, international stakeholders and the general public were informed of the progress made in resolving the fate of people missing in relation to past conflicts. A fact sheet describing ICRC activities in Kosovo was also produced, focused mainly on the issue of missing persons. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, people learnt more about the issue of missing persons through a weekly blog supported by the ICRC.

RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

National Societies boost their ability to deliver humanitarian services

With ICRC financial/technical support, the region's National Societies/Red Cross units continued to strengthen their ability to deliver humanitarian services (see *Civilians*) and promote IHL (see *Actors of influence*).

The National Societies responding to the migration crisis maintained close coordination through the regional information centre, and through meetings in Croatia and Serbia (see *Civilians*). Staff from National Societies in Western Balkan countries not affected by the migration crisis gained practical experience in assisting migrants at a camp in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the National Society undertook activities to raise awareness in local communities about the dangers of mines/ERW (see *Civilians*). It obtained accreditation from the Bosnia and Herzegovina Mine Action Centre to conduct such activities until March 2017. National Society youth volunteers conducted dissemination sessions on humanitarian values for over 500 children in eight towns.

Personnel from the Red Cross of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia assessed their readiness for working in situations of violence, and identified areas for improvement, through an ICRC workshop on the Safer Access Framework.

After receiving communication training from the ICRC, the Red Cross units in Kosovo promoted IHL and the Movement's work among more than 15,000 local/national officials and young people. Staff from one of the Red Cross units learnt more about office management and archiving through ICRC-sponsored training.

Funding from the Swiss embassy in Serbia, obtained with ICRC assistance, enabled the Serbian Red Cross to organize round-tables and other activities promoting IHL and the Fundamental Principles.

MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS: PROTECTION		Total			
CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)					
Red Cross messages (RCMs)					
Phone calls facilitated between family members		7			
Names published on the ICRC family-links website		8,784			
Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons¹			Women	Girls	Boys
People for whom a tracing request was newly registered		28	13		
People located (tracing cases closed positively)		192			
Tracing cases still being handled at the end of the reporting period (people)		8,654	1,244	107	356
Documents					
People to whom travel documents were issued		30			
Official documents relayed between family members across borders/front lines		2			
PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)					
ICRC visits			Women	Minors	
Detainees visited		6,212	4		
			Women	Girls	Boys
Detainees visited and monitored individually		86			
Detainees newly registered		67			
Number of visits carried out		17			
Number of places of detention visited		15			
Restoring family links					
People to whom a detention attestation was issued		122			

1. Not including cases of persons missing in relation to the Croatia conflicts 1991–95, dealt with by the Croatian Red Cross and the Red Cross of Serbia