

REPORTS AND DOCUMENTS

ICRC Protection policy

Institutional Policy

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1. Introduction

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has always undertaken activities that aim to protect lives and human well-being and secure respect for the individual. Its mission is to:

“... protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles ...”

The ICRC's multidisciplinary operational response capacity, in which protection and assistance are combined, and its special relationship with international humanitarian law (IHL) make the institution unlike any other. Protection has always occupied a unique place within the ICRC. It is at the core of the organization's identity and is the motive force of its activities.

This policy document begins by defining key notions and describing the framework for action. It then outlines the principles of the ICRC's protection framework, as well as the operational guidelines based on that framework. The document concludes by describing different types of ICRC protection activity and outlining specific considerations related to the various categories of beneficiary.

2. Definitions and framework for action

2.1. Definitions

The four Geneva Conventions of 1949 refer to “protection” several times without actually defining the term. The Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red

Crescent Movement (Movement) introduced the notions of “protection” and “assistance” in 1952. This two-pronged terminology aimed to give specific meaning to what was once termed “humanitarian activities.” “Protection” and “assistance” are intrinsically linked and are inseparable elements of the ICRC’s mandate.

The term “protection” has several literal meanings.¹ Broadly speaking, four spheres of action are involved in protection: political, military or security, legal (including judicial), and humanitarian. Every actor with a role in protecting persons, or an obligation to do so, belongs to one of them.

2.1.1. The ICRC’s definition of protection

Protection aims to ensure that authorities and other actors² respect their obligations and the rights of individuals in order to preserve the safety, physical integrity and dignity of those affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence.

Protection includes efforts to prevent or put a stop to actual or potential violations of IHL and other relevant bodies of law or norms.

Protection relates firstly to the causes of, or the circumstances that lead to, violations – mainly by addressing those responsible for the violations and those who may have influence over the latter – and secondly to their consequences.

This definition of protection also includes activities that seek to make individuals more secure and to limit the threats they face, by reducing their vulnerability and/or their exposure to risks, particularly those arising from armed hostilities or acts of violence.

Protection remains a constant concern for the ICRC. Promoting and strengthening IHL and other relevant norms and responding to humanitarian needs are, for the ICRC, always linked endeavours. The ICRC combines activities related to the causes of human suffering – especially those that seek to address the causes of violations – with activities to alleviate human suffering, particularly those in response to the consequences of, and the needs created by, such violations.

1 The root of the Latin expression *pro tegere*, whose literal meaning is “to cover in front” suggests either a curtain or a shelter against the sun or storms, or a screen or shield to protect a person or an object from danger. Synonyms or explanatory terms – safeguard, guaranty, aid, support, envelope, cover, screen, shield, rampart or mask – all connote some sort of security.

2 In this document, the expression “authorities and other actors” covers all authorities and bearers of arms – State entities, armed forces, international peace-keepers, armed groups, clans and other non-State actors – who are able to launch hostile action against persons or a population and who are responsible for protecting those who fall under their control.

“Protection” as defined above thus refers to those types of activity that are unambiguously definable as “protection”³ and to be distinguished from:

- other activities carried out within a protection framework or those that aim to have an indirect protection impact, particularly assistance activities that seek to alleviate or to overcome the consequences of violations;
- the permanent concern of the ICRC to ensure that its action does not have an adverse impact on, or create new risks for, individuals or populations (the precept to “do no harm”).

2.1.2. *Violations*

Generally, legal rules exist to protect individuals and to limit the use of violence. Figuratively speaking, these rules may be said to be a type of barrier between individuals and the dangers that threaten them: authorities and other actors are responsible for the maintenance of this barrier.

Based on the definition of protection given above, violations play a central role in protection work.

A violation may be defined as disregard for a formal obligation. The ICRC extends the definition to include disregard for widely accepted standards. The concept of “violation” must therefore be interpreted broadly. Besides the failure to comply with binding norms (hard law), it must also include failures to observe non-binding norms (soft law), relevant traditions and customs, the spirit of the law, and humanitarian principles.

This concept of “violation” is quite similar to that of the more widely used “abuse.”

A violation may be intentional, linked to a deliberately repressive practice or strategy. Or it may be unintentional, the result of a technical, material, financial or structural incapacity to provide certain basic services. This definition of “violation” therefore includes not only acts of violence and arbitrary abuse of power or discriminatory practices, but also the failure to fulfil the obligation to assist people in need. Violations can also come in less immediately obvious guises, such as the economic or social ostracism of part of the population.

Violations almost always result in human suffering and humanitarian consequences for the individual or group concerned. It is these consequences that trigger the ICRC’s response.

Authorities bear the primary responsibility for ensuring the application of legal rules and of other widely accepted norms regulating behaviour. They and other actors must acknowledge and respect the rights of individuals and take measures to fulfil their obligations in this regard. Authorities and other actors are,

3 In this document, the terms “protection,” “protection response,” “protection work,” “protection effort,” “protection approach” or “protection action,” are used as synonyms. They all stand for the entire set of specific protection activities that form the ICRC’s protection framework.

in fact, the primary guarantors of respect for the lives and the dignity of individuals, and also directly responsible for ensuring their security.

2.1.3. Risks, vulnerability, and the need for protection

The concept of risk, with regard to violations, concerns the probability of their commission. More generally, “risk” is created by the cumulative impact of:

- the probability of dangers or threats resulting from a deliberate practice of authorities and other actors or from unintended consequences (structural breakdown or incapacity, adverse consequences of even lawful actions during the conduct of hostilities or during law enforcement operations);
- the vulnerability of persons.

In any given context, dangers or threats are assessed on the basis of precedents and probabilities. The interpretation of events – especially the analysis of the means employed by authorities and other actors, or of the goals they pursue – makes possible the identification of population groups potentially “at risk.”

Vulnerability is an inherent element of risk. It reflects the fragility of an individual or group confronted by hazards or aggression. It denotes a deficiency or shortage, although the latter might not be tangible. Put more precisely, vulnerability reflects the incapacity of persons or population groups to offer resistance to arbitrary acts or violence, as well as their lack of access to services. Vulnerability is determined by specific factors such as legal or social situation, or socio-political, economical and personal characteristics (gender and age, for instance).

Protection needs arise when victims, or potential victims, of violations are unable to defend their basic interests and no longer benefit from the basic respect they are entitled to from authorities and other actors who have control over them or on whom they depend.

Protection needs are determined by analysing:

- actual or probable violations – their nature, gravity, scope, frequency and duration;
- actual or potential victims of violations, and the specific vulnerabilities that result from their being the object of violations;
- the urgency to respond, based on the response of authorities and other actors and on the ability of existing institutions and regulatory mechanisms to address key protection issues.

This process for defining protection needs enables the ICRC to:

- determine the severity of a particular crisis: emerging crisis/pre-crisis phase, acute crisis, chronic crisis or post-crisis period;⁴

⁴ Four cases can be defined: limited basic needs still being met but which will probably not be met at some time in the future (emerging crises and pre-crisis situations); most basic needs not being met (acute crisis); all or part of basic needs not being met properly, and the existence of a risk of the re-emergence of

- make a decision on the extent of its involvement;
- establish priorities.

2.2. Framework for protection

2.2.1. Normative framework for intervention

ICRC responsibilities vary according to the context.

The ICRC directly responds to protection needs in four types of situation as defined by IHL, the Statutes of the Movement, and its own institutional policies:

- international armed conflicts;
- non-international armed conflicts;
- internal disturbances;
- other situations of internal violence.

In addition, some contexts are of a mixed nature and combine some of the characteristics of the situations⁵ mentioned above. ICRC protection work might also be required after the end of one of these situations (to handle direct consequences or during a transition period).

The ICRC's mandate (defined below) unambiguously imposes a responsibility⁶ on the organization to act in international armed conflicts; this corresponds with the obligation of States to allow the ICRC to undertake certain activities in these contexts. This responsibility is less explicit, and consequently decreases, as one moves down the list of situations given above. In internal disturbances and other situations of internal violence, the ICRC's main responsibility is to examine each case and to offer its services where appropriate. The less stringent the ICRC's mandate, the more its decision to act is shaped exclusively by humanitarian considerations. In these situations the decision to act is based on the nature and the extent of identified needs; the ICRC also carefully considers the extent to which its action, experience and expertise would provide an added value.

Action based on a precise framework of reference

The framework of reference consists of four elements:

- The legal rules and other norms applicable, which are determined by the legal classification of the situation (the main question is whether IHL applies) and other specific aspects of the context, such as whether the country in question has ratified IHL treaties and other instruments of international law.

an acute crisis (chronic crisis); basic needs again being met by existing mechanisms and structures that, however, remain fragile, or basic needs again only being partially met (post-crisis situation).

5 Mainly internationalized internal armed conflicts and peace enforcement operations.

6 This responsibility is of an ethical rather than legal nature. There are a number of competencies that are conferred upon the ICRC, which it is, however, not obliged to exercise; but it has to take into account the short and long-term interests of the victims, humanitarian priorities, and the need to balance different tasks and mandates.

- The ICRC's mandate. The ICRC has a clearly defined and internationally recognized role to promote implementation of and respect for IHL as well as the development and dissemination of this body of law. The role of the ICRC in relation to other bodies of law and norms depends on the circumstances and the context, and is governed by its institutional policies.

In international armed conflicts, the ICRC also has tasks and operational prerogatives in the field of protection that are set out in the four Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols and confirmed by the Statutes of the Movement and by the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (International Conference).

With regard to non-international armed conflicts,⁷ internal disturbances or other situations of internal violence,⁸ the Statutes of the Movement and various resolutions of the International Conference – which constitute a basis for ICRC action – also mention protection activities in a variety of ways.

The Central Tracing Agency (CTA) is a special case. It is an institution that was originally established for situations of international armed conflict in accordance with the provisions of the four Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I of 1977, and with the Statutes of the Movement. Its effectiveness and later resolutions of the International Conference have widened the range of its activities to non-international armed conflicts and other situations of violence; more recently, the CTA has begun to assist in restoring family links (RFL) during natural disasters and in other situations in which National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies) are involved.

The CTA carries out four types of activity:

- activities to benefit persons affected and services that are provided directly to them: RFL, efforts to clarify the fate of the missing, the transfer of people, and the provision of travel and other documents;
- activities and services for the benefit of National Societies, particularly coordination and technical assistance for their tracing services;
- activities for States (e.g. assisting in the establishment of a national information bureaus as provided for by IHL);
- management of data on persons who require individual follow-up.

On the basis of the 1997 Seville Agreement and its 2005 Supplementary Measures adopted by the Council of Delegates of the Movement, the ICRC has been given the lead role for activities related to the work of the CTA. Broadly speaking, this covers all activities associated with RFL.⁹

7 The four Geneva Conventions give the ICRC the right to offer its services.

8 In these cases the ICRC may offer its services based on its right of initiative, which is authorized by the Statutes of the Movement.

9 This was elaborated and confirmed by the *Strategy of the Movement for restoring family links*, which was adopted by the Council of Delegates of the Movement in 2007 (Resolution 4). The Strategy is referred to in Resolution 1 of the 30th International Conference, also held in 2007.

Within the Movement, the ICRC's leading role in protection activities is generally recognized: it develops guidelines, provides technical advice and, where it is operational, coordinates activities.

- The Fundamental Principles of the Movement: humanity, neutrality, independence, impartiality, universality, voluntary service and unity.
- The ICRC's institutional policies and other internal reference documents.

2.2.2. ICRC action focuses on the individual

The individual remains the primary concern of the ICRC. The basis of all protection activities is the identification of individuals or groups who are affected or at risk: those who are victims of violations or who face threats or risks that jeopardize their rights and well-being.

The ICRC's protection work requires professional integrity of its personnel and respect for ethical standards and values in the following areas:

- the interests of individuals, especially with respect to the collection and use of information (particularly in the transmission of personal data);
- the express wishes of affected persons;
- respect for the individual's dignity.

However, the ICRC's protection activities are aimed mainly at authorities and other actors and/or must be carried out in relation to them. The perpetrators or those responsible for violations, as well as those who have influence over these actors, must, of course, be identified.

2.2.3. ICRC action is an integral element in creating an environment conducive to the provision of protection

Ensuring respect for human dignity and for the rights of individuals depends on a number of factors. The ICRC's protection work cannot be conceived and carried out in isolation. It contributes to the creation of a favourable environment, along with other actors. The parties that bear different responsibilities and carry out a variety of activities include the following:

- authorities and other actors concerned: they have the primary responsibility and their omissions/violations trigger the need for separate but complementary action by other bodies;
- States other than that to which the authorities concerned belong: they are responsible for ensuring respect for IHL¹⁰ and for various other duties based on the United Nations Charter;

10 Article 1 common to the four Geneva Conventions.

- external regulatory mechanisms, in particular other members of the international community, the international media, international NGOs, UN agencies and bodies of international justice; and internal regulatory mechanisms, (e.g. associations for the defence of certain groups or communities);
- persons who are, or who may in the future be, affected: circumstances permitting, they can take measures of their own to avoid risks and to protect themselves, their families and their communities.

The ICRC implements protection strategies that are complementary to those of other actors; it also tries to avoid confusion.

3. Guiding principles

Guiding principle 1: Neutral and independent approach

A neutral and independent approach is essential for the ICRC to gain the acceptance of all stakeholders. The ICRC adopts this approach in all phases of its work, and this gives the organization the credibility it needs to conduct its operations.

Its neutrality and independence enable the ICRC to avoid becoming instrumentalized by some and rejected by others. Such an approach also guarantees an impartial analysis of the problems identified, which leads to impartial action, i.e. the ICRC's activities will be implemented without discrimination and based solely on needs. By being neutral and independent, the ICRC is able to play the role of neutral intermediary and to offer its mediation and good offices whenever required.

Guiding principle 2: Dialogue and confidentiality

Dialogue is an essential element of the ICRC's protection approach: with affected persons, with authorities, with those suspected of having committed violations and those who control these persons, as well as with all persons or entities that can influence the fate of victims of acts of violence or of persons at risk. Such dialogue must be based on trust, which is strengthened by the fact that it takes place in confidence.

Confidential dialogue is the ICRC's preferred method of working and a strategic choice, but it is not an end in itself. Usually, dialogue that takes place in confidence facilitates access to victims; it also enables the ICRC to understand and appreciate their needs. The ICRC's practice of confidentiality is reinforced by the organization's immunity from the obligation to testify in a court of law.

However, the confidentiality of the ICRC's dialogue with authorities and other actors is not without limits. It is proportional to the willingness of the authorities to take into account the ICRC's recommendations. The justification for confidentiality thus depends on the quality of the ICRC's dialogue with authorities and other actors and on the humanitarian impact of its bilateral confidential

representations. The ICRC reserves the right, should this dialogue not have the desired impact, to resort to other action, including public denunciation.

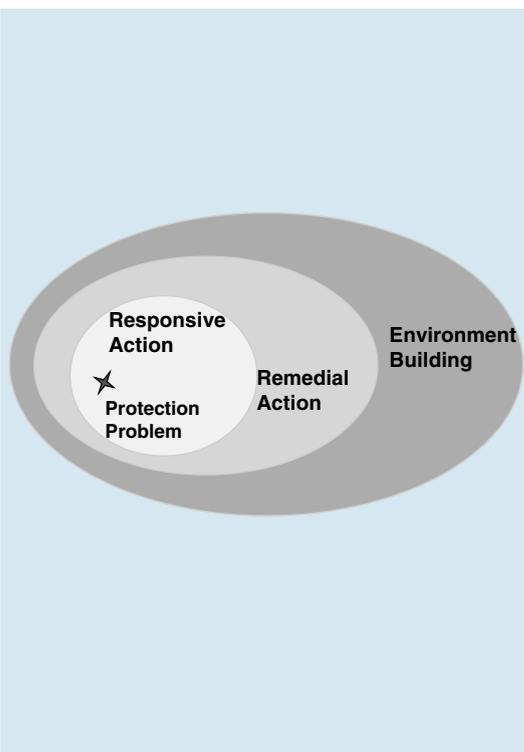
Guiding principle 3: Holistic and multidisciplinary character of ICRC action

The ICRC's protection strategies are based on comprehensive analyses of protection problems and on their causes and consequences. This does not necessarily mean that the ICRC will respond to all protection needs in a given situation; however, it ensures the effective setting of priorities. The ICRC sets its priorities on the basis of the following criteria:

- the nature and gravity of the violations or risks;
- the effects of the violations or risks on victims;
- the impact on victims that the ICRC can reasonably expect its action to have;
- the ICRC's capacities and the means at its disposal.

The ICRC's response is multiform: a number of coordinated activities are implemented at three levels of intervention that are interdependent and mutually reinforcing:

- responsive action: any activity undertaken to deal with an emerging or established protection problem (mainly violations), and that is aimed at preventing its recurrence, ending it, and/or alleviating its immediate effects;
- remedial action: any activity undertaken to restore people's dignity and to ensure adequate living conditions after they have suffered abuse; and
- environment-building action: all efforts to establish or foster a social, cultural, institutional and legal environment in which the rights of individuals might be respected.



Guiding principle 4: Search for results and impact

Protection activities aim to achieve results, to have an impact, and to put in place effective and lasting solutions to the problems they address. They are carried out in conformity with the highest ethical and professional standards. All protection activities are subject to internal monitoring and to evaluations of their results.

They are shaped by choices that are derived from a particular strategy, which is developed by selecting and integrating various modes of action. The ICRC's *modes of action* are: raising awareness of responsibility (persuasion, mobilization, and denunciation), support, and substitution (direct provision of services). The ICRC does not limit itself to any one of them; on the contrary, it combines them, striking a balance between them.

1. The aim of raising awareness of responsibility is to remind people of their obligations and, where necessary, persuade them to change their behaviour. Three methods are used for this purpose
 - a. *Persuasion* aims to convince the authorities and other actors, through bilateral confidential dialogue, to do something (protect people at risk, for instance), which falls within their area of responsibility or competence.
 - b. *Mobilization* entails the seeking of outside interest and action, from influential third parties (e.g. States, regional organizations, private companies, members of civil society or eminent persons who have a good relationship with the authorities in question). The ICRC chooses such third parties with care, contacting only those who it thinks will be able to respect the confidential nature of the information that they receive.
 - c. *Denunciation* is the public exposure of specific imminent or established violations of IHL or other norms protecting individuals. When it is faced with an authority that has chosen to neglect or deliberately violate its obligations, and when other methods have failed, the ICRC might decide to break with its practice of confidentiality.¹¹

¹¹ The conditions for doing this are defined in the ICRC's institutional policy (see "Action by the International Committee of the Red Cross in the event of violations of international humanitarian law and other fundamental rules protecting persons in situations of violence," *International Review of the Red Cross*, Vol. 858, June 2005, pp. 393–400): "(1) the violations are major and repeated or likely to be repeated; (2) delegates have witnessed the violations with their own eyes, or the existence and extent of the violations have been established on the basis of reliable and verifiable sources; (3) bilateral confidential representations and, when attempted, humanitarian mobilization efforts have failed to put an end to the violations; (4) such publicity is in the interest of the persons or populations affected or threatened."

2. *Support* aims to reinforce the capacity of the authorities and existing structures so that they are able to assume their responsibilities and fulfil their functions.
3. *Substitution* (or direct action) is the direct provision by the ICRC of services that the authorities are unable to provide (owing to lack of means, or unwillingness, or when no such authorities exist). If the situation is critical, the ICRC acts immediately and speaks to the authorities to persuade them to take appropriate measures or to help them examine possible solutions.

4. Operational directives

The following highlights key elements that guide the ICRC's relationships with affected persons:

4.1. Directives related to persons affected by violations

4.1.1. *Proximity*

Proximity:

- increases empathy with the persons affected, and raises awareness of their best interests and their express wishes;
- makes it easier to reach a better understanding of the situation;
- facilitates contact with those who have committed violations and with those who control them, and makes it possible to maintain a dialogue with all persons concerned; and
- increases the credibility of the dialogue with authorities and other actors.

Except in special circumstances, the ICRC does not directly carry out protection activities in contexts where it has no access to affected persons and no first-hand knowledge of the situation.

4.1.2. *Individual follow-up*

The extent to which the ICRC attempts to follow up on vulnerable or “targeted” persons individually depends on the severity of the risks faced by these persons. In particular, the ICRC does follow up on protected persons individually in situations of international armed conflict, as required under IHL. It also informs their families of their fate.

Individual follow-up includes the registration and preservation of personal data. Registration – although not an end in itself – is the basis for conducting various activities adapted to the circumstances and problems at hand, and a necessary tool.

4.1.3. *Participatory approach and empowerment*

The ICRC takes into account the capacity of individuals and communities to protect themselves and is careful not to weaken any such mechanisms that exist. When possible, the ICRC conducts activities that empower persons and communities, and that strengthen and develop mechanisms, by:

- building the capacity of individuals and communities, and adding to their knowledge, to ensure respect for their rights and to avoid certain risks;
- providing them with the means to prevent and avoid risks.

4.2. Directives for implementing the ICRC's protection activities

The following outlines the main elements of the ICRC's protection response:

4.2.1. *Rapid response*

Following the onset of an armed conflict or other situation of violence, the ICRC responds to needs as rapidly as possible. To this end, the ICRC has developed a rapid response mechanism, and trained the necessary personnel, for carrying out various protection activities that can be undertaken at very short notice.

4.2.2. *Long-term commitment*

The ICRC remains engaged for as long as is required by the situation of those it seeks to protect. Its engagement is often long-term (e.g. chronic crises or certain activities related to missing persons). The ICRC is careful to draw up a graduated exit strategy beforehand, but it makes certain that its disengagement will have no adverse consequences for those whom it seeks to protect.¹²

The ICRC also tries to prevent its engagement from resulting in the abandonment of their responsibilities by authorities and other actors. It strives not to involuntarily obstruct the involvement of other humanitarian actors or the

12 The following developments might constitute a criterion for the ICRC's gradual disengagement from a particular context: a) the end of an armed conflict or other situation of violence; b) a substantial and lasting reduction in the number of people affected, in the gravity of the violations, in the risks and threats, and in the levels of insecurity and tension; c) the establishment or restoration of the rule of law, including the re-establishment of respect for the law; d) the coverage of essential protection needs by the authorities concerned and by official regulatory institutions and mechanisms; e) the durable and efficient intervention of other external actors; f) a marked decrease in the added value of the ICRC's presence; g) the legal, economic and social rehabilitation and integration of the victims; h) the strengthening of civil society, including the capacity of the pertinent National Society to reassume responsibility for certain activities; i) the lack of impact, confirmed over a meaningful period of time, of the entire ICRC protection operation.

development of internal regulatory mechanisms (e.g. the strengthening of civil society).

4.2.3. Operational innovation

The ICRC encourages operational innovation. When the effectiveness of its innovations has been confirmed, they are communicated to other ICRC operations, so that they may contribute to the development of institutional knowledge and expertise as well as to exchanges with other humanitarian actors.

4.3. Interaction with humanitarian actors

The following outlines the key elements and the scope of the ICRC's interaction with others and its commitment to operational complementarity:

4.3.1. General considerations

The ICRC pays close attention to the interpretation that may be given to its interaction with other humanitarian actors. It is careful to guarantee its neutrality, independence and other operating principles, as well as its operational capacity, in all circumstances. The proliferation of actors in the field of protection requires consultations and adjustments to the ICRC's operational strategies in order that its activities may have the strongest possible impact.

The ICRC's interaction with other humanitarian actors varies according to the context, the types of activity that are undertaken, the identity of the actor concerned and the constraints associated with confidentiality. Such interaction is likely to take one of the following forms:

- coordination (with others): interaction that permits autonomous but orchestrated action that avoids duplication of effort and the leaving of gaps in the humanitarian response;
- cooperation: complementary or joint activities, carried out within a mutually agreed upon framework, to reach pre-determined objectives; this includes cooperation based on an alliance or collaboration (independent action based on a joint strategy and on common goals);
- partnership: cooperation – based on the provision of resources – agreed to within a formal framework;
- leadership (applicable only to the Movement): exercising of two different forms of leadership within the Movement: a) the lead role of the ICRC, a *permanent* responsibility to inspire, motivate, guide, and advise other components of the Movement in a specific thematic area (e.g. RFL); b), the ICRC has – as the lead agency – a *temporary* responsibility to direct and coordinate other components of the Movement in certain situations requiring an international response.

4.3.2. Interaction within the Movement

The components of the Movement, primarily National Societies, are the ICRC's privileged partners.

The ICRC has three responsibilities in parallel:

- to undertake the humanitarian activities specified by its mandate;
- to coordinate both the international activities of other components of the Movement in situations of armed conflict or internal disturbance and RFL activities in all situations requiring an international response;
- to provide leadership in RFL and, more broadly, protection activities.

The division of tasks within the Movement must always be respected. The nature of the interaction within the Movement is determined by a number of factors: the situation (the ICRC has to first determine whether a particular context falls within its mandate), the activities to be undertaken (protection of the civilian population and of persons deprived of their liberty, or RFL), as well as the capacity of the National Society in question. The way in which a particular National Society tackles the challenges before it (e.g. how stakeholders perceive its neutrality and its autonomy from the authorities), and its ability to apply, at all times, the Fundamental Principles of the Movement, will also influence the ICRC's interaction with it.

In the area of RFL the ICRC has a number of specific roles and responsibilities: in particular, activating and coordinating the Movement's Family Links Network and providing technical assistance to the tracing services of National Societies.

4.3.3. Interaction with other actors

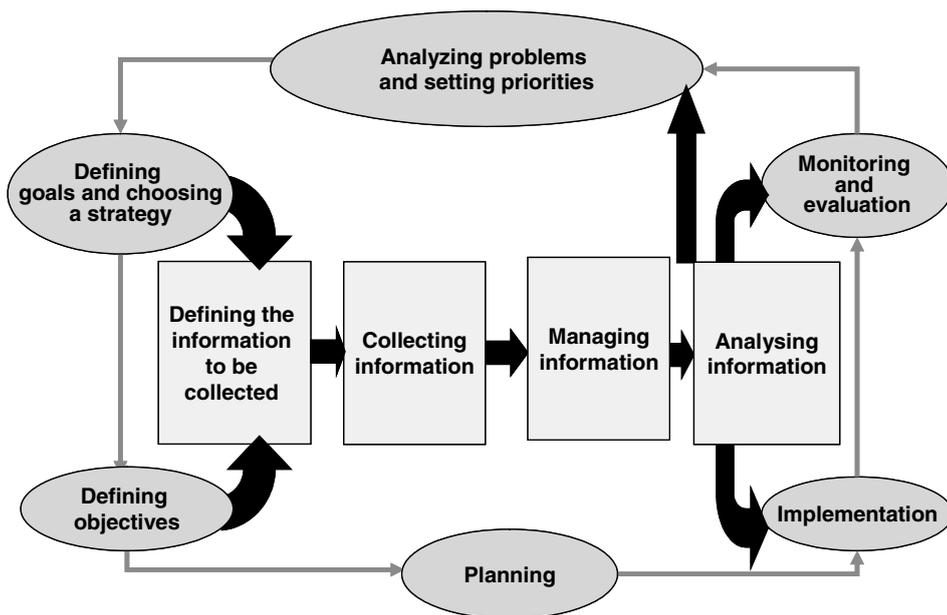
The ICRC enters into operational dialogue with organizations whose roles or mandates and objectives are complementary to its own, especially with regard to modes of action and activities undertaken. This enables gaps in the humanitarian effort to be filled more effectively, allows the exchange of expertise, and makes the best use of the capacity of each organization. The ICRC also maintains and promotes the highest professional and ethical standards, and encourages the proper use of applicable legal norms.

The ICRC may consider sharing tasks – by geographical region, type of activity or target population – with other humanitarian actors whose operational methods and policies are compatible with its own. Sharing of tasks must not, however, compromise the ICRC's operational capacity either in the context of direct concern or elsewhere. Partnerships may be forged under the same conditions.

4.4. Operational cycle

Protection activities are carried out in a sequential manner within a cycle. The various stages of this cycle must be reviewed periodically and adapted whenever

significant changes occur within the context in question. The initial in-depth analysis of the protection problems and the setting of priorities and goals precede the selection of a detailed strategy. The continuous gathering of information – which is fed back into the operational cycle – helps determine whether the strategy needs to be adapted to changes in the situation.



From the beginning of the cycle, a system is put in place for monitoring performance. This ensures the systematic and continuous assessment – using selected indicators – of progress over time. Evaluations and reviews are used to enhance the organization’s overall performance, as well as its transparency, and accountability.

5. Operational response and beneficiaries

The beneficiaries of the ICRC’s protection activities – persons deprived of their liberty; the civilian population and other affected persons not in detention; separated family members or persons listed as missing – cannot be rigidly categorized. Affected persons may benefit from both generic (in behalf of all three categories) and specific (in behalf of some but not all categories) protection activities.

5.1. Generic activities

The ICRC directly implements its protection action through a wide range of activities in which it has expertise. It carries them out in combinations that are

adapted to the problems it encounters, the context, and the available possibilities. These activities are implemented at the appropriate levels of intervention – as outlined under Guiding principle 3. They are adapted to identified objectives, and realized through the application of one or several appropriate modes of action.

The aim of all ICRC activities is to improve the situation of victims of violations and of persons at risk. However, the organization distinguishes between two major categories of activity:

- activities targeting those responsible for violations: these aim to reduce the threat posed by authorities and other actors and to strengthen the protection they are meant to offer;
- activities developed directly to benefit affected individuals and communities: these aim to reduce vulnerability and exposure to violence.

The following chart lists the full range of activities that may be undertaken by the ICRC as part of its protection action. It also shows the general objectives of each set of activities, and the population group directly targeted by it.

Activities		Objectives	Target
DOCUMENTATION OF PROBLEMS	BILATERAL AND CONFIDENTIAL REPRESENTATIONS	Engage responsibility	Authorities
	Discreet representations to third parties		
	Public denunciation		
	Development of the law	Support	Persons at risk
	Promotion of the law		
	Structural support for implementation of the law		
	Activities as neutral intermediary	Reduce vulnerability	
	Registration/monitoring of individuals		
	Presence and accompaniment		
	Self-protection capacity building		
	Risk education		
	Assistance aimed at reducing risk exposure		

Representations – written or oral – are central to the ICRC’s protection activities. Bilateral and confidential representations – general or in behalf of particular individuals – form the ICRC’s preferred approach. The purpose of these representations is to forcefully remind authorities of their responsibilities: they are basic negotiating tools in protection issues.

The bilateral and confidential approach (see Guiding principle 2) may not always be successful. When it does not yield tangible results it may be complemented – in exceptional cases, replaced – by discreet representations to third

parties (States, international and regional organizations, or various individual personalities or entities who may be able to exercise a positive influence on the situation) or by public denunciation.

Discreet representations to third parties are usually conceived to precede public denunciation (see Guiding principle 4).

These steps may be accompanied or preceded by other measures such as:

- developing the law and standards
- reminding the parties concerned of applicable law and relevant standards
- promoting knowledge of the law and relevant standards with a view to changing attitudes towards them
- providing structural support for the implementation of the law and relevant standards in order to strengthen the capacity of authorities and other actors to integrate IHL provisions and other fundamental rules protecting persons into domestic legislation and national systems. The objectives of these activities vary according to the authorities in question, who might be:
 - weapon bearers, including security forces (police and other State forces);
 - legislative authorities;
 - educational authorities;
 - detaining or prison authorities;
 - judicial authorities;
 - health and other authorities with normative responsibilities.

The decision to act and the actual choice of activities depend on the political will of the authorities and other actors to effect lasting change, as well as their degree of structural capacity and cohesion. The potential for problems related to perceptions of the ICRC's activities (particularly in relation to its structural support for law enforcement and systems of judicial administration) is another important consideration.

- acting as a neutral intermediary
- aiming to directly reduce the vulnerability of persons and their exposure to risk through:
 - registration/follow-up of individuals at risk;
 - strengthening the capacity of communities, families and individuals for empowerment and self-protection;
 - risk education;
 - provision of aid and services aimed at reducing exposure to risk.

The ICRC's presence, particularly within affected communities, can have a potentially dissuasive effect.

5.2. Activities to benefit persons deprived of their liberty

Being deprived of one's liberty is psychologically undermining: it makes people more vulnerable and markedly dependent on detaining authorities. The ICRC

recognizes that the intrinsic vulnerability of all detainees can be exacerbated by a number of factors: the personal characteristics of detainees, the prevailing political and military situation, and the practices of authorities and other actors.

5.2.1. The ICRC's general approach to issues related to persons deprived of their liberty

The ICRC:

- identifies the problems encountered by detainees;
- analyses the circumstances in which persons are deprived of their liberty;
- is guided by the normative international framework for the treatment of persons deprived of their liberty;
- operates within a precise methodological framework;
- strives to ensure that the rights of persons deprived of their liberty are respected throughout the period of their detention: this can have significant consequences for the protection strategy, the length of the ICRC's involvement, and the expertise and resources required.

Visits to persons deprived of their liberty form the basis of the ICRC's approach. They are, in principle, a prerequisite of all protection activities to benefit such persons. These visits are carried out in accordance with established ICRC practice¹³ that is uniformly applied and has to be accepted beforehand by authorities and other actors concerned. The ICRC's methods guarantee professionalism and credibility and enable the ICRC to assess the situation as accurately as possible, whilst safeguarding the interests of detainees. They make it possible to analyse specific systemic issues, identify problems, assess conditions of detention, and carry on a dialogue with detainees and detaining authorities. They can also have a dissuasive effect on the commission of violations and be of value, in psychosocial terms, to detainees.

5.2.2. Persons deprived of their liberty who are of direct concern to the ICRC

Besides its responsibilities under IHL, the ICRC acts primarily to benefit persons deprived of their liberty in relation to situations that trigger its intervention. Broadly speaking – and as dictated by circumstances – the ICRC concerns itself with detainees who have no effective means of protecting themselves from abuse or arbitrary acts, who are neglected, who do not or who no longer have access to the

13 There are five main pre-conditions governing ICRC visits: 1. Access to all detainees within the ICRC's field of interest; 2. Access to all premises and facilities used by and for detainees; 3. Authorization to repeat the visits; 4. The right to speak freely and in private (without witnesses) with detainees of the ICRC's choice; 5. The assurance that the authorities will give the ICRC a list of the detainees within its field of interest or authorize it to compile such a list during the visit. The ICRC can then at any time check on the detainees' presence and monitor them individually throughout their detention.

most basic services they are entitled to receive from the authorities, or who are subject to the arbitrary behaviour of those exercising power over them.

The following categories of detainee are of direct concern to the ICRC:

- protected persons deprived of their liberty in a situation of international armed conflict;
- persons deprived of their liberty in relation to a situation of non-international armed conflict;
- persons deprived of their liberty not in relation to a situation of international or non-international armed conflict, but the conditions of whose detention are affected by the conflict;
- persons deprived of their liberty in relation to a situation of internal disturbances;
- persons deprived of their liberty in relation to some other situations of internal violence who are regarded by the authorities and other actors as actual or potential opponents or as threats (owing to their nationality, ethnic origins, religion or other consideration), or others who have been arrested as a means of intimidation;
- persons deprived of their liberty in a situation of internal disturbances or some other situation of internal violence who do not or who no longer receive the minimum protection they are entitled to from the authorities or who are subject to the arbitrary behaviour of those exercising power over them.

In situations other than those in which the ICRC is expressly mandated to act in behalf of persons deprived of their liberty, the organization's decision to offer its services is determined by the gravity of humanitarian needs and by the urgency of responding to them, whatever the causes of the protection problems or the reasons for detaining the persons concerned.

The ICRC deals specifically with the vulnerability of certain detainees, for reasons of age, gender, because they are under sentence of death, owing to their status as detained migrants, etc.

The ICRC insists – in all contexts – on preserving its independence in determining which categories of person deprived of their liberty it is interested in. Negotiations for access to detainees must ensure that no category of detainee is excluded and that the ICRC will be permitted the greatest latitude possible in its work.

5.2.3. Scope of ICRC intervention

The ICRC concerns itself with the following matters:

- the behaviour and actions of those responsible for making arrests, conducting interrogations and taking decisions related to detention;
- the material conditions of detention;
- access to medical care;
- the management and care of persons deprived of their liberty.

Its interventions focus on certain protection problems and violations:

- enforced disappearances and undisclosed detention;
- summary executions;
- torture and other forms of ill-treatment;
- problems created by violations of the physical or moral integrity of detainees and of their dignity and of the obligation to provide the essential necessities for their survival:
 - problems related to water and food;
 - problems related to personal hygiene and sanitation facilities in places of detention;
 - problems related to health and access to medical care;
 - problems related to material conditions of accommodation;
 - problems related to the management of detainees;
- violations of minimum judicial guarantees and procedural safeguards;
- violations of respect for family unity:
 - problems related to maintaining contact between detainees and their families.

5.2.4. ICRC approach

The ICRC distinguishes between two types of approach:

- the individual approach - which is a priority of the ICRC and specific to the organization – consists of carrying out activities to benefit certain individuals or categories of person who have been targeted by the repressive policies of the authorities or who are at risk;
- the structural approach - which the ICRC may also choose to implement in parallel to or separately from an individual approach – focuses on the institutions responsible for detention issues (on aspects of their organizational and normative frameworks, on management issues, particularly in the areas of health, infrastructure and material supplies) and benefits the entire detainee population.

The ICRC will carry out generic protection activities (see 5.1.) according to the individual and/or structural approaches chosen, depending on the nature and intensity of the needs identified. This also includes the provision of RFL services.

5.3. Activities to benefit the civilian population and other affected persons not in detention

The ICRC is conscious that the forms of repression and abuse to which the civilian population and other affected persons might be subjected and the risks to which

they might be exposed, as well as the adverse consequences of conflict, are potentially very varied.

The ICRC requires the fulfilment of certain pre-conditions and the taking of certain steps before implementing its protection framework. These pre-conditions are as follows:

- a minimum amount of access to victims and witnesses of violations;
- safety of ICRC staff (e.g. the extent to which the ICRC's mandate is recognized and accepted by authorities and other actors, or the degree to which security guarantees are provided for the ICRC's activities);
- safety of victims and other persons contacted by the ICRC (e.g. the extent to which guarantees are provided that persons in contact with the ICRC will not be subjected to reprisals);
- identification of and contact with pertinent authorities and other actors.

5.3.1. The ICRC's general approach to problems faced by the civilian population and other affected persons

The ICRC:

- analyses the problems faced by affected persons; it does so by exploiting its access to reliable and pertinent information, which is collected either by its own delegates or through a network of contacts;
- is mindful of the specific difficulties of analysing the conduct of hostilities, for instance, their impact – direct and indirect – on civilians, as well as the difficulties of analysing the use of force during law enforcement operations;
- is guided by the international normative framework applicable to various situations;
- operates within a precise methodological framework that enables it to undertake activities even when the conditions for its humanitarian work are only partially met.

5.3.2. Persons and objects of concern to the ICRC

- Civilians and combatants, or other weapon bearers, who are *hors de combat* or are no longer participating in hostilities.
- Objects specifically protected under IHL.
- All persons affected by internal disturbances or other situations of violence. This refers to persons who are not or who are no longer participating in acts of violence or against whom violence was used unlawfully when they took part in acts of violence.

The ICRC seeks to contribute to the protection of all those persons affected by violence, and those who are at risk, without discrimination. Nevertheless, it

makes every effort to respond to the specific needs of certain categories of person (e.g. children, women, refugees,¹⁴ internally displaced persons, or international migrants).

5.3.3. Scope of ICRC intervention

The ICRC concerns itself with the following matters:

- the actions of weapon bearers and of the various authorities with responsibilities pertaining to the civilian population;
- the access to medical care and other basic services for individuals or population groups;
- the vulnerability of individuals or population groups and their exposure to risk.

The ICRC's interventions focus on violations, and the humanitarian problems that have been identified, by examining the following:

The use of force – means and methods:

- in the conduct of hostilities, including the impact – direct and indirect – of hostilities and of the weapons that are used;
- in law enforcement operations.

The treatment of persons:

- assaults on and threats to the lives, security and physical and moral integrity of persons;
- denial of basic health services and violation of the obligation to ensure access to basic necessities for survival;
- violations of respect for family unity;
- violations of rules related to missing persons and their families;
- violations of rules regarding the free movement of persons;
- the consequences of the unlawful or arbitrary destruction or expropriation of private property;
- disruption of access to education or to places of worship in situations of occupation.

5.3.4. ICRC protection activities

In addition to the generic protection activities mentioned above (see 5.1.), the ICRC undertakes specific activities to benefit the civilian population and other

¹⁴ The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has the primary responsibility for refugee issues; however, the ICRC also has a responsibility in those instances in which IHL applies, as well as a subsidiary responsibility when UNHCR is absent.

affected persons not in detention, depending on the nature and intensity of the situation, such as:

- ICRC accompaniment (ICRC delegates accompanying individuals or groups of civilians, thereby placing them under the protection of the red cross emblem);
- evacuation of persons at risk;
- establishment of protected areas;
- provision of RFL services.

5.4. Activities to benefit separated family members and the missing

The ICRC is conscious that the well-being of individuals is largely dependent on the preservation of their ties to loved ones.

Efforts to ascertain the fate of the missing entail the undertaking of a wide range of complementary and closely coordinated activities. The ICRC is committed to addressing issues related to persons who are unaccounted for (missing persons) and to assisting their families. Its activities in this regard are adapted to the context and to the period of time that has elapsed since the persons concerned were reported missing. Some of these activities necessitate close collaboration with the authorities concerned and with all parties to the conflict, and take place mainly during post-crisis or transition periods.

5.4.1. The ICRC's general approach to problems faced by separated family members and missing persons

The ICRC:

- determines its course of action after analysing needs and estimating the length of its engagement; it also examines the causes of ruptures in contact and communication (e.g. displacement, restricted access to means of communication and family contact, absence of records of people who have been executed or who have died in detention);
- acts within a precise methodological framework and employs rigorous working procedures that demand the following: speed in processing cases (which requires the assistance of the Movement's Family News Network, reliability in data management and transmission, protection of personal data, which varies according to the situation and the amount of time that has passed);
- carries out, in addition to RFL, activities that aim to prevent the severance of family ties and to respond to the specific material and psychological needs of persons who are directly affected, as well as to the needs of their families. The ICRC's efforts to ascertain the fate of the missing take a number of different forms: managing human remains, conducting forensic studies, providing support for families, integrating relevant norms into domestic legislation, ensuring that members of the armed forces are equipped with the necessary means of identification, etc.;

- sets up effective information, communication and tracing systems that enable the development of various tools that are adaptable to extremely varied needs and operational environments.

5.4.2. Persons of concern to the ICRC

- Separated family members: persons who have lost contact with their families as a consequence of an armed conflict or other situation of violence, or after a natural disaster.
- The missing: persons whose families have no news of them or who, based on reliable information, are listed as missing in relation to a situation of armed conflict or other situation of violence, or after a natural disaster.
- Persons deprived of their liberty who are individually monitored by the ICRC or who are held in places of detention visited by the organization.
- Relatives of the persons mentioned above.

Attention is paid to the specific needs of certain groups (children, women, internally displaced persons, refugees, or migrants). This is particularly the case with regard to children who are separated from their families or who are on their own (unaccompanied).

5.4.3. Scope of ICRC intervention

The ICRC concerns itself with the following matters:

- the behaviour of authorities and other actors;
- access to means of communication;
- constraints on free movement;
- the information available to families about the fate of relatives who are unaccounted for;
- the vulnerability of individuals or population groups and the degree to which they are exposed to risk;
- the consequences of the disruption of family links.

Besides the violations and problems discussed above (sections 5.2 and 5.3), the ICRC's interventions also address issues related to the rights of families to know the fate of their loved ones, to recover the remains of their dead, and to pay their last respects.

5.4.4. ICRC protection activities

Besides the generic protection activities mentioned above (see 5.1.), the ICRC carries out the following protection activities:

- registration/monitoring of persons at risk
- tracing individuals;

- operating a system that enables separated family members to correspond and to exchange documents;
- producing various certificates and issuing travel documents;
- reuniting family members;
- promoting and/or setting up mechanisms tasked with clarifying the fate of missing persons: the collection and management of information about the dead, the location, identification and recovery of human remains, etc.;
- providing support for the families of missing persons.

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