

Protection within the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

The Protection Goals of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

The mission of the Movement is “to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found, to protect life and health and ensure respect for the human being”. The principle of impartiality also exhorts all components of the Movement to “make no discrimination...being guided solely by needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.”

The Movement seeks to ensure that people in need receive the protection they are entitled to under international and domestic law. This includes the special protection that certain categories of people are entitled to – for examples refugees. The protection activities of the Movement are therefore driven by needs and informed by rights.

What is protection?

The most common definition of protection among humanitarian organizations is the one developed during ICRC-led workshops, later adopted by the IASC:

“... all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. HR law, IHL, refugee law).”

It is the primary role and responsibility of State authorities and relevant non-State actors to protect people and ensure their security. However, authorities frequently lack the capacity or the will to ensure that people at risk are protected.

The overall aim of protection is to address the causes of violations, the circumstances that lead to them and their consequences, by ensuring that authorities fulfil their obligations to protect all people without discrimination. This includes protection activities that aim to stop or prevent violations of relevant bodies of law.

Protection in humanitarian action in the Movement has both internal and external aspects. Internally, it refers to ensuring that the actions of the Movement respect, and do not endanger the dignity the safety and rights of persons. Externally, it refers to action intended to ensure that authorities and other actors respect their obligations and the rights of individuals.

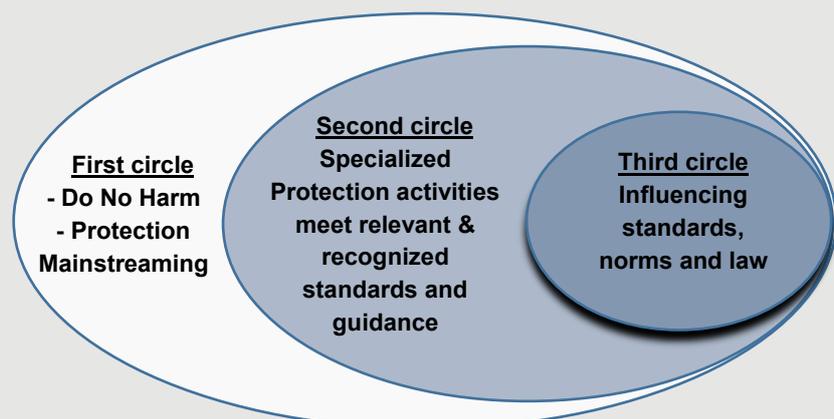
The overarching principles in protection

In all situations, the **main principles** that are central to humanitarian work apply:

- ☑ To respect the **principles of humanity, impartiality** including the aspect of **non-discrimination**
- ☑ To avoid harmful effects, i.e. respect the **principle of “do no harm”**
- ☑ To put the **affected population, communities and individuals at the centre of the response** to ensure **accountability towards affected people**

Three levels of Protection action

These three principles can be implemented through three different “levels” or types of Protective action, illustrated Below and explained on the next page.



Three levels of Protective action

- **The first circle** refers to “do no harm” and Protection mainstreaming. Both are based on the key protection principles of ensuring that all humanitarian activities respect the rights and the dignity of people supported by humanitarian response.

“Do no harm” generally refers to avoiding any negative effects from humanitarian activities. Protection mainstreaming refers to ensuring that protection risks are minimized and potential violations of international and domestic law are taken into consideration when carrying out all humanitarian activities, so that assistance activities also address protection needs through ensuring dignity, access, participation and safety for affected people. It is relevant for all humanitarian actors – whether protection actors or not. At a minimum, Movement actors should ensure that they “do no harm”, and further “mainstream” protection concerns in all humanitarian response.

The IFRC’s **Minimum standards for protection, gender and inclusion in emergencies programming** provides key guidance for National Societies. The Protection Principles in the **Sphere Handbook** and **The Minimum Inter-Agency Standards for Protection Mainstreaming** also provide widely accepted guidance on protection mainstreaming.

- **The second circle** (which also includes the principles stated in the first circle), refers to specialized protection activities addressing the causes and circumstances leading to violations of international (including International Humanitarian Law) and domestic law. It also includes addressing the consequences of those violations. Activities include:

- ICRC core protection activities, for which it wants to maintain the ultimate lead, i.e. the protection of people deprived of their liberty, restoring family links activities, use of force and efforts to clarify the fate of the missing. Its expertise and leadership on such issues stem from an experience consolidated over the years and a specific mandate and mission.
- Other specific areas of protection activities carried out or supported by Movement components, such as child protection, addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), psycho-social support (PSS) in emergencies, gender equality, disability inclusion, protection of trafficked persons, and provision of legal assistance.

Specialized Protection activities may be carried out in different ways (between these two approaches, lie a variety of levels and activities that can be implemented according to context specificities).

The “Minimum Protection Approach” entails that, while remaining focused on service provision, the Movement actor is able to address the protection needs identified. In this case, it doesn’t assess and address all the protection needs but has the means to react to issues that come to its attention in the course of the activities in cooperation with protection specialists.

The “Full Protection Approach” entails regular monitoring of situation of persons supported, confidential dialogue including reporting to the authorities and relevant non-State actors at different levels. It requires immediate responses to alleged violations of relevant bodies of law or norms as well as prevention activities to reduce the vulnerability and/or the exposure of individuals to risks.

In this circle ICRC plays a lead role for activities related to the work of the Central Tracing Agency. In its role of convener, it ensures that ICRC’s **Professional Standards for Protection work** and other jointly issued guidelines, are disseminated and known within the Movement.

In this circle also are included National Societies that have developed in-house expertise on different protection fields in line with the professional Standards for Protection Work and other relevant protection standards.

Professional Standards for Protection Work outline a set of minimum requirements which humanitarian actors should fulfil when carrying out protection activities which includes that when National Societies encounter protection issues they are not able to address, they should inform other relevant actors (which could be the ICRC, provided it has the capacity to respond to these specific needs) as per the Professional Standards for Protection work.

The IFRC’s Area of Focus on “**Protection, Gender and Inclusion**” provides guidance, training and operational support in particular on SGBV, Child Protection and PSS, and facilitates sharing of guidance from National Societies (e.g. the Anti-Trafficking Network).

- **The third circle** relates to efforts to *influence standards, norms and law*, and builds on the activities in the first two circles. In this circle, the Movement strives to promote an enabling environment that is conducive to the protection of vulnerable persons, in particular by advocating that humanitarian principles and protection elements are taken into account, and integrated into states’ policies, practices and legislation as well as into international law and guidance.

It also relates to the implementation of those norms and laws similar to the “environment building” aspect as described in the Environment Building” section of **ICRC’s protection policy** “*all efforts to establish or foster a social, cultural, institutional and legal environment in which the rights of individuals might be respected*”, congruent with **the IFRC’s strategic aim** of “promoting social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace”.