

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

HIGHLIGHTS

2020/2021



The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) helps people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything it can to protect their dignity and relieve their suffering, often with its Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. We also seek to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.

The ICRC has been present in Bosnia and Herzegovina since the beginning of the war in 1992. During the conflicts in former Yugoslavia, the ICRC had visited over 54,000 detainees in 520 places, exchanged 18 million Red Cross messages, reunited over 4,500 families, distributed over 100,000 tons of food, regularly supplied over 1,000 hospitals with emergency medical supplies and hold seminars on international humanitarian law for thousands of soldiers. Most of activities were conducted in close collaboration with the local Red Cross.

Today, the ICRC supports the people of the country in their efforts to recover from the consequences of the war, particularly in relation to missing persons and mine threat, and deal with other humanitarian emergencies such as migrations or the ongoing pandemic.

The ICRC works to strengthen capacities of the Red Cross Society of Bosnia-Herzegovina to

KEY CONCERNS OF THE ICRC

7.571* people are still unaccounted for from the war

Over **40** family associations are in need of strengthening their psychosocial support capacities

More than **16,000** migrants entered Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2020, with estimated **8,000** still being in the country

79,000 landmines and unexploded ordnance from the war cover **2.2%** of the country's territory

545,000 people (**15%** of the total population) are directly affected by landmines and unexploded ordnance

Red Cross Society of Bosnia-Herzegovina needs a more sustainable support from public funds and the authorities

respond to the current needs in the country. We also support the authorities in implementing international humanitarian law (IHL) in domestic legislation.

*According to the Missing Persons Institute (MPI) upon the final verification of its Central Records of the Missing in 2020. A total of 6,385 persons from this list were reported as missing to the ICRC. For the purposes of this brochure, we will use the official figures.

RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

“We were not allowed to go out for two months, so the Red Cross paid our bills, made the groceries, brought us pensions, provided food, medicine and all other necessities.” – a 71-year-old pensioner from Sarajevo, May 2020.

Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina (RCSBiH)

Following the first confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the county in early March 2020, the RCSBiH immediately rolled out a coordinated action to respond to the pandemic and its consequences, supported by other Movement partners such as the ICRC, the IFRC, Swiss, Turkish, Italian, Austrian, German and other Red Cross and Red Crescent national societies.

From **March to May 2020 alone**, the two months of the statewide lockdown, more than **2,000 Red Cross volunteers** and staff have, amongst other things:

- distributed over **100,000** protective facemasks,
- over **23,000** food and hygiene parcels,
- **44,000** information leaflets about preventive measures,
- provided almost **10,000** services to people older than 65, such as visits to pharmacies and groceries or bill payments,
- had over **1,000** psychosocial support interventions on their hotlines,

- disinfected **675** public areas and transported **235** potentially infected people to hospitals,
- delivered over **500** field beds and tents to local authorities in 14 municipalities and set up over **50** triage and quarantine tents.

With support of the ICRC, the RCSBiH equipped its structure with **27 local emergency operational centers** that facilitated its internal communication and disaster management capacities under gathering and movement restrictions.

In 2021, many local Red Cross branches are actively **involved in the process of immunization** of citizens by providing logistical and other support to local health services. The Red Cross of Brčko District is also running a call center, established with support of the ICRC, through which citizens can register for the vaccination.

In addition to supporting the overall Red Cross response for the general population, the ICRC has also provided assistance tailored to additional needs of its customary beneficiaries and partners in the country.

The Red Cross emergency operational center in the Brčko District, established with ICRC's support, is also used for registering the citizens for the immunization process.



Families of missing persons

Families of over 7,000 people still missing from the war have been particularly affected by COVID-19. The existing uncertainty caused by the disappearance of their loved ones has now been compounded by the fear of the pandemic.

The ICRC contacted more than **40 family associations** of missing persons to check on their well-being during the lockdown.



Red Cross volunteers delivered **800** food and hygiene packages to relatives of missing persons in need

A total of **1,777 relatives** of the missing over 65 years old have been identified from ICRC's records as particularly vulnerable due to the pandemic and its economic consequences. Almost **800 of them expressed need for assistance**, such as food or hygiene parcels or other Red Cross services. Suitable support was secured by the ICRC and delivered by volunteers.

Additionally, the ICRC organized **psychosocial support workshops** for representatives of over 30 family associations, tailored to coping with the consequences of the pandemic (see also page 6).

Mine victims

In the past 25 years since the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina ended, more **than 1,700 civilians** became victims of landmines of which 617 died. Estimated **79,000 landmines** and unexploded ordnance still cover almost 2% of state territory, directly threatening and affecting over half a million people.

With joint support of the Swiss Red Cross

and the ICRC, the Red Cross Society of Bosnia-Herzegovina provided direct assistance to mine victims most affected by the economic consequences of the ongoing pandemic. Red Cross mine awareness instructors have identified **124 most vulnerable mine victims** across the country, mostly living in remote and rural areas. The cash allowance provided in line with Movement's standards was aiming to address their most urgent needs caused by the pandemic.

Forensic institutes

To increase the safety standards for forensic practitioners during the pandemic, the ICRC purchased **1,350 heavy-duty body bags** for public health facilities and provided the most urgent personal **protective equipment items to five forensic medicine institutions**. In addition, the ICRC provided its guidance and advice on the management of the dead who deceased because of COVID-19.

Detention centers and prisons

In the framework of its support to places of detention, the ICRC has provided **20,000 protective masks** and pairs of gloves, **750 liters** of disinfectants, and **300** phone cards for **eleven prisons**. The phone cards aimed to facilitate contacts of detainees to their relatives in times when family visits were suspended due to the pandemic. The ICRC also provided recommendations for preventing and managing the spread of the pandemic in prisons.

World Red Cross/Red Crescent Day

Movement's coordinated response to the pandemic would not be possible without the incredible work done by the volunteers in the field. To express gratitude and appreciation for their selfless commitment, the ICRC marked the World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day on 8 May through visual projections on the Academy of Fine Arts in Sarajevo, the City Hall in Bijeljina, and the iconic Old Bridge in Mostar in colors of our international movement. The visual projections contained the message "**You are not alone**", directed both to the volunteers and citizens of the country.



Annual meeting with representatives from 30 family association from Bosnia–Herzegovina

FAMILIES HAVE THE RIGHT TO KNOW

“In the past year I’ve been to nine funerals of members of our local family association. In the same period, not even one identification was done in our municipality. The fear of families that they will not live to see their loved ones found has been present even before the pandemic, but is now stronger than ever.” – sister of a missing person, 2021.

Psychosocial support to the families and MPI investigators

The words of a sister, expressed at the ICRC’s annual conference with the families in February 2021, illustrate the additional burden that the pandemic brought. To strengthen their capacities and empower them to effectively deal with the challenges, the ICRC organized a series of **workshops related to mental health, with members of 31 family associations** participating. Similar seminars were provided for **20 staff and field investigators of the Missing Persons Institute (MPI)**.

For five years, ICRC has been organizing these workshops. While each of workshops represents a follow-up to the previous one, the COVID-19 pandemic was inevitably the central topic of the discussion in 2020, as an ongoing phenomenon that has a tremendous effect on families of the missing.

Led by **experienced psychologists and psychotherapists**, through discussions in smaller groups, the workshops aimed to explore how stress caused by the pandemic, alongside the stressful process of looking for the missing, affects the lives of families of the missing and the work of their associations.

The ICRC also continued to support over

30 family associations of missing persons in implementing their activities in local communities. In 2020, a total of **1,527 relatives directly benefited from 14 psychosocial support projects**, implemented by the family associations, local Red Cross branches or competent NGOs.

Scholarships for innovative research projects

As a part of the initiative to explore innovative ways to help the families and find missing people, the ICRC in 2020 granted scholarships for additional **three post-graduate and two interdisciplinary research projects** on topics relevant to the tracing process, including psychological, forensic, legal, and social perspectives.

Overall, **17 research projects** have received financial and technical support from the





Over 90 family members, Red Cross volunteers, ambassadors and heads of international organizations participated in ICRC's video to mark the International Day of the Disappeared.

International Day of the Disappeared

"Families of the missing have the right to know what happened to their loved ones." This was the central message of the ICRC's 2020 public campaign to mark the International Day of the Disappeared on 30th August. ICRC traditionally marks this day through different formats under the slogan "**Gdje je?**" (**Where are they?**) which has been widely accepted as a symbol of the missing persons' issue across the country.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, the 2020 campaign focused on two elements: online campaign on Facebook and Twitter and protective face masks labelled with the slogan "**Gdje je?**".

To remind the public of the needs and

rights of the families, but also of the obligation of the authorities to provide them with answers, the ICRC produced a short video released on social media networks. **More than 90 people** participated in the video wearing the face masks, including relatives of the missing, Red Cross volunteers, and twelve key ambassadors and heads of international organizations in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

At the same time, Red Cross branches and family associations organized smaller events in **over 40 communities across the country**, distributing thousands of "**Gdje je?**" face masks. Citizens and partners were invited to share their photos and videos wearing the masks on social media networks on 30 August, with many doing so.

A total of 1,527 relatives of missing persons directly benefited from 14 psycho-social support projects in 2020.





MPI investigator and ICRC researcher assessing microlocation of a potential gravesite, based on aerial images and information obtained from international archives.

ICRC SUPPORT TO THE TRACING PROCESS

Search for undiscovered gravesites

In 2020, Bosnia-Herzegovina marked 25th anniversary of the end of the war. Throughout this time, families of **7,571 persons missing** from the conflict in the country have been living in uncertainty, not knowing what happened to their loved ones. One of the biggest obstacles to finding them is the lack of new information on locations of graves.

As a neutral and independent organization, the ICRC has received access to many **international archives** and searches in them for new information about potential locations of mass and individual gravesites. The largest one is the archive of the **International Residual Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT)** in The Hague. In 2020, ICRC experts searched in the archives using names of **1,289** people from Bosnia-Herzegovina, collecting thousands of pages of documents. Furthermore, the ICRC gained access to archives of the **German Ministry of Defence**, the **Western European Union**, and the **Office of the High Representative (OHR)**, besides already accessible archives of **Canada, Den-**

mark, the Netherlands, Poland, France, the European Commission, Italy, NATO, and the UNHCR.

Last year the ICRC collected more than **30,000 pages of documents, and bringing the total to more than 80,000 pages** since 2018. Relevant information, along with analytical and summarizing reports, is-transmitted to the Missing Persons Institute (MPI) for further action. To help the MPI investigators interpreting the data and finding microlocations on the ground, ICRC researchers and forensic experts accompanied them on multiple field visits throughout the country.

Exploring innovative ways of searching for the missing

To explore possible usage of the latest **geological methods, such as geomorphology and geotechnics*** in the process of searching for the missing, the ICRC facilitated several meetings with the Dean of the Faculty for Geology, Mining and Civil Engineering at the University of Tuzla, involving the MPI management, representatives of the BiH Prosecutor's Office, ICMP, IRMCT, the Dutch embassy and the Cantonal Government in Tuzla.

It was agreed to launch a pilot project using **LIDAR technology** in the summer of 2021, focusing on the Tuzla Canton and Eastern Bosnia. It would allow for more efficient examination of larger areas in a shorter time, and improving identification of gravesite microlocations. This is necessary for better processing of data obtained by the ICRC from international archives, as the information or witness statements obtained from there often contain only approximate locations on potential gravesites.

To enhance MPI's capacities to process data received from the archives, the ICRC organized two seminars focusing on analytical methods and techniques for the tracing process, attended by **more than 20 investigators from the Institute**. The ICRC also donated to the MPI and its regional offices **27 GPS devices and 15 laptops and computers**.

Forensics

In 2020, ICRC continued its activities on improving conditions, and ensuring dig-

nified treatment and management of exhumed human remains in facilities throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina. Upon complementation of the assessments of 13 mortuaries and ossuaries across the country, the ICRC refurbished four of them, **Mostar, East Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Visoko**. Five more facilities require significant refurbishment, some of which will be conducted in 2021.

The ICRC increased its efforts to reinforce forensic capacities in Bosnia-Herzegovina by supporting **renovation works and equipping of the autopsy room at the Institute of Forensic Medicine and Forensic Toxicology at the Medical Faculty of University in Sarajevo**. This was the first renovation of the facility since it was built in 1945.

Five forensic experts were supported to attend tailored training programs in forensic archaeology and anthropology, alongside support for publication of the **first forensic anthropology textbook in Bosnia-Herzegovina**.



Autopsy room at the Institute of Forensic Medicine and Forensic Toxicology before and after ICRC's renovation.

*Both these methods can be particularly adapted to search for human remains. Samples of soil can be taken from the depth of up to 10 meters. The subsequent laboratory analysis determines accurate morphological and chemical composition of samples. Experts at the Faculty can overlap geological maps with current scans to determine whether there was erosion or movement of soil during the last 30 years.

RED CROSS HELPS MIGRANTS

Close to **16,000** migrants entered Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2020, looking for a way to a better future in Western Europe. More than 8,000 remain stranded in a country that is not their final destination and still has not recovered from its wounds of the 1992-1995 war.

The Red Cross Society of Bosnia-Herzegovina, supported by other partners from the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, as well as other international organizations, plays a prominent role in humanitarian relief efforts for migrants. It provides direct assistance for up to **4,000** people every day in six temporary reception centers.

After a fire destroyed previous accommodation capacities at the **Lipa location** in December 2020, the RCSBiH remained the key service provider for migrants at the site, fulfilling its humanitarian mandate. They set up 25 tents with a capacity for up to 900 people. Additionally, separate tents have been set up for social and religious activities of migrants.

In addition, **11 Red Cross mobile teams** have supported **33,000** people on the move in the past two years, including those sleeping by the roadside and those staying outside of official reception centers, providing them with essential emergency relief items such as dry food parcels, hygiene items, blankets, mattresses, sleeping bags, shoes, and clothes, as well as psychosocial support and first aid.

Restoring family links

Conflict, disaster, and migrations can separate families, leading to years of uncertainty about the fate of relatives. ICRC supports Red Cross mobile teams in Una-Sana, Sarajevo, and Tuzla Cantons which helped people stay in contact with their relatives and prevent separation of

relatives. As part of the *Restoring Family Links* program, the teams directly contacted more than **4,500 migrants and had 395 interventions**, such as facilitating internet access, providing mobile internet cards, or charging mobile phones. The teams are also promoting ICRC tools, such as the social media site **Trace-the-Face**, developed to allow migrants to reconnect with their family members in cases of separation.

Warning migrants of landmines

To avoid entry registration by local and national authorities, most migrants try to cross through the country using less accessible roads, exposing their lives to the **79,000 landmines** and unexploded ordnances still remaining from the war. In cooperation with the National Mine Action Center, ICRC supported the production of an additional **2,000 awareness materials** (leaflets and billboards), which included maps with clearly marked minefields and messages on safe behavior in five languages (Urdu, Pashto, Farsi, Arabic, and English), for the newly established migration camp at Lipa. Altogether, more than **40,000 information materials** on landmine threats were produced for **11 locations** along the main migratory routes throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina in the past two years. No mine incidents involving migrants have been reported so far, which confirms the effectiveness of these Red Cross activities.

Rights of migrants

The ICRC seeks to ensure that states fulfill their obligations **to protect the lives, preserve dignity and alleviate the suffering** of vulnerable migrants. We offer all authorities concerned a confidential and constructive dialogue in support of their efforts in fulfilling these obligations.

Red Cross mobile teams and volunteers provide food and hygiene parcels, clothes, and psychosocial support to migrants on the road.



DETAINEES AND MIGRANTS UNDER CUSTODY

As a part of its mandate, the ICRC has been visiting the detainees for more than 140 years, traditionally focusing on people held in connection with armed conflict and other situations of violence.

We aim to secure **humane treatment and conditions** of detention for all detainees, regardless of the reasons for their arrest and detention. The ICRC also seeks to alleviate the suffering of their families, particularly by restoring communication between detainees and their relatives. All this is facilitated by **constructive dialogue**

with the authorities who are responsible for ensuring that detainees are treated in accordance with international humanitarian law and other applicable laws.

In 2020, the ICRC **visited detainees in four prisons and migrants under custody** in the Immigration Center in Istočno Sarajevo and shared its findings and recommendations in confidential dialogue with the authorities. With our support, **two families visited detained relatives on eight occasions.**



Workshop on community policing for 14 police station chiefs and other members of the Una-Sana Cantonal Ministry of Internal Affairs was held in September 2020.

More educational workshops on the similar topics for members of law enforcement agencies are planned in Sarajevo and Una-Sana Canton in 2021.

COMMUNITY POLICING

The ICRC and the Una-Sana Canton Government jointly organized a three-day-long workshop titled “Community policing” **for 14 police stations chiefs and other members** of the Una-Sana Cantonal Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Topics covered during the workshop relate to human rights principles to be applied in policing duties, main principles of community policing, diversity and conflict management, as well as citizens’ participation in public security.

It is the first workshop of its kind in the Western Balkans and it aimed to provide a

safe space for police officers to speak about the challenges they face in their daily work, such as understaffing, heavy workload and frustration from among both migrants and the local population.

Harsh working conditions combined with the fact that Una-Sana Canton is the part of Bosnia-Herzegovina most affected by increased migration flows, are causing a continuous raise in stress and pressure.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has not slowed down the migrant movement towards the EU, nor their numbers in Una-Sana Canton, the high turn-over of people

on the move in Una-Sana Canton was highlighted as a significant factor which limits ability, time and resources to develop a deeper and meaningful communication with migrants.

The community policing workshop was an opportunity to increase the knowledge of police officers in methods of deescalation by establishing two-way communication. The overall objective is to decrease tensions in Una-Sana Canton and preventively assure that both the needs of the local population and the fundamental rights of migrants are taken into account and respected by the law enforcement agencies.

HELP THE HELPERS

The work of the **Red Cross volunteers** involved in the response to the humanitarian challenges in BiH can be exhausting, both physically and mentally.

Recognizing the needs of volunteers, the ICRC launched the initiative „Help the helpers“, aiming to support **volunteers' well-being**, empower them in their roles,

equip them to better cope stress, and therefore improve the overall quality of their work. The focus of these workshops was on empowerment of those that direct their efforts and knowledge into a response to challenging circumstances, such as migration influx and the COVID-19 pandemic.

To identify the needs of and obstacles faced by Red Cross volunteers and staff, psychologists contracted by the ICRC conducted more than 30 individual interviews and organized four focus groups. Based on the data collected, experts developed strategies and methods to use for addressing **mental health issues and providing psychosocial support** for the Red Cross staff and volunteers in the follow-up workshops.

In 2021, the ICRC held a regional workshop focusing on the **security aspect and mitigating measures** in the migration response, and also ensured funds for standardization of the equipment for Red Cross mobile teams which assist the migrants in Bosnia-Herzegovina, thus **increasing their visibility and improving the safety standards**.

„Help the Helpers“: In December 2020, experts conducted 30 individual interviews and four focus groups with Red Cross staff and volunteers in the Una-Sana Canton.



DIALOGUE WITH ACADEMIC AND RELIGIOUS CIRCLES



Launch of the book on IHL and Islamic Law at the Faculty of Islamic Science in Sarajevo, held in February 2020.

„True religion transcends misunderstandings and all cultural and social prejudices of the limited human mind. Moreover, it seeks to establish lasting good relations among people by strengthening feelings of equity, equality, brotherhood, and unity in diversity. True faith in God is an effort to love His creatures, not committing crimes against them.“ - Dr Zuhdija Hasanovic, Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Science in Sarajevo.

Even wars have limits. They are defined by **International Humanitarian Law (IHL)** which obliges protection of all people not taking part in the conflict, as well as limiting the means and methods of warfare.

The rules and laws of war undoubtedly have deeper historical roots. They are derived from elementary human values that are an integral part of all the world's philosophies and religions.

Islamic law guarantees victims of armed conflict the right to protection, respect, and dignified, humane treatment. It also calls for the protection of civilian facilities and property. Islamic law limits the

methods and means of warfare to the limits of military necessity.

All this is in full compliance with the provisions of IHL and the Geneva Conventions. Thus, the similarities between IHL and Islamic law are not coincidental, but evidence that there are universal values which are an important part of most religious and other worldviews.

The **publication titled "Islamic Law and IHL"**, published in 2020 in Bosnian and English, deals with those similarities and was born as a result of the longstanding cooperation between the ICRC and the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo.

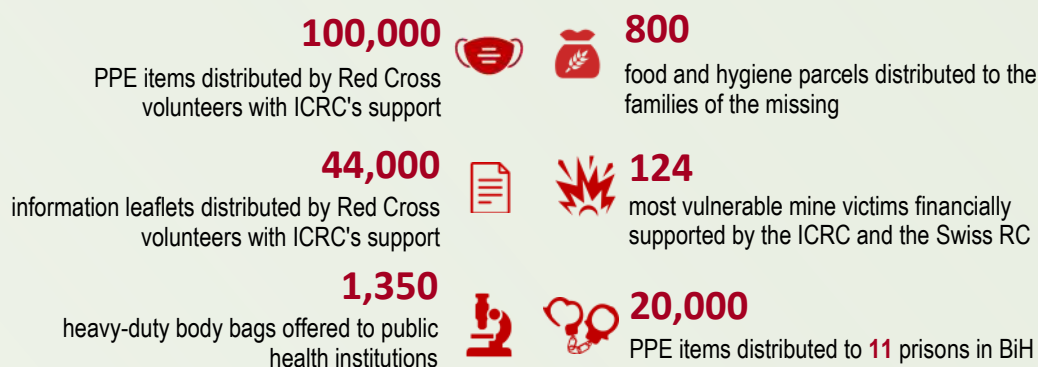
IHL PROGRAMME FOR STUDENTS

In December 2020, the ICRC organized a **five-day programme for 40 students of eight faculties** of law and political studies from across Bosnia-Herzegovina. Lecturers were ICRC experts from Sarajevo and Geneva, and numerous academics teaching about IHL at European universities.

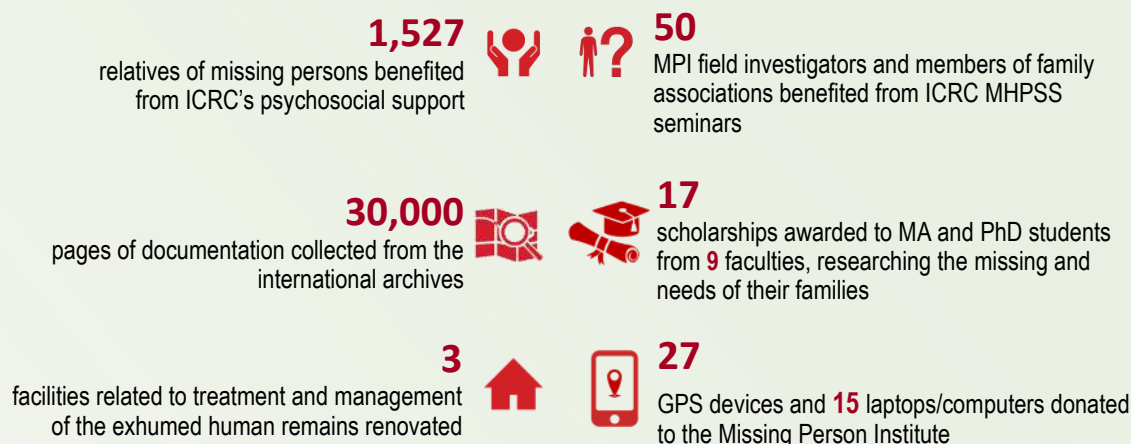
Due to the ongoing pandemic, the event had to be held online. Nevertheless, it was interactive in design to increase students' knowledge of IHL, encourage discussions and spark their curiosity to keep learning more about this discipline in the future.

ICRC FACTS & FIGURES 2020

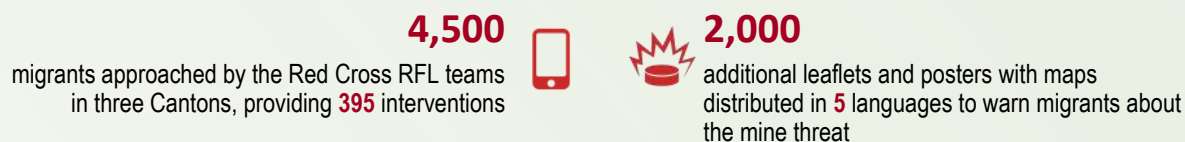
RESPONSE TO COVID-19



MISSING PERSONS



RESTORING FAMILY LINKS (RFL) AND MINE ACTION FOR MIGRANTS



INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW (IHL)



COMMUNICATION



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