

Zeitschrift: Annual report / International Committee of the Red Cross
Herausgeber: International Committee of the Red Cross
Band: - (1949)

Rubrik: Assistance to civilian victims of war

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 12.12.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

V. — Assistance to Civilian Victims of War

(I) — REFUGEES AND STATELESS PERSONS

Relations with the International Refugee Organization

An official Report estimated, in June 1941, that 604,500 Displaced Persons had been found countries of adoption by the International Refugee Organisation (IRO), and that this body was still looking after 385,000 persons in camps in Germany, Austria and Italy.¹

The Committee had occasion to make contact with IRO on many occasions during the execution of this great task.²

But, important as was the work accomplished, IRO was still unable to cope with the needs of all who found themselves debarred from leading a normal life. This latter consideration, apart from all questions of nationality, religion or race, represents for the ICRC, the "human" aspect of the refugee problem.³ It was in this spirit that the Committee tried, as far

¹ IRO estimate, quoted in a Report of the competent U.S. Senate Commission (June 30, 1949).

² See particularly under "Travel Documents", p. 55 below.

³ On the Committee's proposal, the Stockholm Conference approved, in the draft Civilian Convention, an Article 127, reading as follows:

"The High Contracting Parties shall endeavour, upon the close of hostilities or occupation, to facilitate the return to their domicile, or the settlement in a new residence, of all persons who, as the result of war or occupation, are unable to live under normal conditions at the place where they may be.

"The High Contracting Parties shall, in particular, ensure that these persons may be able to travel, if they so desire, to other countries and that they are provided for this purpose with passports or equivalent documents."

This text was not adopted by the Geneva Conference.

as its resources permitted, to aid refugees—particularly those who could not count on help from IRO.

Aid by the ICRC

Italy. — Constant efforts were made to speed up repatriation of Germans from Italy. Many of these, military or civilian, had no identity papers and were interned in Italian Government camps; others were at liberty but could not pay their way home. After repeated representations by the ICRC, the Bonn Federal Government, the Italian and the Allied authorities finally agreed to make arrangements for repatriation. In the meantime, the ICRC agreed with the Social Service of the Italian Red Cross and the German Red Cross organizations, for the issue of relief parcels to those in need, and itself distributed parcels of food, clothing and books.

Belgium — During 1949, several thousand Displaced Persons of all nationalities, working in Belgium, addressed themselves to the ICRC. They had signed two-year contracts for work in the Belgian mines, and relying on verbal promises made to them, expected at the end of that period to be able to find other work in Belgium, emigrate overseas, or return to Germany. But the economic situation in Belgium debarred them from other employment; the Allies were opposed to their return to Germany, and IRO could admit no claims from persons who had already emigrated at its expense. They thus had no alternative but to continue in the mines—often, when physically unsuitable, to the detriment of their health.

The Committee was unable to obtain satisfaction for them, but it was at least reassured by the fact that wages were high and housing excellent. With the help of IRO, some cases were found more suitable employment in France and South America.

The Netherlands — A similar problem in Holland was dealt with by the ICRC, the Dutch Red Cross and IRO representatives at The Hague.

Palestine — About three hundred members of the Protestant Community of Templars had retained German nationality, although they had lost practically all contact with Germany. Threatened with expulsion after the War, they had recourse to the ICRC; they had special ties through Henry Dunant, who had been concerned with setting up the original Community in Palestine. The Committee had them transported with their belongings to Cyprus and obtained permission for them to emigrate to Australia.

China, Algeria, Rhodesia, Greece — Delegates dealt with refugee problems in all these countries—China: refugees of Russian or German origin; Algeria: refugees in transit of all nationalities; Rhodesia: several hundred Poles; Greece: Russians, Assyrians, Rumanians, Bulgarians and Jugoslavs, the majority of them destitute.

Finding it impossible to give material assistance to all, the ICRC tried to help in other ways, and especially, in countries distant from Europe, by facilitating their approach to the authorities who might be able to help.

Legal Assistance

The Stockholm Conference adopted the following Resolution (No. XXXI):

“The XVIIth International Red Cross Conference recommends that National Societies include in their activities, should the necessity arise, legal and social assistance to stateless persons, refugees and war victims;

Requests the League of Red Cross Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross to establish a standard programme in this field.”

A “standard programme” was in fact drawn up by the League and the ICRC towards the end of 1948 and communicated by them to the National Societies. It was inspired by the work in Italy of AGIUS, an autonomous Section of the Italian Red Cross responsible for providing legal assistance to aliens, which gave inestimable services during the last five years. The League and the Committee sent National Societies

the text of the AGIUS Statutes for information, suggesting that similar bodies might be set up locally.

Several National Societies replied to the effect that the agencies for legal assistance already existing in their countries would be able to carry out the work suggested; an international centre might co-ordinate their efforts.

An Iranian lawyer, M. R. Aghababian, who, in 1944 had put forward the principle on which AGIUS was set up, took up the idea of the Stockholm Conference independently of the National Red Cross Societies. On December 30, 1949, he registered, in accordance with the legal requirements of the State of New York, "International Legal Assistance Inc."—a body which followed the AGIUS model, but which is intended to be world-wide in scope.

Travel Documents

The ICRC Travel Document¹ was designed to facilitate the repatriation of Displaced Persons, to permit them to emigrate to a country of their choice, or to enable them to explain their presence in places where they happened to be as a result of the events of war.

It was intended that the Document—issued in default of other valid identity papers—should be withdrawn, according as the authorities in various countries themselves provided appropriate papers. During 1949, however, the ICRC was forced to continue its issue because of the number of applicants, and at the request of the receiving countries and of IRO; in certain countries—Argentina for example—the Document was the only substitute accepted for a valid passport. To prevent abuse, the issue was made subject to three conditions:

- (1) — Absence of valid passport and impossibility of procuring one.
- (2) — Possession of exit visas.
- (3) — Assurance of visa from the Diplomatic or Consular authorities of the country of destination.

¹ See *General Report, 1939-1947*, Vol. I, p. 669, and *Report, 1947-1948*, p. 60.

The Documents, issued free, served for repatriation as well as emigration. Nationals of East European countries used them to return home; others, to emigrate overseas. They were issued principally by the ICRC Delegations in Prague, Vienna, Salzburg, Innsbruck, Paris, Cairo, Shanghai, Madrid, Genoa, Naples and Rome—most of all in Rome, and in close liaison there with AGIUS and the IRO representative.

Reunion of Families

In the course of other work, the Committee tried to help in reuniting families split up by the War.

Germany — Liaison was established between a number of Czechoslovaks and relatives who had emigrated to Germany.

Shanghai — Similarly, relatives left behind, and refugees of Russian origin transferred by IRO from Shanghai to Samar (Philippines), were enabled to correspond, with a view to their eventual reunion.

Australia — Germans interned during the War and allowed to remain afterwards, were given permission to bring out their families. At the request of the Australian Immigration Department, the ICRC got in touch with IRO and Marseilles shipping agents, in order to ensure that the voyage out would be satisfactorily arranged.

As will be seen below, similar efforts were made in the case of German-speaking minorities (*Volksdeutsche*) and East Germans, separated from their families.

Camp Visiting

Italy — Of the four camps in which destitute German refugees having illegally entered Italy were housed¹, two—Lipari and Alberobello—were closed during the year, leaving

¹ Refugees considered as eligible by IRO, were accommodated in some ten other camps, under IRO control.

Fraschette di Alatri for men, and Farfa Sabina for women and children. The efforts of Delegates to assist were warmly seconded by the Italian authorities, who welcomed the visits and the moral and material aid brought to the refugees, while doing everything possible to meet Delegates' suggestions for improving living conditions.

(2) — GERMAN-SPEAKING MINORITIES

(“ *Volksdeutsche* ” and East Germans)

The term *Volksdeutsche*¹ is commonly used to designate German-speaking minorities established for several generations in countries of Central or Eastern Europe. Their nationality is other than German, but following events in the recent past, they were treated as suspect by the authorities in power in the various countries where they were living. This gave rise to their expulsion after the German defeat. The expulsions forced millions of *Volksdeutsche* to seek shelter in Germany.

The ICRC helped these refugees whenever the occasion offered ; it tried particularly to bring the members of dispersed families together.

Poland — The ICRC approached the Polish Government to obtain permission to leave for all *Volksdeutsche* and East Germans who so wished. The authorities agreed and organized several convoys of emigrants ; after a certain number had passed, however, the British authorities required, at the frontier, individual permits issued by the Allied Permit Office in Warsaw. This considerably slowed up operations. The ICRC took this matter up with the Allied authorities, who thereupon agreed to a resumption of collective transports.

Czechoslovakia — Much the same procedure was followed in Czechoslovakia. The Prague Delegation, for several years

¹ The word is to some extent a technical term, and, for conciseness, will be used here to describe such minorities.

the intermediary through which petitions by relatives of political prisoners had been made to the authorities, obtained the consent of the Czechoslovak Government to the release of all *Volksdeutsche* political prisoners, provided they were sentenced to less than twenty years and that their entry to Germany was guaranteed.

In December, 1949, a Conference in which Allied and German authorities, and the Red Cross Co-ordination Committees in Germany took part, led to an agreement under which 25,000 persons of German stock from Poland, and 20,000 from Czechoslovakia, were to be admitted to Western Germany, and looked after by relatives who accepted responsibility for them.

Thanks to the Red Cross Committees, the persons covered by these agreements were satisfactorily transferred and settled.

East Germany — *Volksdeutsche* were allowed to enter East Germany provided they had obtained an entry permit from the German authorities in the Soviet Zone. The ICRC handed over these documents to the authorities, and convoys were then organized to the said Zone. There are probably some 4,400,000 *Volksdeutsche* in the area.

Western Germany — According to official German sources ¹ there were 7,600,000 refugees of German stock in Western Germany at the end of 1949. Some were expelled *Volksdeutsche*, or post-war refugees from Russia, Poland, Rumania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the others being East Germans, expelled from territory taken from Germany under the Postdam Agreement.

The gravity of this problem comes more fully into perspective when it is remembered that there are large numbers of non-German refugees in Germany, that the country is littered with the ruins of war, and that the lost territory beyond the Oder-Neisse line produced, before the War, two-fifths of the country's food. The density of population passed suddenly from 139 to 202 per square kilometre.

¹ Statement by the representative of the Bonn Federal Government at the IRO Conference, Geneva, April 24, 1950.

The German authorities have done the best they could to improve conditions for both *Volksdeutsche* and East Germans, having decided to treat all with the same care, whether or not they are technically Germans. But it has proved impossible to give them all employment and so enable them to enter fully into the community; many, as a consequence, drifted into a state of idleness and apathy in the camps and the ruins.¹

The German administration, unable to deal single-handed with the problem, has welcomed every gesture of help from abroad²—all the more so as neither *Volksdeutsche* nor East Germans come within IRO's terms of reference.

Austria, Yugoslavia — Conversations were held in November, 1949, between the ICRC and the Yugoslav Government on the subject of transferring *Volksdeutsche* from Yugoslavia to Austria. According to a report of the Ministry for the Interior, there were 300,000 *Volksdeutsche* in Austria as on December 1, 1949.³

(3) — CHILD WELFARE

Poland — The ICRC had successfully taken up the question of restoring 500 German children, then living in Poland, to their parents in Germany.⁴ The transfer was completed during 1949.

In the opposite direction, the Committee offered to help in repatriating Polish children from Germany; for this purpose, it loaned wagons, and gave out provisions and blankets on the convoys.

¹ And in spite of the sums their upkeep costs the *Länder* Governments.

² It is only fair to mention here, to take two examples, the work of Caritas Catholica Internationalis and of the World Council of Churches.

³ The decision of the IRO Preparatory Commission to consider *Volksdeutsche* refugees in Austria "eligible" (see *Report, 1947-1948*, p. 64), had no practical effect in 1949; they are thus in the same precarious position as the *Volksdeutsche* in Germany.

⁴ See *Report 1947-1948*, p. 67.

Jugoslavia — The ICRC got in touch with the Yugoslav Red Cross after the Yugoslav Government had called for the intervention of the ICRC and the League of Red Cross Societies in repatriating Yugoslav children from Germany and Austria ; the matter was still under discussion at the end of the year.

Italy — Following a report of its Delegation in Italy, the Committee brought to the attention of the International Union for Child Welfare, the needs of those children whose parents were in camps ; the Union took the matter in hand.

Greece — The disappearance of Greek children, following frontier warfare, was a source of constant anxiety to the Committee all during the year.

At the beginning of 1949, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, acting on the General Assembly's Resolution of November 27, 1948, asked the ICRC and the League of Red Cross Societies to get in touch with the Greek Government and Red Cross, and with the Governments and Red Cross Societies in the countries bordering Greece, in an attempt to have the children restored to their parents.

The ICRC and the League decided to make a preliminary general study in co-operation with the Greek Red Cross and authorities, and with the Societies and Governments of the countries in which the children were living.

They endeavoured to send information missions to these countries, but could not do so in the case of Hungary, Rumania and Albania, from which the necessary visas were not forthcoming. The Albanian Red Cross, moreover, informed Geneva in April 1949 that there were no longer any Greek children in the country.

Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Greece and Jugoslavia gave visas for representatives of the ICRC and the League.

The Delegates went to Greece in February, 1949, and saw the arrangements made by the Greek Red Cross to deal with requests for repatriation received from next of kin. The Greek

Red Cross and Government gave the most formal assurances that the repatriated children would be lodged in good conditions, and that the ICRC and the League would be given all facilities for inspection.

The various countries were then asked to send lists of all Greek children in their territory, for comparison with the requests from Greece, so that a working list could be drawn up for each country. In spite of numerous reminders, and despite the assurances given by the Bulgarian and Czechoslovak Red Cross Societies to the Delegates, none of the countries in question sent the required lists to Geneva.

The ICRC and the League then drew up nominal rolls of children claimed, on the basis of requests received through the Greek Red Cross. The list was sent at the beginning of August 1949, to the Red Cross of each of the countries in which the children were stated to be, asking that the names of any of the children identified be marked on it.

The Czechoslovak Red Cross communicated 138 such names in September 1949. Although written to several times, none of the other Societies made any response.

Delegates sent by the ICRC and the League on study mission to Bulgaria and Yugoslavia were able, in these two countries, to visit several homes for Greek children, and obtain some figures. They thus learned that 13,500 children had passed through Yugoslavia—3,550 bound for Czechoslovakia, 3,050 for Hungary, 6,400 for Rumania, and 500 for Poland. In September, this information was officially communicated to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Polish Red Cross was then approached but denied—at first verbally and in November, 1949, by letter—that the information given by the Yugoslav Red Cross was correct.

On October 5, 1949, the ICRC and the League addressed a first general Report on what they had done since January 11, 1949, and on results obtained, to the United Nations.

On the basis of this Report, the United Nations General Assembly, on November 18, 1949, unanimously adopted a new Resolution, thanking the ICRC and the League, asking them to continue their efforts and calling for the full support

of the various countries concerned, in the attempt to find a solution.

On November 30, 1949, this Resolution was communicated by the ICRC and the League to the Red Cross Society of each of the interested countries.

(4) — ASSISTANCE TO WAR INVALIDS

The Committee, as far as its means allowed, continued to assist war invalids.

The brochure "Rehabilitation of War Invalids", published in English, French and German, was very favourably received ; it gave rise to numerous articles and an abundant correspondence.

Replies on technical questions were given to official agencies and private correspondents in France, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, Pakistan, Poland, Syria and the United States.

An inquiry was made on conditions for war invalids in China and Japan.

In agreement with the United Nations, films about the training of war invalids were shown in Geneva, and two films on the functional training of amputees were loaned to the Polish Government.

Relief was given collectively by the ICRC to groups of war-invalids of eleven nationalities (Arab, Austrian, Czechoslovak, French, German, Greek, Yugoslav, Indonesian, Italian, Norwegian and Polish).

In addition, 900 individual requests for relief were examined ; invalids with families were helped to find a living.

General relief given, collective and individual, is described in Chapter VII.

(5) — NURSES

Relief, in the form of clothing and footwear, was, as in the past, given to nurses in poor circumstances.

The Nursing Service, in agreement with the League, prepared a questionnaire, to be sent to the National Societies, on the

voluntary principle in the Nursing and Volunteer Aid Services.

Five nurses were engaged for service in Palestine, from which country three others returned after completing the period of their contracts (see p. 72).
