

The Strategy for Archives, Records and Library Collections (ARC)¹ 2019-2023

Unleashing the potential of ICRC Archives, Records and Library Collections by advancing knowledge, becoming digital by design and being fit for purpose

Adopted by the ICRC Assembly on 5 February 2020

What is this about?

Ever since its inception in 1863, the ICRC has endeavored to preserve and record its humanitarian action as well as the history of the development of IHL, leading to the building of a wealthy and unique legacy of modern humanitarian action and law. Recording our action was not only seen as key to prove our aims, ensure their continuity and comply with increasing legal requirements. It also became evident that understanding, learning about, and questioning our past has shaped who we are in the present.

This legacy held by ICRC is also about and for the people whom ICRC has sought to protect and assist during some of the darkest periods of humankind. We hold the living proof of their existence and a clear acknowledgment of their suffering. All in all, our collections form collective common basis for the memory of entire nations.

Whilst everyone acknowledges that it is vital to preserve the past, we strive to understand that this is also about how each and every one of us captures the present to create the basis of who we will come to be. The Strategy for Archives, Records and Library Collections (ARC 23 Strategy) is about taking individual and collective responsibility and action for the next four years to ensure the proper preservation of today's information that will become our memory. It also highlights the need to ensure a robust records management system and practice for business continuity as well as for legal and compliance requirements. Gathering information for the sole purpose of preserving it is insufficient if it is not shared, promoted and used. Increasing the discoverability and use of our collections in ways that it can meet the needs of users is one key element of the strategy. Last but certainly not least, the strategy takes into account the increasingly digitalized environment in which everyone is operating, turning challenges into opportunities we need to seize in order to meet our ambitions. As the ICRC embraces digital transformation in conjunction with the new Institutional Strategy and Information Environment Strategy, it is time for the ICRC's Archives, Records and Library Collections to embark on this journey and unleash their potential.

¹ ARC is an acronym used for *ICRC Archives, Records and Library collections (ARC)*. As a matter of simplification, we will speak through the text of *Collections* as a generic term. See the Glossary for a definition of these terms.

What drives us to evolve

✓ **Increasing volume of information/data on increasing diversified carriers/sources**

Both the archives and library landscapes have gone through fundamental changes in the past decade, linked to the fast-changing environment on how one creates, accesses searches, and uses information. In an increasingly digitalized world, there has never been so much information and data created and shared as in the past years on multiple, scattered and very diverse carriers and platforms. At the same time, there has never been so little trust in the veracity of this information and data. Reconstructing recent history is like trying to put together differently shaped pieces of a growing gigantic puzzle, trying to navigate between official traditional sources which increasingly contain scarce information, to different and sometimes ephemeral data, sorting out fake information and insufficient or biased evidentiary support. People have so far trusted the authenticity of our paper collections, built on solid and robust practices. The digital world is a game changer if not disrupter, and we will increasingly be required to ensure authenticity and integrity of the born-digital information we record with the help of new practices yet to be defined.

✓ **Moving from paper to digital**

Moving from physical to digital content is a source of uncertainty in both the archives and library fields. It implies leaving traditional, stable and trustworthy practices and processes allowing for the long term safe preservation of paper to digital systems that will require continual and continuous change and different processes². In addition, what to preserve in this jungle of information and where to store it has become a major topic of debate among professionals. In delegations, the increasing use of various applications and platforms to collect and store data and evidence challenges our ambition to safeguard and preserve this information when such tools are not linked to a records and archives management system. Meanwhile, libraries are also striving to keep up with a push from host institutions and users alike for easier and wider access to online, open and interconnected content whilst copyright regulations are being tightened up.

✓ **Merging analogue with digital methods**

This evolving landscape is accompanied by the development of new skill sets in archives and library sciences, incorporating expertise such as data mining and analytics, web communication and in-depth knowledge of information technologies and systems. Paper will prevail alongside and traditional robust skills in cataloging, indexing, preserving and making its content accessible will continue to be solicited. But as we embrace the digital transformation, new practices, skill sets and states of mind are increasingly required for the curation of digitized and born-digital collections and will gradually form the main core of our technical expertise, as it is already the case for our audiovisual content.

✓ **Answering the users' thirst for more simplicity**

The more complex the world of information and technology has become, the more important it is to simplify the life of users, e.g. by means of automatic capturing of records, intuitive navigation, easy access to user services via a single-entry point, integrated search engines, metadata by default, open data, all of which are accessible through a minimal number of clicks. Our projects need to meet these expectations and offer services that continuously evolve in line with the users' needs and *modus operandi*.

✓ **The call for a wider and more universal access to information**

This digital transformation is offering exciting opportunities to advance knowledge in more inclusive and innovative ways. It does not come as a surprise that several states throughout the world have embarked on rebuilding their past by acquiring digital copies of the ICRC's physical archival and legacy

² How can we determine what has value for us amongst the mass of potential digital records? How can we guarantee their authenticity when there are multiple creators and owners but no originals?

content that concerns them directly. Sometimes linked to the setup of transitional justice mechanisms, requests to gain access to ICRC Archives are also part of a healing process which helps nations and individuals cope with their past, rebuild their present and envision their future. Linking past physical content with modern born-digital records through the structured and strategized digitization of our collections has become key to our orientation, not only to showcase how our past vibrantly speaks to us today but also, and perhaps more importantly, to ensure improved online access to our archives and library collections to those who can't afford to come and consult them on our premises.

✓ ***The push to decipher the past with the assistance of new technologies***

The ICRC's collections are made of billions of data that could potentially, if digitized, be analyzed on a macro level deploying algorithms yet to be defined. What if we could find common indicators that led to major humanitarian crises such as famines in the past and could help pre-empt such crises in the future? Cross-analyses of data from different sources could also prove key to solving the fate of missing people decades after their disappearance. In the academic world, cross-analyzing data is the core of digital humanities, a relatively new academic discipline that seeks to interpret the past and present by means of the comprehensive and complementary use of digital resources, thus enabling a deeper understanding of targeted subject areas as well as our evolving societies at large.

✓ ***Genealogical interests***

The developing trend of investigating our genealogies has reached the ICRC, with an increasing number of descendants of prisoners of war (PoW) of both World Wars searching for information on their kin. The set-up of a web portal containing digitized individual registration cards of PoW during WWI allows direct online research by the relatives themselves. However, we remain incapable of responding to the annual flow of thousands of incoming requests related to WWII prisoners of war, as these archives have not been digitized and put on line. Therefore, capacities and methods relating to these requirements need to be reassessed, amongst others with a view to digitizing portions of the archives in question.

✓ ***Limited resources***

Expanding knowledge as well as preserving digital memory have significant financial costs attached to them. We need to think of new and creative ways of resourcing and financing our ambitions, for example by monetizing sets of data in digital records for a limited period or by seeking support for legacy projects from philanthropic and historical societies.

Our Vision

Through the Strategy ARC 22, we aim to unleash the potential of the ICRC's Archives, Records and Library Collections by:

1. Advancing Knowledge:

We add, enrich, valorize and promote the information contained in our Archives, Records and Library Collections to reinforce their role and significance and to advance knowledge. We influence policies and inform decision-making by rendering our sources accessible, visible and intelligible. As a learning organization, we welcome independent and critical researchers from internal and expanding external audiences.

2. Becoming digital by design

We think inclusively in terms of factoring digital and digitized solutions into building projects and initiatives to expand our reach and spread knowledge. We explore how innovative and user centric technologies accelerate and simplify acquisition and access to information, thus helping to create knowledge. We link the past to the present and future by cross-referencing information/data from different sources to provide insights on past, current and future humanitarian issues.

3. Being fit for purpose

We strengthen our archival and librarian digital skill sets and culture and remain the trusted custodians of future digital content. We organize ourselves efficiently and are careful to define and implement the right practices and tools in the digital domain. We explore creative outside resourcing models to enable the implementation of the strategy.

Our guiding Principles

The following principles guide us when implementing the strategy:

User focus and service-oriented

We endeavor to ensure that whatever we set up meets our users' rising expectations in how they access information and we strive to offer the best service possible. Simplification for the end user is our motto.

Compliance with our professional ethics and practices

In everything we do, we comply with our respective codes of ethics and practices as Archivists, Records Managers and Librarians. In particular, we guarantee the authenticity and integrity of our collections and inspire trust on how we preserve and make them accessible.

Independent research focused

We attract external researchers to engage with an independent and critical perspective on our past in order to grow as a learning organization.

Innovation

We explore creative thinking and innovative technologies to a maximum effect in order to reach our vision.

Respectful of Data Protection and of Information Security

When preserving and making the content of our collections accessible, we are guided by the principle of do no harm and abide by ICRC rules on data protection. We provide assurance and guarantee the appropriate levels of integrity, confidentiality and availability of the archives and records under our custody.

Our objectives

I. Advancing knowledge

We add, enrich, valorize and promote the information contained in our Archives, Records and Library Collections to reinforce their role and significance and to advance knowledge. We influence policies and inform decision-making by rendering our sources accessible, visible and intelligible. As a learning organization, we welcome independent and critical researchers from internal and expanding external audiences.

Objective I.1 – Reinforcing and broadening sources of capture

Fully aware of the need to ensure business continuity, meet legal and compliance obligations and build ICRC's institutional memory, staff take the necessary actions to ensure that records they produce and receive are properly dealt with.

Going beyond the traditional scope of e-mails and documents, we capture digital records of non-traditional format and sources based on an evaluation of what needs to be preserved amongst all the information/data generated.

We explore machine learning solutions that enable the automated capture of records and metadata to a maximum effect, irrespective of their origin and format, therewith reducing the burden of acquisition on staff.

A trusted records management system is set up, allowing for the preservation and accessibility of information and data over time.

How?

Enhancing:

- ✓ Strengthen staff's awareness on records management and set up accountability measures.
- ✓ Build the foundation for our records management and long-term preservation.
- ✓ Refine criteria of appraisal of different sources (social media platforms, intranet, social collaborative networks).
- ✓ Build a Digital Asset Management system for the multisource and audiovisual content (DAM).

Exploring:

- ✓ Test crowdsourcing processes to identify potential partners to assist in capturing existing sources and enrich them with metadata.
- ✓ Explore possibilities to capture linked records such as web conversations or hyperlinks.
- ✓ Plan the evolution of our records management system in different phases in line with priorities on what to capture.
- ✓ Explore machine learning specifically in the field of capturing and organizing records according to metadata content and structures.

Objective I.2 – Facilitate the retrieval of information for all staff

Acknowledging that finding the right information on multiple scattered and diverse carriers and platforms is key to ICRC's action, enhance our in-house capacity to search for and retrieve information from our collections according to specifically approved access rights.

Ensure that the systems and tools put in place allow for the preservation of information and data compliant with relevant professional norms and standards, so that staff can efficiently trace reliable and authentic archival evidence to support their work.

How?

Enhancing:

- ✓ Ensure the visibility, accessibility and searchability of our collections through one entry point online, based on robust inventories and digitized physical content.
- ✓ Ensure that ICRC tools and platforms containing information/data that need to be recorded are linked to a records management system that is compliant with professional norms and standards.

Exploring:

- ✓ Digitize the most commonly used series of paper archives and library material and install an internal portal for online access.
- ✓ Implement the enrichment of digitized /digital sources through machine learning processes to improve the quality of search results.
- ✓ Install a user-friendly and more efficient search engine that allows all staff to retrieve information both from our born-digital records and digitized content according to their specific access rights.
- ✓ Expand the search engine's functions to other resources according to the priority needs of ICRC.

Objective I.3 – enhancing in-house knowledge

Aiming at inspiring our policy and decision making, quality analytical reports are enriched by combining different sources and data from the ICRC's archives, library and audiovisual collections, various independent research output and interviews. They are made available through a user-centric and experience portal that respects rights of access to information in conjunction with distinct levels of confidentiality.

How?

Enhancing:

- ✓ Increase the internal production of analytical reports, research guides and chronological notes based on our various collections, cross-referencing them when relevant with external information/data.
- ✓ Facilitate their reading by creating bundles as well as nutshells of information and graphics.
- ✓ Increase the number of online search guides dealing with most pertinent topics.
- ✓ Organize creative internal events to showcase our rich past.
- ✓ Expand the FOCUS platform and enrich it with articles and books written on the basis of our collections as well as internal historical and other research articles.

Exploring:

- ✓ Explore the possibility to embark on an oral history project, potentially extending interviews to beneficiaries.

Objective I.4 – Expanding the accessibility of our collections to a wider external audience and enhancing our engagement with the public

Through the digitization of selected series in our collections, we enable people and nations to access their recorded memory in line with the Rules of Access to the ICRC's Archives. We build stronger and efficient relationships and partnerships with delegations, communities of practice, humanitarian organizations and academic circles. We encourage diversified, independent and critical research on our history. We remain relevant and aligned with the ICRC's priorities of action in our communication towards the public when promoting our collections and organizing events.

How?

Enhancing:

- ✓ Digitize series of public paper collections and microfiches / microforms with a view to making them accessible and searchable online.
- ✓ Engage in strategic partnerships with academic circles in line with our institutional priorities to promote our collections and foster the production of quality published research output.
- ✓ Participate in, and/or actively organize, promotional and professional events that position the ICRC as the reference organization in IHL and a major player in the realm of the past, present and future of humanitarian action.
- ✓ Keep up with the fast-evolving social media platforms and adapt our communication practices accordingly.

Exploring:

- ✓ Reach out to our delegations and extend access to our collections to support diverse independent perspectives through the organization of/participation in round table discussions, seminars, conferences, exhibitions etc.
- ✓ Explore opportunities to collaborate with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum on research and exhibition projects related to our collections.
- ✓ Explore active forms of participation with academics in the development of digital humanities as a means of both promoting our collections and advancing new collaborative ways of conducting research.
- ✓ Make a formal proposal to host the International Association of Law Librarians (IALL) annual 2022 course and conference event.
- ✓ Explore linked open data models to enhance the visibility of, and level of access to, our descriptive metadata.
- ✓ Explore new business models with library organizations and providers and strive for increased open sources in our Library catalogue.

II – Becoming digital by design

We think inclusively in terms of factoring digital and digitized solutions into building projects and initiatives to expand our reach and spread knowledge. We explore how innovative and user centric technologies accelerate and simplify acquisition and access to information, thus helping to create knowledge. We link the past to the present and future by cross-referencing information/data from different sources to provide insights on past, current and future humanitarian issues.

Objective II.1 – Designing a user-friendly ecosystem to access our collections

We design and set up a digital ecosystem to ensure that all platforms hosting our collections, supporting their dissemination and serving to generate and share information are interconnected. The ecosystem comprises a structure of building blocks and tools which can be supplemented, transformed or substituted according to evolving needs. We create a user centric single-entry point to the digital ecosystem that ensures ease of access and reinforces the confidence that the ICRC is a trustworthy organization with robust systems underneath the surface. We explore the development of a digital assistant to navigate among the different sources of information, thus facilitating the users' access to the data and information they need.

How ?

Enhancing :

- ✓ Develop a digital ecosystem that ensures a maximum level of interoperability between the different tools used by our archives, records and library collections.
- ✓ Assess our existing applications to evaluate risks and needs in terms of digital preservation.
- ✓ Channel all incoming requests for information and use machine learning techniques to redistribute the content automatically to the relevant sector that needs to answer.

Exploring:

- ✓ Explore approaches such as those of the Open Archives Initiative³ to allow for the interoperability of distinct systems.
- ✓ Deliver minimal viable products to step by step build global solutions. Adapt their evolution based on users' feedbacks.
- ✓ Test different options offered by digital assistants in the field of search and navigation.

³ <https://www.openarchives.org/>

Objective II.2 – Applying algorithms and encoding to our collections for the benefit of humanity

We join forces in institutional initiatives and pilot efficiency-driven digital approaches aimed at reinforcing the impact of our collections in shaping the current and future landscape of humanitarian action. We define, test and apply algorithms to data and information contained in pre-identified and digitized series of collections to detect potentially useful evidence and trends.

How

Exploring:

- ✓ Within the framework of the project on the missing explore options to digitize specific series of collections, develop suitable algorithms and apply them to the digital content, cross-referencing it with other sources of data.
- ✓ Explore possibilities to digitize data and information associated with the ICRC's major relief activities and analyze them for the purpose e.g. of detecting possible early warning signs of potential major humanitarian crises such as famines.
- ✓ Test open data models in ICRC's collections to facilitate cross-referencing of internal and external data.
- ✓ Contribute to the definition of concrete steps to ensure the proper use and safety of such data

Objective II.3 – Setting out the right tools, policies and processes to manage our digital collections

In response on how the disruptive impact of digitized and born-digital records has revolutionized ways of working in the archives and library sciences, we rethink our rules and processes on what and how we create, capture, share and make available electronic records.

How?

Enhancing:

- ✓ Review the way we capture, organize and manage archives, records and library collections to adapt to best practices of the digital environment.
- ✓ Based on IHT rules, adapt access to the information.
- ✓ Review how we organize and manage historical records and collections for long-term conservation.

Exploring

- ✓ Examine and implement new digital inventorying processes.
- ✓ Facilitate and automate the work of transferring records to historical archives (long term preservation) based on a list of agreed metadata
- ✓ Adopt a system that automates the sorting, elimination and selection of electronic records based on the retention schedule.
- ✓ Ensure the long-term preservation of electronic records in accessible format.

III – Being fit for purpose

We strengthen our archival and librarian digital skill sets and culture and remain the trusted custodians of future digital content. We organize ourselves efficiently and are careful to define and implement the right practices and tools in the digital domain. We explore creative outside resourcing models to enable the implementation of the strategy.

Objective III.1 – Enhancing our digital capabilities, skills and approaches

We consolidate our authority as custodians of the collections by adapting our approaches to digital records and showing transparently how we operate. To keep up with the new archives and library practices emerging with each new generation of tools, we continue to acquire skills and knowledge that enable us to sustain our collections over time and render them accessible. We are seen as a major player in the humanitarian archives, records and library sectors with regard to creative thinking and developing techniques and tools to adapt to digital transformation.

How?

Enhancing

- ✓ Define our professional approach in archives and library science, considering digital records and archives and make our choices transparent.
- ✓ Adapt our processes to optimize the digital experience
- ✓ Identify the new skills required by the digital transformation and set up a training itinerary for professionals in Information Management, including archivists, record managers and librarians.
- ✓ Organize a systematic track record of new trends and practices in our field of expertise and participate actively in seminars and webinars.
- ✓ Reinforce cross-cutting thinking and collaborative ways of working amongst and between the different information management sectors.
- ✓ Position the ICRC in major archivists' and librarianship events/fora by making significant contributions to the written and oral debates.
- ✓ Strengthen the network with the archives, records management and libraries sectors of international organizations in Geneva to learn from each other.

Objective III.2 – Reorganizing the Public Archives and Library physical spaces and online services

To enhance their visibility, recognition and use, we reconfigure the physical spaces of the public archives and library in line with new successful ways of re-designing mixed formal and informal working environments. Catalogues, reference guides and digital/digitized collections are accessible through a single-entry point and valorized and promoted in complementary ways.

How?

Enhancing

- ✓ Create centralized digital front end and physical front desk points for visitors seeking to access and use our archives and library collections.
- ✓ Create friendly and practical physical working spaces for researchers and other visitors in our public archives and library.
- ✓ Connect the digital and physical space by defining a clear visual identity for the archives and library collections.

Exploring

- ✓ In line with rethinking the concept of workspace at HQ, explore the possibility of encouraging informal and formal transversal discussions by creating physical points of encounter and exchange around the ICRC public collections.
- ✓ Explore partnerships with archives and library centers of international organizations to increase the circulation and impact of knowledge encapsulated in their collections.

Objective III.3 – Reinforcing incentives for a better information management, as well as internal compliance and accountability

ICRC staff are trained, coached and supported in managing their records, complemented by user-friendly and simple guidelines. Managers are made aware of their responsibility towards managing information in line with ICRC's policies and rules of which the Division CIM_AIM is the custodian and the prescriber. Incentives as well as accountability mindsets and measures pertaining to information management are reinforced and implemented.

How?

Enhancing:

- ✓ Assemble a toolkit that contains simplified and coherent guidelines on information management.
- ✓ Coach and train in innovative ways, using up-to-date visual supports such as videos and virtual reality tools.
- ✓ Assert our role as prescriber of rules.
- ✓ Reinforce incentives around good practices in information management

Exploring:

- ✓ Contribute to setting up Information/data governance principles and guidelines.
- ✓ Make Information Management e-learning modules mandatory for all users.
- ✓ Instore measurable mandatory objectives on Information Management in performance reviews (managers and users).

Objective III.4 – exploring new ways of resourcing our Strategy

Based on well-defined projects and initiatives, we actively explore the possibility of partnering with foundations, government archives and academic circles to benefit from their expertise, know-how and qualified workforce to explore new technologies – including machine learning – in our areas of expertise. We seek alternative fundraising avenues together with our colleagues from the Resource Mobilization Division (REM) with a view to achieving our ambitions set out above.

How?

Explore

- ✓ Define a plan action with REM on specific projects in view of obtaining separate funding.
- ✓ Explore the possibility of monetizing our digital public and collections and making income from users or commercial partners.
- ✓ Explore the possibility to request payments for research enquiries
- ✓ Engage with governments' National Archives and other archiving/memory institutions who are eager to digitize ICRC public archives related to their country or to a theme and conclude solid memorandums of understanding that ensure, amongst others, a cost-neutral exercise for the ICRC.