

EMN France
Online conference “Separated and missing migrants: Member States approaches to prevent family separation and search mechanisms for missing migrants”
15 October 2021

On 15 October 2021 EMN France held an online conference on “**Separated and missing migrants: Member States approaches to prevent family separation and search mechanisms for missing migrants**”. This conference gathered more than 60 participants, including representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Red Cross EU office and the French Red Cross, as well as representatives of many European and non-European Red Cross offices, French and European associations and NGOs, EMN National Contact Points and Member State administrations in charge of migration issues.

This conference was organised in two panels, which were preceded by an intervention dedicated to the conclusions of the [EMN inform “Separated and missing migrants: Member States' approaches to preventing family separation and search mechanisms for missing migrants”](#), published in 2021. The aim of this conference was to **explore the approaches favoured by EU Member States to prevent the separation of migrants' families, and to present the tracing mechanisms put in place in order to find missing migrants.**

Jean-Baptiste Herbet, Head of the Department of Statistics, Studies and Documentation (*Département des statistiques, des études et de la documentation*, DSED) at the General Directorate for Foreign Nationals in France (*Direction générale des étrangers en France*, DGEF) of the Ministry of the Interior, introduced this conference by recalling how the topic of the separation and disappearance of migrants constitutes a **national and European political priority.**

A first presentation by **Tamara Buschek-Chauvel**, EMN France policy officer, presented **the conclusions of the EMN inform**, which was elaborated on the basis of contributions from 22 Member States and the ICRC. After an overview of the reasons why migrants may be separated from other family members, this presentation notably showed that all Member States have put in place measures to prevent the separation of families when they first arrive on their territory and in reception centers. Families are also generally detained together and placed in specific administrative detention centers. Furthermore, the inform reveals that there is no procedure specifically dedicated to the search for missing third-country nationals, and that most Member States have not set up specific mechanisms to anonymously report a disappearance. Finally, the involvement of national Red Cross societies and, in some Member States, civil society organisations, in the search for missing persons in most Member States, was highlighted.

The first panel, moderated by **Tamara Buschek-Chauvel**, was dedicated to **the national policies, good practices and challenges regarding the prevention of family separation in the EU.**

Julia Koopmans, researcher at EMN Netherlands, detailed **the measures implemented in the Netherlands to prevent the separation of migrants or asylum-seeking families**, while respecting the principle of family unity. The presentation was structured around three stages in the journey of third-country nationals: their entry into the territory, their arrival in reception centers, and the initiation of the voluntary return procedure. A special focus was given to “Closed Family Facilities”, administrative detention centers dedicated to families placed under a return procedure, and for whom the deadline for voluntary return has expired.

The presentation of **Evita Armouti**, Acting Head of the Migration Unit of the Red Cross EU Office, was dedicated to **family reunification procedures**. First, she presented the work of the European office and the national Red Cross societies in the field of restoring family links, in cooperation with other national and European actors. She then focused on the consequences of prolonged family separation on the physical and mental health of family members, and on their ability to integrate into the host society as well. She concluded her presentation with a summary of various recommendations enabling a swift and effective family reunification.

The second panel, moderated by **Christelle Caporali-Petit**, Coordinator of EMN France, focused on **the search mechanisms for missing migrants**.

Manal Al Chaarani, Legal Advisor on Asylum and Migration to the EU at the ICRC, provided an overview of **the measures and procedures implemented to search for missing migrants in the EU**. In particular, she presented the Restoring Family Links Network of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which is used to trace missing migrants around the world. The gaps in Member States' policies, as well as a sample of good practices identified around the world, at different scales, were presented. She concluded her presentation with several ICRC recommendations to the EU, such as the need to establish a procedure specifically dedicated to the search for missing third-country nationals.

Finally, **Florence Boreil**, Head of the Restoring Family Links (RFL) Service of the French Red Cross, presented **the action of the French Red Cross regarding the search for missing migrants**. Her presentation focused on the two activities of the RFL service: the search for missing migrants, and the prevention of disappearances and the maintenance of family links. Regarding its search mission, she stressed the importance of cooperating with national authorities, national Red Cross societies in Europe, relatives of the missing person, and a large network of volunteers in France, in order to gather as much information as possible about the circumstances of the disappearance and any potential lead. The "[Trace the Face](#)" tool, a website gathering photos of people searching for a missing relative, was also presented.

The questions asked to the speakers allowed some clarifications regarding, among other things, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the search mechanisms for separated and missing migrants, the evolution of the number of searches carried out since 2018-2019, the information campaigns carried out online and on social media, and the average duration of an investigation.

In conclusion of this conference, **Tamara Buschek-Chauvel** thanked the participants for the quality of their presentations, which provided a clear overview of practices in the prevention of family separation and the search for missing migrants in the EU. She also underlined the importance of the Red Cross actions in this field, and the avenues of reflection opened up by its recommendations, notably concerning a greater convergence in the application of the principle of family unity, the setting up of specific research mechanisms or the possibility of creating a working group on these issues at the EU level.

The EMN inform "Separated and missing migrants: Member States' approaches to preventing family separation and search mechanisms for missing migrants", is available in [English](#) and [French](#) on the [EMN website](#).