

**Family News Service/Restoring Family Link (FNS/RFL)**

**Background:**

Restoring Family Links (RFL) called Family News Service (FNS) in India is a program of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, more specifically of the National Society and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). It covers a range of activities that aim to prevent separation and disappearances, restore and maintain contact between family members and clarify the fate of persons reported missing.

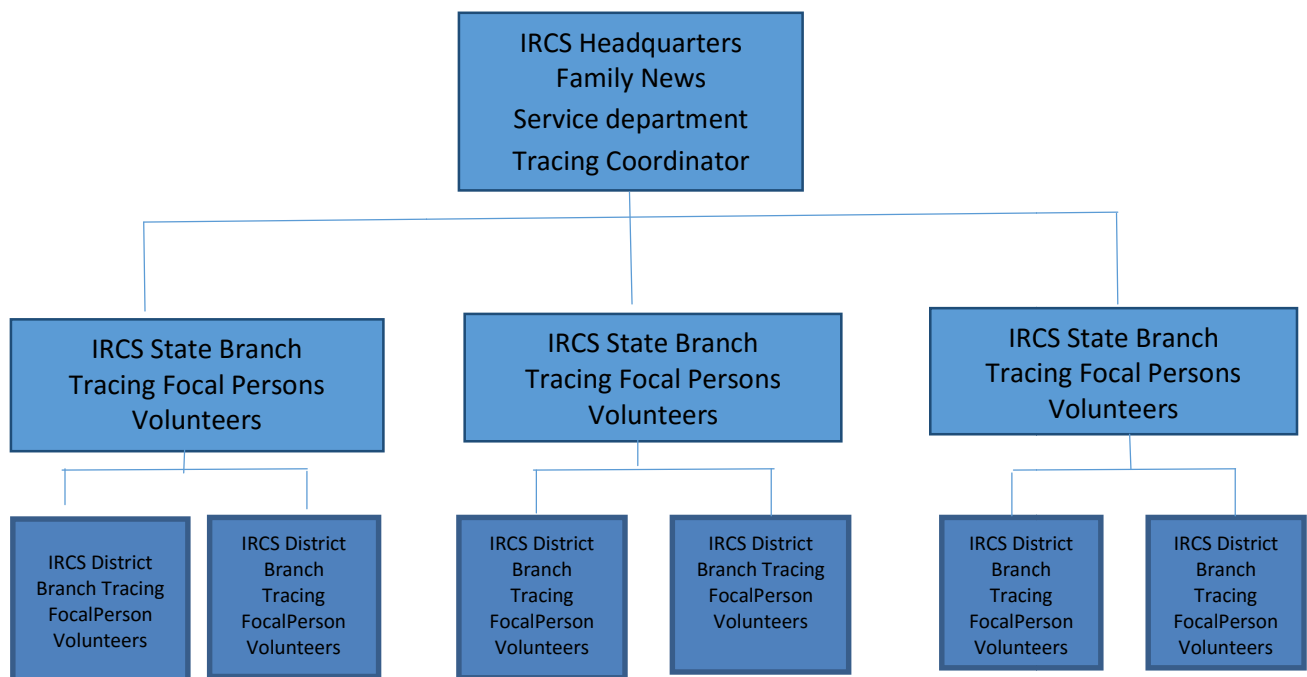
The ICRC and the National Societies form together a global network, the Family Links Network. This network works across international borders, present with staff and volunteers at grass-roots level worldwide, to locate people and put them back into contact with their relatives, observing of the principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

The Family Links Network takes action when the loss of contact between family members is due to armed conflict, other situations of violence; natural or man-made disaster; migration and in other situations of humanitarian needs such as allowing/helping detainees to keep in touch with their families while in prison.

**Indian Red Cross Society Family News Service (FNS)**

The Family News Service (FNS) department of the Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS), with all the National Societies worldwide, plays an important role in helping to re-establish or maintain contact between separated family members. As part of the network, IRCS can help a person in India to locate a missing family member in any part of the world, be it in the Middle East, Europe, North America or anywhere else. It is a unique service provided free of charge to the public. The IRCS Family News Service (FNS) department provides its services throughout India, through the widespread network of IRCS State and District Branches.

**The IRCS Family News Service Network:**



IRCS Tracing structure (as presented above consists of three levels covering the country).The three levels are:

1. IRCS Headquarters Family News Service department is the highest instance in charge of coordination of the whole structure.
2. As there are 36 State and Union Branches, there should consequently be 36 Tracing Focal Persons, one in every State Branch. Alongside the Tracing Focal Person, every State Branch should have a certain number of Tracing Volunteers.
3. District Branches in districts prone to natural disasters, migrations and other situations of humanitarian need, where RFL needs might become very important, should also have a Tracing Focal Person and a number of Volunteers offering the service in their respective District Branch

Following are the acceptance criteria of FNS service in India

1. **Conflict or Internal disturbances**
2. **Disaster** (such as earthquake, flood, tsunami, cyclone, etc),
3. **Migration** (abroad or within India, e.g. a person from India went to work in Saudi Arabia or a person from Bihar went to work in Punjab and after a while the family lost contact with him/her)
  - The time period elapsed since the loss of contact in situation of migration is substantial (three months at least) or
  - The duration of absence is longer than anticipated/usual (e.g. a migrant who usually stays 6 months in one State or country has not returned home after nine months and the family does not have any news of him/her) or
  - The enquirer/family has relevant indications that a migrant has been detained, sick, hospitalized and does not have other possibility to contact him/her and verify his/her status,
4. **Other situations of humanitarian need, as decide by the IRCS NHQ Family News Service department.**

The main tools used for the FNS activity in India are the following:

#### 1. Red Cross Message (RCM)

Red Cross Messages are means for the exchange of family news, in the form of an unsealed letter, when mail services or other methods of communication have been temporarily suspended due to conflict, disaster or other situations of humanitarian need. Red Cross Messages (RCM) should be used when the enquirer has a good idea of where the sought person is, but has no other means to send or receive news. If the enquirer does not know the location of the sought person, a Tracing Request should be used instead. The standard RCM form consists of two pages: the first is used by the sender to write his/her details and message, and the second is used for the addressee's reply.

(Pls. see the FNS procedural guidelines 2008 Page No.9-14)

#### 2. Tracing Request

While RCMs are used when a full address and whereabouts and the addressee are known, the Tracing Request refers to the collection of information regarding the disappearance of an individual in relation with conflict, natural disaster, migration or any other situation of humanitarian need. Therefore, Tracing Request is the official enquiry by a family member to trace a missing relative. Acceptance of tracing inquiries by a National Society depends a lot on the working environment,

capacity, accessibility of certain regions, etc. Hence, it is very important that an IRCS Tracing Focal Person or a Volunteer is well aware of the criteria for accepting Tracing cases.

(Pls. see the FNS procedural guidelines 2008 Page No.15-19)

### 3. Unaccompanied minors tracing

Unaccompanied minors (also called unaccompanied children) are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so. The unaccompanied children often find themselves forlorn and unaided with meagre resources, psychological dilemmas, social taboos (especially for girls) and in an unfamiliar environment with hardly any skills to re-integrate back in the society. Separated from those closest to them, these children lose care and protection of their families when they most need them. They face abuse and exploitation and sometimes their very survival may be threatened. Unaccompanied children are the most vulnerable amongst the separated population.

(Pls. see the FNS procedural guidelines 2008 Page No.20-25)

### **RFL in Disasters:**

One of the many hardships imposed by conflicts and disasters is the separation of families. A range of RFL needs can be expected in relation to the outbreak of a conflict or a Disaster.

The ICRC and many National Societies have a long tradition of meeting needs in relation to separated family members in situations of conflict.

While an RFL response in disasters have developed over the last decades, meeting RFL needs of migrants represent a growing challenge to the Movement.

Usually, demand for RFL services provided by the Movement in a natural disaster will be:

- a short term need to transmit news when normal means and channels of communication are disrupted,
- requests for clarification of fate of relatives from whom/about there has been no news after communications were restored,
- a limited need for evacuation/transfer and family reunion, concerning particularly vulnerable individuals.

***Note: Kindly refer the Family New Service Procedural Guidelines 2008 (attached) for all procedures and acceptance criteria's for different tools including model replies.***

For more information kindly visit [www.indianredcross.org](http://www.indianredcross.org)