

# WESTERN BALKANS (regional)

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



ICRC regional delegation (red cross in circle), ICRC delegation (red cross in square), ICRC mission (red cross in diamond).  
 ..... Inter-entity boundary line \*UN Security Council Resolution 1244

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, works with the authorities and civil society to promote IHL and supports the development of the National Societies.

## KEY RESULTS/CONSTRAINTS

### In 2013:

- ▶ the region's national authorities continued to make efforts to clarify the fate of persons missing in relation to past conflicts, leading to the resolution of 649 cases in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for instance
- ▶ Kosovo and Serbia made progress in clarifying the fate of persons missing in relation to the conflict in Kosovo, identifying 45 sets of human remains and confirming the location of a gravesite in Serbia, with ICRC support
- ▶ Serbia's Ministry of Education and the Red Cross of Serbia assumed full responsibility for implementing the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme in the country
- ▶ some National Societies in the region demonstrated their ability to conduct humanitarian activities effectively and independently, enabling the ICRC to reduce or phase out its direct support for them
- ▶ particularly vulnerable detainees in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia received ICRC visits to monitor their treatment and living conditions

## YEARLY RESULT

Level of achievement of ICRC yearly objectives/plans of action **HIGH**

PROTECTION	Total
<b>CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)</b>	
Red Cross messages (RCMs)	
RCMs collected	1
People located (tracing cases closed positively)	694
<b>PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)</b>	
ICRC visits	
Detainees visited	38
Detainees visited and monitored individually	36
Number of visits carried out	14
Number of places of detention visited	13

EXPENDITURE (in KCHF)	
Protection	2,483
Assistance	-
Prevention	772
Cooperation with National Societies	763
General	-

**4,018**

of which: Overheads 245

IMPLEMENTATION RATE	
Expenditure/yearly budget	99%

PERSONNEL	
Mobile staff	6
Resident staff (daily workers not included)	50

\* UN Security Council Resolution 1244

## CONTEXT

The countries of the Western Balkans continued to tackle problems inherited from past conflicts, particularly in connection with the thousands of missing persons and their families. Political instability, interethnic tensions and economic difficulties persisted in some countries.

Serbia began accession talks with the European Union (EU). Kosovo and the European Council began negotiations over a Stabilisation and Association Agreement, while the EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) continued to investigate and arrest war crime suspects. In EU-facilitated discussions, Kosovo and Serbia reached an agreement to establish an association of Serb-majority municipalities in northern Kosovo.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's failure to establish stable interethnic dialogue continued to hamper its efforts to resolve its political crisis and to join the EU. The EU membership prospects of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (hereafter FYR Macedonia) continued to be affected by the dispute over its name with Greece and by recurring ethnic tensions.

Following elections in June, Albania moved closer to obtaining EU member candidate status. Montenegro was on track for membership as it continued implementing reforms. Croatia became an EU member country in July.

## ICRC ACTION AND RESULTS

In partnership with the National Societies in the Western Balkans, the ICRC regional delegation supported the national authorities' efforts to clarify the fate of persons missing in relation to past conflicts and to ensure that their families received psychosocial and legal assistance. It focused on encouraging the authorities, including by mobilizing the EU and other key international actors, to fulfil their obligations to the missing and their families. In parallel, it helped authorities and the region's National Societies strengthen their capacities to assume more responsibility for addressing the issue of missing persons.

Although the process of clarifying the fate of missing persons continued to be hampered by the lack of new information and other challenges, the concerted efforts of national authorities, National Societies, the international community and the ICRC led to the recovery and identification of several sets of human remains, which gave the families some relief. Some missing persons were found alive.

To help move the process forward, the ICRC: resubmitted to the pertinent authorities formal requests for information on missing persons; shared information on the location of potential gravesites; and maintained public listings of the names of missing persons. Acting as a neutral intermediary between Kosovo and Serbia, the ICRC continued to chair the Working Group on Missing Persons and its Sub-Working Group on Forensic Issues, and to facilitate their meetings.

The ICRC continued to help national authorities assume the lead role in resolving the issue of missing persons and to transfer responsibilities to them. It helped the Missing Persons Institute (MPI) in Bosnia and Herzegovina strengthen its capacity to eventually manage all open cases of missing persons. It supported the MPI and the Kosovar authorities in establishing their respective central data registers. The process of handing over case summaries to the Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina continued.

The ICRC supported national authorities in enacting or implementing legislation in line with IHL, particularly with regard to protecting the rights of missing persons and their families. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the authorities received legal and technical support to work towards implementing the country's law on missing persons and the Convention on Enforced Disappearance.

Throughout the region, initiatives carried out by family associations and National Societies, with ICRC support, helped the families of the missing to cope with their situation and to have their concerns brought to the attention of various stakeholders.

In addition to working with them to help the authorities address the issue of missing persons, the ICRC continued to assist the National Societies in strengthening their ability to disseminate IHL, restore family links and raise awareness of mine-related risks. By year's end, it reduced or phased out support for National Societies that had shown that they could conduct humanitarian activities independently and effectively.

In line with the conclusion of its direct support for implementing the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme, the ICRC continued to help national stakeholders boost their capacities to implement and monitor it. It also helped some National Societies seek alternative funding options to sustain the programme.

People held on security charges and other especially vulnerable detainees in Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYR Macedonia and Serbia received visits conducted according to standard ICRC procedures. Afterwards, the authorities concerned were given confidential feedback and, where appropriate, recommendations for improving detainees' treatment and living conditions. People formerly held at the US internment facility at Guantanamo Bay Naval Station in Cuba benefited from ICRC family-links services.

## CIVILIANS

Efforts to clarify the fate of persons missing from past Balkan conflicts advanced, albeit slowly, owing to the lack of new information – particularly on the location of alleged gravesites – and the slow progress in identifying human remains stored in morgues throughout the region. In total, 11,638 of the nearly 34,900 individuals who had gone missing in relation to the conflicts remained unaccounted for.

With a view to intensifying their efforts, the pertinent stakeholders were encouraged to assume more responsibilities and supported in building their capacities to do so. National authorities were urged to, *inter alia*, share information in their possession, support the institutions involved in the exhumation and identification process, and enact legislation protecting the rights of the missing and their families. The authorities concerned received updated information on missing persons gathered by the National Societies/ICRC from the families and from archives. They discussed regional cooperation at a meeting chaired by the International Commission on Missing Persons (ICMP) and attended by the ICRC. In parallel, the EU and other key international actors were urged to reassert to national authorities the importance of fulfilling the aforementioned obligations.

People throughout the world could access – on the ICRC family-links website ([familylinks.icrc.org](http://familylinks.icrc.org)) – the list of persons still being sought in the region.

## Local stakeholders bolster capacities to resolve cases of missing persons

### Bosnia and Herzegovina conflict 1992–95

In total, 620 cases of missing persons reported to the ICRC were solved, mainly through information provided by the MPI regarding recovered and identified remains. A further 29 people were found alive. However, the families of 7,713 missing individuals for whom cases had been opened with the ICRC remained without news.

In preparation for eventually taking over the management of open cases of missing persons, the MPI reinforced its data management capacities, with technical/material/financial support from the ICMP and the ICRC. It continued establishing a central register of missing persons and verifying the data by reviewing documents. In parallel, Bosnia and Herzegovina's National Society gradually assumed more responsibility for following up the cases of missing persons. Through the efforts of the region's National Societies/ICRC, some 3,500 families of missing persons learnt of impending changes related to the handover of responsibilities and discussed the cases of their missing relatives.

Interaction among local forensic investigators improved, in particular through the ICRC-supported first annual meeting of an association for forensic medicine established in 2012.

Coordination continued with other international organizations helping local institutions enhance their forensic capacities. The ICRC provided input for a UN-led project to strengthen forensic, police and judicial institutions in order to reinforce the rule of law.

### Kosovo conflict 1999

A total of 45 sets of human remains were identified and handed over to families, with ICRC support. The search for human remains progressed in Raska, Serbia, where the authorities – with support from EULEX, the ICRC and other institutions – located a gravesite. Forensic procedures were under way to determine the number of and recover the discovered sets of human remains. In total, 1,719 persons missing in relation to the conflict remained unaccounted for.

Field assessments and excavations facilitated by the ICRC-chaired Working Group on Missing Persons continued, leading to the recovery of human remains. Representatives to the Working Group and the Sub-Working Group discussed their work – the progress they had made and the challenges before them – during

ICRC-chaired meetings, and updated family associations through briefing sessions. During two Sub-Working Group meetings, technical experts from Kosovo and Serbia discussed procedures for exhuming and identifying human remains, as well as the transfer of forensic capacities from international to local stakeholders. The discussions were backed by a report presented by the EULEX Department of Forensic Medicine (EULEX DFM) on its 2008–12 review of human remains in its Kosovo morgue.

To promote further action, 23 reports on the location of alleged gravesites – based on information gathered by the ICRC from government and international sources – were handed over to EULEX DFM for follow-up. Kosovar and Serbian authorities received ICRC requests for information on 557 and 312 persons, respectively.

Kosovo's Government Commission on Missing Persons and the local Department of Forensic Medicine made progress in establishing a central data register for missing persons, using the ICRC's ante/post-mortem data-management software. They finished entering open cases in the register and reviewed the data entered in 2012; staff involved in the process attended ICRC-hosted training. Entry of remaining data was ongoing, with the Ministry of Justice allocating resources for the process. Helping enhance its data management abilities, Serbia's Commission on Missing Persons continued entering its data in an EU-donated software through a server from the ICRC.

Public awareness of the status of missing persons and the plight of their families developed through the launch and distribution of the fifth edition of the Book of Missing Persons in Kosovo.

### Croatia conflicts 1991–95

Representatives of Croatia and Serbia's missing persons commissions met in June within the framework of a new working group, attended by the ICRC as an observer. Their renewed rapprochement facilitated the recovery of 94 sets of human remains in Croatia and 38 in Serbia. Four ante-mortem data questionnaires collected by the Croatian Red Cross and the Red Cross of Serbia were submitted to the pertinent authorities in the two countries; 2,206 cases of missing persons remained unresolved.

### Families of missing persons address their needs

With financial support from the ICRC, families throughout the region travelled to identify the remains of their relatives, allowing them to arrange burial ceremonies afterwards. Sixty relatives of missing persons from Serbia joined group identification sessions

CIVILIANS	ALBANIA	BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	CROATIA	KOSOVO
<b>Red Cross messages (RCMs)</b>				
RCMs collected		1		
Names published on the ICRC family-links website		8,388		1,762
<b>Reunifications, transfers and repatriations</b>				
People transferred/repatriated	1			
<b>Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons<sup>1</sup></b>				
People for whom a tracing request was newly registered				2
<i>of whom women</i>				1
People located (tracing cases closed positively)		649		45
Tracing cases still being handled at the end of the reporting period (people)		7,713	20	1,719
<i>of whom women</i>		1,029	4	236
<i>of whom minors at the time of disappearance</i>		403		75

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

arranged by Croatian authorities at the Forensic Institute in Zagreb, Croatia; 23 people in Bosnia and Herzegovina travelled to confirm the identities of remains thought to belong to their relatives.

Family associations helped relatives of missing persons address their needs and worked to increase awareness of their plight, with technical/financial ICRC support. For instance, throughout the identification process and during the events leading up to burial ceremonies, relatives of missing persons received psychosocial assistance and, when necessary, first aid from family associations and National Societies trained and supported by the ICRC. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 271 individuals received such assistance; in Kosovo, over 400 relatives of missing persons benefited from 13 psychosocial projects of family associations and the two Red Cross units.

Family associations produced promotional materials and organized commemorative events, including for the International Day of the Disappeared, helping boost awareness of the situation of relatives of missing persons. In Serbia, family associations developed websites that had online donation functions, with a view to raising funds in a sustainable manner. Albanian and Serbian family associations improved their organizational capacities through ICRC-supported training in office/project management, public relations and needs assessment.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the MPI Advisory Board (consisting of six representatives from all the family associations) drew on ICRC expertise and support for conveying the families' concerns to the authorities and the managing bodies of the MPI – for instance, through a round-table it organized directly with the authorities.

Families of 1,443 missing persons were followed up by the Serbian Red Cross, which had taken over the management of the cases. In Kosovo, relatives of missing persons received ICRC attestations distributed by the two Red Cross units.

## PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM

### Vulnerable detainees' treatment, living conditions monitored

People detained on security-related charges and other especially vulnerable detainees received ICRC visits carried out according to the organization's standard procedures. After delegates' visits to detainees in Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYR Macedonia and Serbia, the authorities concerned received confidential feedback and, where appropriate, recommendations for improving inmates' treatment and living conditions. Discussions continued with the Macedonian authorities regarding the ICRC's request to visit detainees held on remand in relation to a security-related case; dialogue with the Kosovar detaining authorities was renewed.

People who had been detained during past conflicts received ICRC-issued detention attestations, some distributed by National Societies; this helped them regularize their status or apply for legal/administrative procedures.

### Former Guantanamo Bay internees receive assistance

An individual formerly held at the Guantanamo Bay internment facility who had resettled in France received, with ICRC support, a second visit from his son based in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Two other former internees resettled in Albania received assistance for their reintegration into society; one of them was repatriated to Tunisia at his request.

Families in Bosnia and Herzegovina with relatives held at the Guantanamo Bay internment facility were informed of family-links services available to them.

## AUTHORITIES, ARMED FORCES AND OTHER BEARERS OF WEAPONS, AND CIVIL SOCIETY

### Local stakeholders work to address the situation of families of missing persons

Dialogue with the region's national authorities focused on the issue of missing persons and their families (see *Civilians*). The authorities were reminded of their obligation to advance clarification of the fate of missing persons, and received legal/technical support for implementing laws protecting the rights of the missing and their families. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees continued working towards fully implementing a law on missing persons, particularly the provisions on the legal status and social rights of the families of the missing. The country's authorities also worked to advance implementation of the Convention on Enforced Disappearance.

Public awareness of the situation of the families of missing persons, and other humanitarian issues, grew – largely because of media coverage of events involving family associations and of the launch of a new edition of the Book of Missing Persons in Kosovo (see *Civilians*).

### Authorities take over implementation of Exploring Humanitarian Law programme

With the ICRC phasing out direct support, education authorities throughout the region continued to incorporate the Exploring Humanitarian Law programme in their schools' curricula. Serbia's Education Ministry, together with the National Society, formally assumed full responsibility for implementing the programme in the country. Authorities improved their capacities to implement/monitor the programme through discussions with the ICRC, as in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, and during specific events, such as for principals in Kosovo and trainers in Serbia. With ICRC

PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM	BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	FYR MACEDONIA	KOSOVO	SERBIA
<b>ICRC visits</b>				
Detainees visited	11	16		11
Detainees visited and monitored individually	9	16		11
Detainees newly registered	4	1		
Number of visits carried out	5	5		4
Number of places of detention visited	5	4		4
<b>Restoring family links</b>				
People to whom a detention attestation was issued	234		196	



support, the National Societies of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia pursued their joint application for EU funding to sustain the programme.

Supplementing their IHL studies in major universities, students discussed the subject at a regional course in Serbia and at other events/competitions organized by National Societies, local institutions and the ICRC. At a meeting in Bosnia and Herzegovina, professors from throughout the region discussed ways to expand IHL education and promote its domestic implementation – for instance, through an ICRC-proposed Internet platform.

### **Weapon bearers in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia learn more about IHL**

The Serbian armed forces continued to conduct computer-simulated IHL exercises attended by the National Society of Serbia/ICRC. During a seminar, 30 police instructors in Bosnia and Herzegovina learnt more about international human rights law and other legal norms applicable to law enforcement.

### **National authorities advance domestic IHL implementation**

In consultation with the ICRC and with its support, the region's national authorities worked towards acceding to and implementing IHL treaties. After signing the Arms Trade Treaty, the countries sought ICRC advice for ratifying it. Croatia adopted a law to implement the Chemical Weapons Convention; Bosnia and Herzegovina amended a similar law. The latter had yet to establish a national IHL committee, with the process hampered by the prevailing political crisis.

Civil society in the region kept abreast of developments in the domestic implementation of IHL through initiatives of local ICRC partners, such as Serbia's IHL resource centre.

## **RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT**

The region's National Societies strengthened their capacities to help address the needs of the families of missing persons (see *Civilians*), disseminate IHL and restore family links, with financial/material/capacity-building ICRC support. The Albanian Red Cross, the Red Cross of FYR Macedonia, the Red Cross of Montenegro and the Red Cross of Serbia, which worked to position itself as an IHL focal point, showed that they could conduct their activities independently, allowing the ICRC to reduce or end direct support for them.

The two Red Cross units in Kosovo drew on International Federation/ICRC support to develop their organizational and operational capacities, but no formal dialogue was initiated between them.

Coordination with Movement partners facilitated humanitarian activities throughout the region and helped maximize impact.

### **National Societies promote humanitarian principles and IHL**

Assuming more responsibility for their IHL dissemination programmes, the National Societies of FYR Macedonia and Montenegro trained their staff/volunteers in this regard. The National Societies of Montenegro and Serbia also organized emergency response workshops within the Safer Access Framework. With ICRC support, the two Red Cross units in Kosovo conducted IHL dissemination activities, which helped solidify their respective

identities and promote protection of the red cross and red crescent emblems.

### **Bosnia and Herzegovina's National Society strengthens family-links services**

The National Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina helped broaden public awareness of humanitarian principles through its youth component, and worked to promote and raise funds for its activities. In parallel, it pursued efforts to strengthen its legal basis and reinforce its role as a humanitarian actor, particularly in terms of restoring family links. Using ICRC-developed software for its family-links database, it enhanced its ability to follow up tracing requests and to maintain contact with the families of missing persons. It trained staff/volunteers in and developed a plan of action for restoring family links during disasters.

At a regional meeting on the Movement's Restoring Family Links Strategy (see *Europe*), the National Societies enhanced their capacities to provide family-links services, particularly across borders, using advice from counterparts in other European National Societies. With the Bulgarian Red Cross, some of the region's National Societies helped migrants restore contact with their families.

### **National Societies raise public awareness of mine risks**

While continuing to help their national authorities deal with weapon contamination, the National Societies of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Croatia, and the Red Cross units in Kosovo improved cooperation in this area, particularly during coordination meetings.

With ICRC support, the National Societies of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Red Cross units in Kosovo raised public awareness of the risks posed by weapon contamination and ways to mitigate them. The Albanian Red Cross organized first-aid training for army personnel conducting mine-clearance operations, while the National Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina built safe play areas for children and held refresher courses for staff/volunteers involved in mine-risk education initiatives. The latter National Society contributed to formulating the country's approach to reducing the risks posed by small arms and light weapons.

<b>MAIN FIGURES AND INDICATORS: PROTECTION</b>		Total		
<b>CIVILIANS (residents, IDPs, returnees, etc.)</b>				
<b>Red Cross messages (RCMs)</b>				
RCMs collected		1	UAMs/SCs*	
Names published on the ICRC family-links website		10,150		
<b>Reunifications, transfers and repatriations</b>				
People transferred/repatriated		1		
<b>Tracing requests, including cases of missing persons<sup>1</sup></b>				
People for whom a tracing request was newly registered		2	Women	Minors
People located (tracing cases closed positively)		694		
Tracing cases still being handled at the end of the reporting period (people)		9,452	1,269	478
<b>PEOPLE DEPRIVED OF THEIR FREEDOM (All categories/all statuses)<sup>2</sup></b>				
<b>ICRC visits</b>				
Detainees visited		38	Women	Minors
Detainees visited and monitored individually		36		
Detainees newly registered		5		
Number of visits carried out		14		
Number of places of detention visited		13		
<b>Restoring family links</b>				
People to whom a detention attestation was issued		430		

\* Unaccompanied minors/separated children

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

2. Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYR Macedonia, Serbia