

Disaster Risk Management Policy

- from prevention to response and recovery

Introduction

Disasters can have devastating impacts on individuals and communities. The frequency, complexity and severity of impacts are likely to increase in the future due to factors such as climate change, displacement, conflict, rapid and unplanned urbanization, technological hazards and public health emergencies. At the same time, contexts are becoming more complex; countries experiencing disasters associated with natural hazards may simultaneously be affected by conflict or large-scale displacement.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and its member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies strive to reduce the impact of disasters. National Societies are uniquely placed to support people and communities with their extensive network of local branches and volunteers, their role as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field and their disaster management capacities in almost every country in the world.

Our top priorities in disaster risk management are to save lives, reduce suffering, and uphold human dignity. We seek to support individuals' and communities' own capacity to reduce risks, respond to disasters and recover. Our work in recovery also presents an opportunity to address future risks and vulnerabilities, such as promoting improved preparedness, climate change adaptation, safer infrastructure, strengthened societal systems, revitalized livelihoods, and protection of the environment. Together these activities aim to build the resilience of people and communities¹ towards future risks and shocks.

Scope

This policy covers our approach to all kinds of disasters, in all contexts, including fragile, protracted and conflict situations, in both urban and rural areas. It promotes integrated approaches so that all stages of the disaster risk management continuum are considered together in a coherent way, replacing the previous IFRC policies on Disaster Preparedness (1999), Emergency Response (1997), Post-emergency Rehabilitation (1999) and Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (2001).

It is a Federation-wide policy, and therefore applies to all National Societies and the IFRC Secretariat activities at local, national, regional and international levels. It is aligned with the Principles and Rules for Red Cross and Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance which govern National Societies and their IFRC Secretariat in the organization and coordination of international assistance. Relationships within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement)² are governed by a different framework, comprising the Statutes of the Movement, the Seville Agreement and its Supplementary Measures.

Definitions³

Disaster: A serious disruption of the functioning of a community that exceeds its capacity to cope using its own resources. There are many potential causes of such disruption, including natural and technological hazards, industrial accidents, mass movements of populations and infectious and contagious diseases, as well as various factors that influence the exposure and vulnerability of communities.

¹ See further the [IFRC Framework for Community Resilience](#)

² The Movement comprises the IFRC, ICRC and National Societies.

³ The definitions are inspired by the [definitions provided by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction](#) but adapted for the use of the IFRC.

Disaster Risk Reduction: Measures aimed at preventing new and reducing existing disaster risk.

Disaster Management: The organization, planning and application of measures preparing for, responding to and recovering from disasters.

Disaster Risk Management: The application of policies, strategies and other measures to prevent new disaster risk, reduce existing disaster risk and manage residual risk (through disaster preparedness, response and recovery), contributing to the strengthening of resilience and reduction of disaster losses.

Statement:

The following general operational principles underpin IFRC's approach to disaster risk management. National Societies and the IFRC Secretariat:

- Recognize the right of all people to both offer and receive humanitarian assistance based on the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.
- Undertake all disaster risk management activities complying with the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and other applicable instruments: the Principles and Rules for Red Cross and Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance, the Code of Conduct for International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, as well as relevant quality standards, in particular the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response and work towards the application of the Core Humanitarian Standard.
- Are fully cognizant of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the New Urban Agenda in developing our approaches to disaster risk management.
- Acknowledge that disasters occur in a variety of contexts, such as fragile, protracted and conflict situations and in public health emergencies. We will therefore strengthen our knowledge and skills in analyzing these evolving contexts to inform and guide operations and practices, working with National Societies and ICRC in accordance with their mandates, and with external partners.
- Recognize that the reduction of disaster risk, disaster response and support for recovery are first and foremost the responsibility of public authorities. National Societies will actively offer assistance to disaster affected people as an auxiliary to, and in a spirit of cooperation and complementarity with the public authorities.
- Commit to continual improvement of our performance to protect the environment and prevent pollution⁴, applying a "do no harm" approach.

The following specific commitments describe our approach to disaster risk management:

1. Place people affected by disasters in the centre of what we do

Affected communities and people are the best informed of their own situation and key agents in strengthening their resilience and responding to disasters. Therefore, we will ensure that they are at the

⁴ For example the Red Cross and Red Crescent Green Response work to strive to reduce the IFRC's environmental footprint.

centre of decision-making processes and lead and shape sustainable changes so that they emerge more resilient in the future. We will also identify those persons, households and communities most vulnerable to or affected by disasters as a basis for prioritizing location and focus of programming activities⁵.

Disasters have a different impact on men and women, as well as on different individuals and groups based on age, disability, nationality and other social, cultural and ethnic differences. As such, assessments, activities and programs should incorporate a gender and diversity analysis and should be designed and implemented in a culturally sensitive, participatory, inclusive and accessible way⁶ that respects and protects dignity and human rights. We also ensure that prevention and protection of vulnerable persons from sexual and gender-based violence as well as other forms of exploitation and abuse is essential in all our disaster risk management activities.

We will establish mechanisms for accountability to affected communities and ensure that our performance is measured from the perspective of the people we serve.

2. Invest in community preparedness and risk reduction

Climate-smart risk reduction is a very effective way to reduce the impacts of disasters and is an essential investment that reduces mortality and morbidity and protects community resources including livelihoods, built environment and nature.

We will anticipate disaster risks and raise awareness of disaster hazards through education, including using the Red Cross and Red Crescent youth and volunteer networks, encouraging vulnerable people to take preventative and preparedness actions. We will also monitor rumors, misconceptions and community concerns regarding hazards and risks.

We will improve the collection of risk data to strengthen a comprehensive Federation-wide risk analysis of hazards and their potential impacts in high risk areas and contribute to situational analysis for the broader humanitarian community before and after a disaster strikes. We will also support community-led disaster preparedness strategies that build on existing structures, practices, skills and coping mechanisms and ensure that information from forecasts, community-based epidemic surveillance and early warning systems can be accessed, understood and acted upon by local communities.

3. Strengthen organizational preparedness

It is essential to support capacity development of the local National Society and affected branches at all stages of the disaster risk management continuum, emphasizing National Society institutional preparedness for future disasters. This includes systematically assessing, measuring and analyzing the strengths, gaps and challenges of its response system (in areas such as timely decision-making, effective operational structure, internal communication, coordination, scale-up support services and delivery capacities)⁷. We will also incentivize taking no-regret early action by improving access to pre-agreed financing to respond ahead of a disaster, for example, by applying the forecast-based financing approach.

⁵ See further for example the [Enhanced Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment](#).

⁶ This can be facilitated through the implementation of the IFRC's "[Minimum Standards for Protection, Gender & Inclusion \(PGI\) in Emergencies](#)".

⁷ See the framework for [Preparedness for Effective Response for National Societies](#).

We will promote and carry out pre-disaster meetings and agreements, response and readiness plans at national and regional level ensuring participation of national governments, relevant external stakeholders, intergovernmental regional disaster management systems and Movement partners. We will also support governmental authorities to assess and strengthen their disaster risk management laws, policies, strategies and plans, encouraging the authorities to assign clear roles and responsibilities to the National Society, consistent with its auxiliary role.

4. Save lives and livelihoods by responding to disasters in an effective, coherent and timely manner with consideration for long-term effects of humanitarian response

We will respond to disasters based on needs at a relevant scale, focusing on a locally led response, utilizing the capacity of the National Society in the affected country and leveraging the collective capacity of the IFRC and Movement network. Our response will consider any impact on the local economy, environment and social structures, and we will ensure that the support provided does not contribute to tension or conflict and does not have negative longer-term consequences (“do no harm”).

We commit to the appropriate use of flexible delivery mechanisms for response and recovery outcomes, especially cash and voucher assistance and market-based approaches, taking into account existing social safety nets. These response options will be considered in all need assessments, programme design and planning with a commitment to increase the use of cash responses where appropriate and feasible.

We will protect staff, volunteers and individuals and communities with whom we work, including in our collection, storage and use of data, especially data which can identify individuals and vulnerable groups, and commit to abiding by the spirit of relevant data protection policies. When responding to the needs and vulnerabilities of displaced people, we will also consider the needs of the host population.

We recognize that, without proper mitigation measures, disasters and emergency operations might expose staff and volunteers of the National Society in the affected country to mental and physical stresses and cause damage to the National Society. It is essential to build the local capacity of the National Society, with priority to affected branches during the emergency to be able to cope and adapt to the situation.

Emergency support will continue until the acute threat to life and health has abated or, in situations of prolonged threat, until the needs can be more appropriately addressed within the framework of a recovery mechanism. We will ensure appropriate transition from response to recovery.

5. Provide the basis for longer-term recovery and strengthen resilience for the future

We will strengthen the quality and impact of our emergency response through early recovery assistance that supports people’s self-recovery, determined by people’s and communities’ own needs and priorities. This includes promoting joint planning and integrated programming in response and recovery, including, where applicable in the context, to strengthen the key inter-relationships between livelihoods, shelter, health, water and sanitation, the environment, protection activities, restoring family links and psycho-social support in affected communities. Integrated programming ensures that a holistic understanding of communities’ needs and capacities inform our operational and advocacy responses.

Medium and longer-term recovery and reconstruction design and actions will be built on local knowledge and skills and will be appropriate to local conditions. Activities must be sustainable by local communities or organizations, including ensuring that the cost of use, repair and maintenance of any materials or technology are locally affordable and do not destroy the environment.

We will develop risk management, transition and exit strategies as early as possible during response and recovery operations. The strategies will be based on needs and priorities, anticipated funding levels and the capacity of Red Cross and Red Crescent actors, in coordination with public authorities and others, to effectively and sustainably support planned activities. Strategies should also ensure that transition and exit occur in such a way that the National Society capacity is maintained or even strengthened.

6. Partner within the Movement and with others

We recognize that we do not work in isolation. Innovative partnerships inside the network and externally enable us to access a wide range of skills, competencies and experiences to add value to our own capacities.

We commit to working effectively within the coordination and cooperation structures with Red Cross and Red Crescent actors as our primary partners, and with the Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation (SMCC) initiative in situations in which National Societies, IFRC and ICRC are involved.

National Society coordination, engagement and influencing occur also with a wide variety of actors external to the Movement, including national, provincial and local authorities (including civil protection and military personnel), private sector and the broader humanitarian community. We will respect, encourage and support the development and inclusion of the local National Society in national and in-country coordination platforms and mechanisms when possible, including coordination and dialogue with political and military actors in accordance with the Fundamental Principles.

7. Maximize the leverage and influence of Red Cross Red Crescent value

The public, donors and partner organizations look to support the IFRC and its member National Societies through offers of assistance such as volunteering, donations and partnering. To expand the scope and reach of the support we provide, and make good on this trust from the public, we need to maximize these opportunities and offers of assistance. Red Cross Red Crescent advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy work will complement our programmes and services and will include action against stigma and discrimination of vulnerable people and promoting equal access to basic health care and disaster services. In strengthening our relationships with decisionmakers – governments in particular - we aim to have National Societies sit at the table when humanitarian decisions are made as well as to have a predictable and sustainable flow of resources for our humanitarian work.

We will develop clear methods to communicate with communities, media and the public on disaster risk management activities, timeframes and strategies to ensure that promises made are deliverable, activities are appropriate and sustainable, and adequate attention is given to less visible but highly devastating disasters.

8. Act with a strong focus on results and impact

When resources are entrusted to us to deliver assistance to those in a dire need, we need to make sure we provide value for money. This means being cost-effective, providing support that is appropriate and relevant

to the needs of the people we serve and able to present the results of our work. We will further strengthen our assessment, analysis and planning as the basis for timely decision-making and quality action that meet or exceed industry standards. We will systematically listen to, engage and communicate with affected communities, respond and act on feedback, and provide safe and equitable access and opportunities to participate in decision-making to ensure that we continuously improve the efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, sustainability and impact of our assistance. We will monitor our progress against clear performance indicators, which include disaggregated data (on sex, age, disability), and report on them from local to global level. We continue to learn by utilizing tools such as real-time evaluation, which are undertaken for major operations to identify successes and challenges so that we continually improve our performance.

Responsibilities

The leadership of the IFRC and of National Societies will ensure the policy's implementation. National Societies are expected to align their existing policy and guidance with it, with appropriate adaptation to their context. As required, tools and supporting frameworks or strategies will be developed or revised to be aligned with the policy.

This policy will be reviewed regularly, at the latest by the IFRC General Assembly in 2027.