



ICRC

ICRC STRATEGY 2019–2022



Front cover:
Maiduguri, Nigeria.
This woman fled her home in Dikwa because of the conflict in the north-eastern part of the country. She now lives in an informal camp.

Back cover:
Lulingu Tschionka Airport, Democratic Republic of the Congo.
After six years apart, a girl is reunited with her parents thanks to help from the ICRC.

ICRC STRATEGY 2019–2022

THE EVOLVING OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

THE EXPANDING AND PERVASIVE EFFECTS OF ARMED CONFLICT AND OTHER SITUATIONS OF VIOLENCE¹

Conflict and violence continue to cause immense suffering throughout the world. While the methods have not fundamentally changed over the last decade, major conflicts are driving global instability, spreading fragility, triggering forced displacement and long-term disruption within societies and social systems and creating massive humanitarian needs. For many years now, responding to needs related to health, nutrition, shelter, water and sanitation has been at the heart of humanitarian assistance; however, owing to the disruptive effects of conflict and violence, a much broader range of vulnerabilities has begun to emerge, giving rise to additional needs. In many countries, socioeconomic development has resulted in expanded access to health care and education, and technological progress has lifted many people out of poverty; even so, millions of others remain trapped in a vicious cycle of violence and underdevelopment that is often linked to protracted conflict.

Battlefields are less clearly defined as they increasingly move into urban areas and proliferate in the digital sphere.

The operating environment is further complicated by parties to armed conflict and other actors fuelling violence and often operating within coalitions that transcend national borders. These coalitions have become more assertive in the pursuit of their interests and also more fragmented and volatile in the way they coalesce. Conflict-related violence regularly blends with criminality, and is continuously fed by war economies and the political exploitation of ethnic and religious differences.

¹ In this document, the term ‘armed conflict and other situations of violence’ will be shortened to ‘conflict and violence’ for ease of reading. Please note that the ICRC uses ‘other situations of violence’ (hereafter ‘violence’) to refer to situations of collective violence, perpetrated by one or several groups, that do not reach the threshold of an ‘armed conflict’, but that may have significant humanitarian consequences.

Lanao del Sur, Marawi City. Portrait of a teacher who continued holding classes despite the ongoing conflict.



An ICRC forensic specialist examining a skull.



Battlefields are less clearly defined as they increasingly move into urban areas and proliferate in the digital sphere. Conventional weapons continue to be readily available and new weapons are becoming more accessible to a broad range of State actors, non-State armed groups (NSAGs) and individuals, putting growing numbers of people in harm's way.

THE HUMAN COST OF WAR

The human cost, direct and indirect, exacted by conflict and violence is appalling. Every day, hundreds of thousands of civilians throughout the world are persecuted, abused, displaced, wounded or killed and regularly denied the fundamentals of humanity. The number of civilian deaths caused by conflicts doubled between 2010 and 2016 and the number of people displaced, missing or behind bars as a result of conflict and violence is greater than at any point in several decades. The potential use of biological and other weapons of mass destruction and the use of chemical weapons is a dramatic setback for the international community, as is the re-emergence of famine and cholera, which threatens entire communities. The disregard for international humanitarian law (IHL) and other fundamental rules that protect people is both a root cause and a symptom on a dynamic continuum of conflict and violence. Greater connectivity makes information about IHL violations, violence and injustice instantly accessible to more people; ignoring them or denying their existence is therefore becoming increasingly unacceptable to the people affected and to the international community.

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Acts of extreme violence against civilians have become commonplace, and massive civilian casualties are too often regarded as an inevitable consequence of war.

Acts of extreme violence against civilians have become commonplace, and massive civilian casualties are too often regarded as an inevitable consequence of war. Armed actors regularly pursue their military strategies with little or no respect for the laws of war. Counter-terrorism measures lead to unending 'states of emergency', in which fundamental rights are restricted or denied, and humanitarian imperatives are systematically overridden by security objectives. In such an environment, political discourse often becomes toxic, dehumanizing victims and eroding compassion for human suffering. This adversely influences States and other actors' willingness to uphold their obligations. In countries not affected by armed conflict but by extremely high levels of violence, particularly in territories where State authority is weak or being challenged, entire communities suffer the severe and chronic consequences, often without any support from either the authorities or traditional humanitarian and development organizations. These protection failures cause population displacements on a massive scale and result in the widespread perception that the international community is collectively failing the people and communities affected.

A MORE FRAGMENTED AND POLARIZED WORLD

Preventing, responding to or ending conflict and violence has been made more difficult by an increasingly fragmented international order and the attrition of diplomatic solutions. Political polarization at global and regional levels is feeding conflict dynamics. The international community often lacks the resolve to find political solutions and instead turns to humanitarian actors for short-term remedies to the most serious consequences of conflict. More alarmingly, the politicization of principled humanitarian action threatens to further reduce the neutral space required for responding to the consequences of increasingly complex and intractable conflicts. In the absence of such humanitarian space, decades-old conflicts remain with no end in sight, and newer conflicts gradually morph into protracted crises, characterized by long-term societal challenges, high levels of violence, poverty and economic underdevelopment, and failures of governance.

Short-term humanitarian problems caused by conflict and violence are made worse by longer-term trends like climate change, population growth, urbanization and uneven economic development. The economic inequalities between the haves and the have-nots is widening in many fragile contexts and the latter increasingly have instant access to information and images that deepen their sense of social injustice and deprivation. Inequality across different groups also exacerbates political, ethnic, and religious tensions, resulting in greater social and political instability.

Such tensions and injustice extend to issues of gender, where one sees the contrast between the persistence of sexual and gender-based violence and a growing resistance to oppressive and harmful gender practices across entire societies. In conflict-affected contexts and beyond, sexual and gender-based violence has become not only a matter of humanitarian concern but also a key political issue, and one to which humanitarian actors are expected to respond proactively, by protecting people from harassment, abuse and violence.

Governance systems also seem to be failing at multiple levels, causing a crisis of trust between authorities and populations. The resurgence of populist policies in many countries is accompanied by inward-looking and xenophobic rhetoric that challenges established areas of international cooperation. The very same technological achievements that have empowered individuals and communities are also creating unprecedented – and often not yet fully understood – risks to their safety, freedom and rights.

THE PARADOX OF PROGRESS

When all these dynamics intersect, the effects are pervasive, weakening existing systems and undermining the coping mechanisms of communities affected by conflict and violence. They can turn the front lines of conflict into a continuum of violence and instability across geographical and social boundaries. The expansion and deepening of front lines of conflict are exacerbating individual and structural vulnerabilities and turning affected States, including relatively stable middle-income countries, into heightened ‘states of fragility’.

On the other hand, with rapid socioeconomic and technological progress and the new opportunities it creates, there has never been as much potential for finding solutions to the complex problems confronting us. The physical and virtual worlds are merging into augmented realities, with possible transformations that are not yet fully understood. New actors are emerging on the political and humanitarian landscapes, to contest the traditional distribution of power and to challenge conventional aid policies with innovative approaches and strategies that are often rooted in local action and community partnerships.

Despite significant challenges, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other principled humanitarian organizations are still able to successfully carve out and negotiate the humanitarian space required to protect and assist millions of people affected by conflict and violence. Recent studies and direct observation show that IHL is respected and implemented in many situations, and that it provides the framework for the protection and assistance efforts of numerous local, regional and international actors. This is proof that armed actors, even in the most challenging contexts, can be influenced and persuaded to respect humanitarian principles and the laws of war.



Karachi, Pakistan. ICRC training in de-escalation of violence for medical staff at the Jinnah postgraduate medical centre.

A GUIDING COMPASS

The ICRC's Institutional Strategy 2019–2022 provides a compass for action for the next four years. It guides the organization in both preventing and alleviating the suffering of people and communities affected, and in delivering relevant and sustainable humanitarian impact. The Strategy is rooted in the rich history and legacy of the ICRC, solidly grounded in the present reality and resolutely forward-looking. We hope that it will provide the necessary guidance for orienting the activities and development of the organization, inspiring staff, donors and other stakeholders, and responding proactively to the challenges and new opportunities that we are likely to encounter from 2019 to 2022.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS AS WE LOOK TO THE FUTURE

The ICRC's Strategy 2015–2018 has helped the organization to sustain the development of its activities in parallel with the growth of the global humanitarian sector, and to ensure their relevance to those affected by conflict and violence. Notwithstanding the challenging operating environment described above, the ICRC has managed to strengthen its ability to protect and assist people and to establish stronger synergies between legal, operational and policy activities throughout the organization. Our humanitarian diplomacy and public positioning have enabled the ICRC to secure further political and financial support. Stronger partnerships within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement), and with other humanitarian organizations, the private sector, professional networks and academia, have helped the ICRC become more capable of responding promptly and effectively to the growing needs of populations affected.

THE ICRC'S MISSION

“The ICRC is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of the 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.

Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.”

This mission statement will continue to provide the framework for the ICRC's development. The core strengths and the distinctive character of the ICRC, developed over more than 150 years, can be seen in its ability to keep IHL and humanitarian principles alive in the worst of circumstances, to protect the rights and dignity of people affected, to alleviate their suffering, and to establish and maintain trustful relationships with combatants, governments and local communities in order to carve out the humanitarian space necessary to fulfil its mission. The ICRC's ability to maintain a strictly humanitarian approach, while operating in some of the most testing political and security environments, is at the core of its past success and of critical relevance to its future.

In order to fulfil its mission and chart its way forward, the ICRC will continue to rely on:

- the Fundamental Principles – especially impartiality, neutrality and independence – which are the most powerful tools for guiding and safeguarding humanitarian action
- our ability to put these principles into action and to ensure the safety of our staff, so that we can continue to be close to people and their needs and to adapt the humanitarian response accordingly
- both our proximity to armed actors and other stakeholders on the front lines of conflict and our capacity to engage in a constructive dialogue to maintain our licence to operate
- our engagement with States and NSAGs in order to ensure implementation of IHL and negotiate safe and secure humanitarian spaces
- our engagement with the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions and other stakeholders in order to interpret and develop the norms of IHL and other relevant rules as a practical and experience-based tools to preserve the fundamentals of humanity in times of conflict and violence
- our combination of professional skills, operational expertise, humanitarian diplomacy and public engagement with stakeholders and audiences about humanitarian concerns and dilemmas, the ICRC's policies and actions and their impact.



Maiwut, South Sudan.
At a hospital supported
by the ICRC, Kay greets
an ICRC surgeon before
he has his operation.



Psychosocial support from the Ukrainian Red Cross Society in Pisky village in the Donetsk area, Ukraine.

The ICRC will have to navigate the dilemmas and tensions that arise from operating in highly complex environments. It will therefore:

- maintain its neutral, impartial and independent character, while providing humanitarian assistance and protection within an increasingly politicized environment
- continue to navigate and manage dilemmas and tensions between principled action and pragmatism, confidentiality and advocacy, while operating as an international organization delivering very local responses, and discharging its mandate from States to engage impartially with all actors of conflict and violence, including the adversaries of those same States
- strengthen its ability to work at multiple levels, from life-saving emergency operations to longer-term, systemic and innovative activities that address some of the most serious sources of vulnerability and fragility
- continue to address issues arising from conventional warfare and violence, while also preparing itself to deal with challenges associated with cyber security and the conduct of hostilities in the digital sphere and to respond to the related humanitarian consequences
- embrace innovation and digital transformation to become a more flexible and agile organization, one that responds more promptly and effectively to the changing needs of populations affected without losing the human, personal and informal character of its interaction with the populations and communities affected
- focus on its key priorities – with regard to humanitarian action – and engage in partnerships that build on the complementarity of skills and mandates of other humanitarian actors for greater impact
- influence the humanitarian sector to strengthen its capacity to respond to the humanitarian consequences of complex crises, while maintaining and developing its own principled operational capacity to respond directly to the needs of populations affected.

PEOPLE AND THEIR NEEDS AT THE CENTRE OF THE ICRC'S HUMANITARIAN ACTION

PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF OUR MISSION

Individuals, households and communities affected by conflict and violence are at the heart of the ICRC's mission. Saving lives, alleviating suffering and responding to people's needs remain the driving force of the ICRC's humanitarian engagement and the focus of its commitments and efforts. Just as the nature and means of war and violence change, so too do the needs and coping mechanisms of the people affected. But a great deal of humanitarian action is still largely directed by States, donor policies and international humanitarian agencies, which define the parameters and priorities of humanitarian action and measure its relevance and results. The populations affected and their needs might be taken into account, but people themselves are rarely at the centre of the design of the formal humanitarian response.

Today, too many vulnerable people fall into a 'protection gap' because they do not fit within existing programmatic criteria. Others are left unassisted and unprotected because they are silent (or have been silenced), invisible, hidden or uninformed about prevention or protection options. Facilitating the meaningful participation of people affected and ensuring that they have space and agency within the humanitarian response is critical in addressing this situation. This change will require time, new approaches, practical tools and techniques, and a deeper transformation of traditional structures. This will include a shift away from a culture of top-down operational control to one of genuine engagement with populations and communities affected and the local actors and influencers within their environment. Specific approaches will be needed to prevent or minimize the adverse effects of unequal power relations between international actors and vulnerable communities, and between the different social, age or gender groups within these communities.

PEOPLE AFFECTED ARE EXPERTS ON THEIR OWN SITUATION

By recognizing and respecting the fact that communities affected are experts on their own situation, first responders and agents of change, the ICRC aims to go beyond its traditional needs analysis and

subsequent provision of assistance – goods, cash and services – to build a response that takes into account evolving priorities, irrespective of whether people's needs lie within its existing portfolio of operational responses.

...recognizing and respecting the fact that communities affected are experts on their own situation, first responders and agents of change...

The ICRC will continue to assess and seek to address, in line with its principles, needs arising from conflict and violence. It will also adapt and evolve, both in the delivery of its humanitarian response and in the scope of its activities, particularly

in conflict settings and 'forgotten' contexts, where it has a unique ability to negotiate humanitarian spaces and where it is often the first and last international actor present.

This approach opens up a space for populations affected to articulate their needs, tell their stories as individuals and communities, and have their perspectives and knowledge of the context incorporated in the design, implementation and review of the ICRC's humanitarian responses. In protracted crises, people's ability to deal with changing threats and vulnerabilities – as well as their coping mechanisms, agency and influence within the context – changes over time and varies with their status and circumstances. Sound cultural and contextual understanding is vital, and there cannot be a single approach. For instance, women may face specific protection issues in conflict settings, such as a disproportionate risk of sexual violence and other dangers exacerbated by cultural norms, their

gender and their perceived place in society. Yet in many cases the influential, informal roles that women play are critical in upholding social cohesion and preventing further disruption. Such important contributions must be better acknowledged and leveraged to build resilient communities.

We acknowledge that a broad range of stakeholders (people and communities affected, States and NSAGs, donors, staff, National Societies and partners) may facilitate, control, deliver or block principled humanitarian action. With that in mind, we will engage not only with people and communities affected, but also with host communities, States and NSAGs to influence the upholding of IHL, alleviate the suffering created by conflict and violence and deliver concrete prevention and protection outcomes. We also recognize that the ICRC is but one actor within the broader humanitarian ecosystem, and will therefore seek to build formal and informal connections that enable a more relevant and sustainable humanitarian response and create greater impact for people affected.

...in many cases the influential, informal roles that women play are critical in upholding social cohesion and preventing further disruption.

OPEN, ACCESSIBLE AND WILLING TO LISTEN

To make these changes, the ICRC needs to remain open, accessible and interested in the views of people affected. Crucial reflections include determining who should be consulted. Who represents a legitimate expression of needs? How should the ICRC engage with those who are most vulnerable and manage local intermediaries? How should the ICRC respond when assessing needs is difficult and when it does not yet have responses for emerging needs? How does the ICRC build trust and a broad consensus in highly volatile situations? How does it structure operational decision-making processes? How can the ICRC use new technologies to facilitate engagement with people affected, and make sure their views and voices are heard and become more responsive to them? How can we address security challenges as well as political, social and bureaucratic obstacles at the local level? And how can we ensure that the humanitarian response reaches the right people? These are real and important challenges.

“*How does the ICRC build trust and broad consensus in highly volatile situations?*”

Najaf, Iraq. At Sadr Hospital, a patient talks with ICRC physiotherapists.



Responding to such questions is critical and will enable us to devise a humanitarian approach that is fit for the future. Ensuring that ICRC needs assessments systematically incorporate the views of people affected, while leveraging their knowledge and understanding of the social changes and public policies that influence their vulnerability and resilience, will be key. Maintaining and increasing the ICRC's physical proximity to people affected, in order to build relationships of trust that enable the organization to respond to an evolving palette of needs, will be crucial. Interacting with a diverse range of local and international stakeholders, partners and influencers, who can together deliver a more relevant and impactful humanitarian response, is also vital.

The ICRC will also ensure that people-centred and influencing strategies bring together its humanitarian activities and institutional initiatives independent of their organizational labels or structures. By doing this we hope to ensure that our responses are perceived as more integrated and multi-disciplinary by people affected, and to enable all ICRC staff, resident and mobile, to contribute to addressing people's need for protection and assistance effectively. The orientations in this Strategy are presented in this spirit and therefore go beyond the ICRC's traditional programmatic approach to its humanitarian activities. The orientations aim to influence those who cause suffering to change their behaviour; and when this is not successful, to mitigate the consequences for the people and communities affected.

Bangkok, Thailand. At the ICRC's Asian and Pacific Conference on Prison Health, a participant learns about the ICRC's work through virtual reality technology.





Bab al-Tabanneh, Lebanon. This woman receives a hot meal every day from a kitchen run by people in her community. The ICRC helped launch the project, which provides work for dozens of people in the community and gives hundreds of others the freedom to use what little money they have on essentials other than food.

STRATEGIC ORIENTATION 1

INFLUENCING BEHAVIOUR TO PREVENT VIOLATIONS OF IHL AND ALLEVIATE HUMAN SUFFERING

People affected by conflict and violence want to have their suffering alleviated, but they also want not to have to suffer at all. A people-centred approach therefore requires a stronger focus on prevention and protection. Efforts must be made to influence and change the behaviour of parties to conflict; prevent violations of IHL and fundamental rights; change laws, policies and practices that have a harmful impact on people affected; and ensure respect for principled humanitarian action, so that both those in need and those seeking to assist them are accessible.

The ICRC will strengthen and adapt its strategies to influence the behaviour of those who threaten the safety, dignity, rights and well-being of people affected.

Protection challenges are growing, but political reluctance to deal with protection issues is widespread. The ICRC will strengthen and adapt its strategies to influence the behaviour of those who threaten the safety, dignity, rights and well-being of people affected, such as children, women, older people, people with disabilities, people who are detained, victims and survivors of sexual violence, internally displaced people and migrants, and those who are persecuted or discriminated against.

To do this, we will leverage our proximity to affected populations, our concrete action on the ground, our adherence to humanitarian principles and our role as a neutral intermediary to establish and develop trustful relationships with States, with non-State armed actors and other stakeholders. We will continue to build bridges with all parties to conflict and endeavour to establish the necessary dialogue to carve out neutral spaces, prevent the escalation of violence and mitigate the impact of conflict on the lives of people affected.

We will combine our operational experience, technical expertise, diplomatic network and contextual knowledge with the relevant internal and external information and data flows to help us better understand the causal links between political and socioeconomic dynamics, technological developments, human behaviour, disregard for fundamental rights and IHL and patterns of conflict and violence.

We will develop a solid base of knowledge and evidence to improve our ability to anticipate and influence the policies and behaviour that cause human suffering during situations of conflict and violence. We will continue to explore how formal and informal diplomatic and normative mechanisms can enhance respect for IHL and other rules protecting people in violent situations, and aim to demonstrate their relevance for protecting civilians, reducing fragility and contributing to the broader individual and societal aspirations of sustainable peace.

Based on our principled approach, we will develop alliances with organizations and other actors, especially those committed to humanitarian principles and IHL, within and beyond the humanitarian sector, in order to strengthen our influence, enhance the impact of our work and foster an environment more conducive to policies aligned with humanitarian principles and IHL, which is a building block of a broader system of rules-based order.



Magelang, Central Java, Indonesia. A three-day ICRC workshop on international humanitarian law for cadets at the Indonesian Military Academy.

OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 The ICRC **strengthens its role as the reference organization on IHL** by:
 - increasing its capacity to **assist States and other relevant actors to uphold their legal obligations**
 - making a particular effort to **demonstrate the relevance, added value and practical application** of IHL and other norms
 - working to address **existing and emerging gaps** in the law
 - continuing to provide **thought leadership on IHL and its evolution**.
- 1.2 The ICRC strengthens its **collection and use of evidence, data and research in the areas of IHL, and humanitarian action** in general, as a means of **reinforcing its protection response** to people affected by urban violence, forced displacement, sexual violence, disappearance and family separation, and by attacks on health-care personnel and facilities.
- 1.3 In order to **deliver concrete prevention and protection outcomes**, the ICRC pursues advocacy and/or standard-setting in relation to existing and **new dimensions of warfare and law enforcement practices**, with a specific focus on:
 - **people** who are missing and/or detained and people experiencing forced displacement and family separation
 - **weapons-related issues** such as **cyber and autonomous weapons**, and the need to ensure human control and agency in decisions to use force
 - **leveraging operational and legal experience and expertise** to engage more consistently with parties to armed conflict, and communities affected, on the necessity of respecting IHL, and in particular the compatibility of counter-terrorism measures, detention practices and use of force policies with IHL.
- 1.4 The ICRC contributes to the **improved safety and security of people affected** by conflict and violence, and the preservation of their **dignity**, by:
 - developing field-based strategies and leveraging its **operational experience and expertise** in support of its confidential and bilateral dialogue, humanitarian diplomacy and public communication
 - enhancing its **negotiation skills by developing and more systematically sharing negotiation experiences, tools and methods** with peers, and across front-line agencies and organizations
 - ensuring greater diversity in humanitarian negotiation teams – in terms of background, gender and technical competencies – so that they are **relevant and effective** within the contexts in which they work.
- 1.5 The ICRC **prevents disappearances and increases positive case resolution** for people separated from and without news of their loved ones by:
 - **transforming the Central Tracing Agency** into the lead international mechanism for storing, standardizing, accessing and analysing data linked with people who have gone missing
 - **providing protected and secure digital storage** of personal data within the Central Tracing Agency and the Family Links platform, and through partnerships with National Societies and other key stakeholders
 - **making itself more accessible to families** of people separated, disappeared or missing in relation to conflict and violence.

STRATEGIC ORIENTATION 2

BUILDING RELEVANT AND SUSTAINABLE HUMANITARIAN IMPACT WITH PEOPLE AFFECTED

Humanitarian action was born with an emergency mindset, to save lives and alleviate the suffering caused by the immediate consequences of war, violence and other disasters. As a result, humanitarian responses often focus on short-term solutions for dealing with the immediate and visible costs of such crises.

The systemic, long-term and intangible needs created by protracted crises often remain invisible.

Emergency needs arising from conflict and violence are and will continue to be the entry point for the ICRC, and will remain an important focus of its work. However, the longer-term effects of protracted crises and chronic situations of violence on the security, safety, dignity, identity and sense of belonging of people affected are a growing concern for us. These effects are not always easy to

understand and are therefore more difficult to respond to. Despite the significant impact of such consequences on people's lives, the systemic, long-term and intangible needs created by protracted crises often remain invisible because they are not always revealed by humanitarian needs assessments.

It has therefore become essential when responding to protracted crises, to develop an approach that incorporates these longer-term and evolving needs in the design and implementation of humanitarian programmes. An enhanced vulnerability-based methodology, one that makes use of needs and impact assessments that are more participative and multifaceted, would help us to develop broader and

Leer, South Sudan. Two women carrying away a bag of sorghum from an ICRC airdrop of food.



more inclusive means of addressing the various threats to the safety and dignity of people affected. This would also help to reduce the vulnerabilities that emerge over time, and support the coping mechanisms that enable people to return to their version of a normal life, sustain their livelihoods and meet their longer-term needs autonomously.

The ICRC will pay attention to a broader range of needs and work with others, seeking concrete ways to facilitate impartial and safe access to education, connectivity, information and other entitlements that enable people affected to gain greater control over their lives and future. Such an approach is crucial for strengthening people's ability to enjoy or defend their fundamental rights, or have those rights restored, and for finding more lasting ways of addressing the needs of people affected.

We also aim to develop more systemic, innovative and multi-stakeholder approaches alongside our emergency response, in order to ensure that our protection and assistance activities are more responsive, impactful and relevant to the evolving nature and complexity of humanitarian needs. This means that we will invest in improving our ability to address the underlying vulnerabilities in the delivery of basic services and in infrastructural systems (e.g. in the areas of health, water, shelter, physical rehabilitation for people with disabilities and nutrition) on which people and communities depend. It also means expanding our understanding of what is required to sustain the provision of basic services and to arrest the decline of these services. At the same time, we will strive to influence all parties to armed conflict to respect IHL so that essential infrastructure is protected from damage, personnel can continue working and humanitarian action is shown due regard.

We will strive to influence all parties to armed conflict to respect IHL so that essential infrastructure is protected.

Humanitarian action in protracted settings must therefore be adapted at several levels. First, the response must not be limited to disruptions of individual lives; it must also be capable of **dealing with more systemic and long-term problems**, particularly because the cumulative impact of conflict and violence in fragile urban environments can destabilize broader geographic areas. Second, the humanitarian response must **address not only the physical needs, but also the mental health and psychosocial impact that** war has on the overall well-being of populations. In the spirit of the 'do no harm' approach, humanitarian action must go beyond short-term substitution and support communities affected in strengthening their coping mechanisms, self-reliance and self-protection strategies.

All this must be accompanied by a more diverse, **efficient and sustainable use of humanitarian funding**, one that supports both the scalability of short-term, emergency-driven expenditures and longer-term, impact-driven humanitarian investments that enable humanitarian actors to meet emergency needs while simultaneously securing 'development holds'. This will help prevent the degradation of critical individual and public assets, boost the resilience of communities, reduce the cost of post-conflict reconstruction and contribute to the overall recovery of societies affected by conflict and violence.

In the coming years, the ICRC will therefore, in addition to providing emergency response, strengthen its response to needs generated by the time frames of protracted conflicts and the requirements of urban settings – and also work closely with people affected to design, implement and review its humanitarian activities – to deliver a more relevant and sustainable humanitarian response. The ICRC does not intend to become a development agency with a social-change agenda. It will however continue to be guided solely by its humanitarian mandate and maintain its ability to calibrate activities, expand or contract its operational surface according to evolving needs, identified gaps and opportunities to create greater humanitarian impact for people affected.

OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 To ensure the **relevance and sustainability of its humanitarian response**, the ICRC adapts its working procedures to:
- **maintain and increase its physical proximity to and digital engagement** with populations affected by conflict and violence
 - **systematically engage people affected** on the relevance, design, implementation and review of its activities
 - focus on strengthening its **understanding of and response to people's broader needs**, such as mental health and psychosocial needs, or the need to access educational opportunities
 - improve the timeliness, reliability and scope of **needs assessments and feedback** mechanisms.
- 2.2 The ICRC enhances its comprehensive response throughout the crisis cycle, in order to **strengthen the resilience of people affected**, by:
- acknowledging people's **self-determined priorities**
 - working together with people affected to ensure **safe access to the social, financial and physical resources and services** they require
 - reinforcing or supporting the development of **affected people's own risk reduction capacities**
 - supporting affected people to **build on their self-reliance and self-protection strategies**.
- 2.3 The ICRC continues to **develop and scale up its protection and assistance responses** with a focus on:
- people and communities with specific characteristics that put them at greater risk in contexts of conflict and violence
 - addressing needs arising from **sexual and gender-based violence**, as well as needs related to **mother-and-child health care** and needs arising from the **disruption of livelihoods**
 - refining its analysis of the **various factors contributing to vulnerability and needs**
 - reducing social exclusion associated with **situational and identity-based barriers** that people affected are confronted with when trying to access services.

Homs, Syria. Nasser opened a food shop with funds from a microeconomic initiative supported by the ICRC and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.



- 2.4 To bolster the sustainability of its humanitarian response, the ICRC seeks to reinforce conflict-affected communities' **ability to absorb the combined consequences** of conflict and climate shocks, and will:
- support communities to adapt and transform their capacities and resources to **better manage future stresses** caused by the **combined effects of conflict and climate change**
 - adapt its programming to systematically **prevent degradation of the environment on which populations affected rely** for their livelihood and well-being
 - enhance its **own environmental responsibilities and policies** by improving its energy efficiency, reducing its dependence on fossil fuels, reducing and ensuring proper treatment of hazardous waste in the field and demanding higher quality and sounder environmental practices of its suppliers.
- 2.5 The ICRC continues to **respond to emergencies, while concurrently strengthening its ability to address needs created by the breakdown of systems** and infrastructure in protracted conflicts by:
- ensuring that **appropriate planning systems and operational models** are in place
 - developing a **multi-year financing model, including contributions that sit outside of annual core planning** and that specifically **support large-scale, longer-term systemic responses in protracted conflicts**.
- 2.6 The ICRC **strengthens its ability and capacity to operate** in some of the most hazardous environments by:
- adopting, disseminating and reporting on adequate and regularly updated **security protocols and procedures**, in order to enhance the capacities of its operational teams, particularly at sites most exposed to security risks
 - providing managers with the necessary **professional training, competency testing and experience sharing** in security management, and awareness and skills training for all its operational staff on these assignments
 - **establishing an independent system of review** to support the organization in examining the causes, consequences and implications of major security incidents through the proper capturing, analysis and dissemination of lessons learned across field operations, while empowering its operational staff to manage risks in a proactive manner.
- 2.7 As a **learning organization**, the ICRC:
- strengthens its capacity to **evaluate the outcomes of its activities** and learn from its successes and failures
 - **embeds evaluation** more firmly in its planning and result-based management systems
 - takes advantage of the increasing availability and collection of **relevant data**
 - **leverages a variety of evaluation methods**, including qualitative and quantitative approaches, with a view to having a greater operational impact and promoting institutional learning.

STRATEGIC ORIENTATION 3

WORKING WITH OTHERS TO ENHANCE IMPACT

Two of the key features of protracted conflicts are the growing incongruence between humanitarian needs and the capacity of traditional humanitarian actors to respond to and cover those needs; and the increased interdependence between the vulnerabilities created by conflict and violence and the structural fragilities of society, such as poverty, social exclusion, bad governance and the effects of climate change. The gaps between needs and response, and the complexities of the challenges that arise, cannot be addressed by a single approach or by one organization. Cooperation, complementarity and work between different stakeholders and actors have therefore become more essential than ever.

Cooperation, complementarity and work between different stakeholders and actors have therefore become more essential than ever.

In many contexts, broad acceptance by and proximity to people affected are determined by the ability to carve out and maintain humanitarian spaces, and the receipt of unearmarked funds for delivering services perceived as impartial, neutral and independent. The ICRC will pay particular attention to these crucial factors in framing operational and strategic partnerships with others to increase the impact of its activities. As the needs of populations affected grow in magnitude, complexity and interconnectedness, we should expect the ICRC to change its response and the way it works with others.

The ICRC will focus on the special relationship it has with other components of the Movement.

The careful delineation of areas and activities – those areas in which the ICRC will work directly on the basis of its mandated role, skills and resources; and those in which it will cooperate with partners to increase its impact – is a critical issue. The ICRC will focus on the special relationship it has with components of the Movement. It will also develop more cooperative strategies with international and local humanitarian organizations, the private sector and academia that are consistent with its principled approach. Finally, the ICRC will systematically consider experimentation and innovation with a range of partners whenever that is critical for achieving a greater impact and more durable solutions for people affected by conflict and violence.

Ciudad Serdán, Puebla, Mexico. These ICRC and Mexican Red Cross staff and volunteers take a break together in one of the areas where they provide assistance to migrants.



OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 Striving for **greater impact for people affected**, the ICRC takes the lead in orchestrating an **inclusive Movement response** during armed conflict and ensures **funding, reporting and accountability of coordinated Movement activities**. Alongside this, it increases the relevance and impact of principled Red Cross and Red Crescent action by **creating opportunities and systems** within its humanitarian response for National Societies to contribute specific and complementary expertise, knowledge and resources that address the unmet needs of people affected by armed conflict.
- 3.2 The ICRC recognizes the **importance of National Society development in delivering a more relevant and sustainable humanitarian response**, and therefore works to create **alliances of competent and experienced partners, including with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**, that deliver broad institutional development support with National Societies while focusing ICRC support on the areas of: Safer Access, IHL, Restoring Family Links, and the Fundamental Principles.
- 3.3 The ICRC increases its **capacity to shape debates and influence decision-making on humanitarian issues of concern** by building **communities of practice with front-line responders and creating coalitions with new and existing partners** – including National Societies, academia and the private sector – that employ **a principled humanitarian approach to protect** people affected.
- 3.4 The ICRC works with others to **facilitate access to tools and services that are not necessarily part of its existing response but that are regularly cited by people affected as important needs**. These include:
- access to education, connectivity and information
 - services that enable people and communities affected to develop their own prevention and protection strategies and strengthen their resilience to recover and sustain their lives and livelihoods.
- 3.5 The ICRC develops **diverse models and forms of engagement and partnerships with States** and other relevant stakeholders to secure broader and safer humanitarian access, and to achieve greater impact on converging issues of interest, with a particular **focus on contexts where the coverage of humanitarian needs, and where the ICRC's access, accessibility or acceptance, is significantly challenged or limited**.
- 3.6 The ICRC engages with a **more diverse range of stakeholders – including States, donors and investors, development actors and international financial institutions** – to elicit principled donorship that supports an impartial and independent response, and to explore, test and secure innovative and sustainable humanitarian financing solutions that go beyond grants and philanthropy and ensure impact-driven investments.

STRATEGIC ORIENTATION 4

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The greatest strengths and the most valuable assets of the ICRC and the Movement are their staff and volunteers. The ICRC's global workforce provides the organization not only with essential skills and knowledge, but also with an unwavering commitment to its humanitarian mission and action.

ICRC staff demonstrate their courage and dedication every day. They often sacrifice their safety and comfort to fulfil the ICRC's mission, very often in extremely challenging contexts. ICRC staff often have to deal with various aspects of the suffering caused by conflict and violence; and have to rely on their resilience and their internal reserves, and on institutional support networks, to maintain their well-being and motivation.

*ICRC staff demonstrate
their courage and
dedication every day.*

The ICRC is therefore committed to ensuring a safe and inclusive working environment in which the diversity of its global workforce is valued, and that enables ICRC staff members to listen to and connect with each other and with the people we strive to serve. This entails strengthening engagement, exchange and mutual respect amongst managers and staff to foster professional and personal development within the organization.

Gaza. Osama went through a tough time after he lost his legs, but he didn't lose his determination. For him, playing sports was the key to adjusting to his new situation.



OBJECTIVES

- 4.1 The ICRC ensures that its **staff can maintain a spirit of initiative and innovation and develop the technical skills and functional competencies** required to **translate its institutional ambitions and priorities** into realities, by developing a **People Strategy and roadmap** with a focus on 1) ensuring a culture of decision-making and 2) developing competencies in the areas of:
- integrity and accountability to populations affected
 - leadership and representing the ICRC
 - teamwork and collaboration
 - people and change management.
- 4.2 Engaged ICRC staff, leadership and governance share a **culture of integrity, mutual respect and collaboration** and foster the highest standards of conduct, including **compliance with the Code of Conduct** across all levels of the organization, with a focus on:
- the inclusion of integrity in the annual objective-setting of senior leadership
 - the development and delivery of specific learning initiatives on integrity.
- 4.3 The ICRC **implements policies and practices that are inclusive and that enable it to value and leverage the diversity of its global workforce** and that of the Movement including ensuring the ICRC strives to reach its **goal of gender parity (50:50) among its managers by 2022**, through the necessary means and actions.
- 4.4 The ICRC ensures that its **management teams include both resident and mobile staff, are diverse in expertise and gender**, and are clear in authority, thereby ensuring a more **efficient and decentralized decision-making culture** that is supported by the relevant horizontal and vertical processes.
- 4.5 The ICRC, in line with its duty-of-care obligations, ensures that staff can safely and securely carry out their work by **further developing its security and crisis management model and systems**, and by mainstreaming security risk management practices and tools across all levels of the organization, as elaborated under objective 2.6.

STRATEGIC ORIENTATION 5

EMBRACING THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Digital technologies and artificial intelligence are transforming the way people and organizations function in both the physical and virtual worlds. Digitalization is also altering the way States, NSAGs and other actors interact with populations and protect or restrict fundamental rights, and also how they manage security and conduct warfare. The global digital transformation is changing the nature of humanitarian action, particularly in relation to the digital dimensions of protection, trust and privacy-related issues. While we may not be able to predict where technological progress will lead us, we know that we must equip ourselves to understand its exponentially increasing impact on our environment, so that we can exploit the opportunities it offers and mitigate the risks it carries. The ICRC will transform and optimize its information environment; it will focus on digital accessibility and engagement with populations affected and other key stakeholders as critical elements to support its protection, assistance and prevention activities.

The digitalization of our systems and operational responses is not just a matter of tools or technological assets; it also relies on its privileges and immunities recognized under international and domestic law, the Fundamental Principles of the Movement and the ICRC's standard working modalities, particularly confidentiality and security of information.

It will also require new processes, new working methodologies and the delivery of new services with and for people and communities affected. It will affect the core of our organization and will entail major transformational investments that will last for years. This transformation and the necessary investments will need to be managed transversally and with discipline throughout the organization, and governed through strong, intelligent and consistent leadership. The ICRC will also have to provide specific support to staff members to ensure that we all understand how to use, leverage and manage the digital tools at our disposal to create a more impactful and agile humanitarian response.

Bengaluru, India. At the Enable Makeathon competition, the SoftBionics team demonstrates their prototype for an assistive device designed for people with disabilities in rural areas.



OBJECTIVES

- 5.1 The ICRC **increases digital opportunities for accessibility and engagement** for people affected by conflict and violence and other stakeholders and audiences, including by developing a platform and associated internal processes to enable people affected to securely upload, store and access digital information relating to their needs, especially in connection with restoring and/or maintaining contact with relatives and other loved ones.
- 5.2 The ICRC establishes the **relevant mechanisms to disaggregate the data** it collects about populations affected, with a particular focus on ensuring that vulnerabilities specific to gender, age and disability can be identified, so that it can provide a more relevant humanitarian response.
- 5.3 The ICRC **ensures that it can draw on the human and technical capacities necessary to generate, access, manage, analyse, and leverage the large amounts of internal and external data** required to inform and support its response and to enable its digital transformation.
- 5.4 The ICRC is a trusted manager of personal information on individuals in insecure environments and therefore applies data-protection, and digital, cyber, and information **security, standards that preserve the integrity, confidentiality and availability of information systems and data.**
- 5.5 Within the humanitarian ecosystem, the ICRC **influences other organizations to follow a humanitarian purpose-driven approach to the use of data concerning vulnerable individuals** affected by crises, while emphasizing that the collection and use of data on individuals is a risk factor in their safety, i.e. it stresses the importance of ‘doing no digital harm’.
- 5.6 The ICRC ensures **that the required transformational endeavours are systematically geared to sustaining, preserving and strengthening its core humanitarian competencies**, and its natural operational and structural agility, by establishing change management and control mechanisms that guarantee continuous alignment between innovative investments, organizational development initiatives and its human, administrative, logistical and financial capacities.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

**HUMANITY
IMPARTIALITY
NEUTRALITY
INDEPENDENCE
VOLUNTARY SERVICE
UNITY
UNIVERSALITY**






P. Napa/ICRC

The ICRC helps people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything it can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with its Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. The organization also seeks to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.



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