# Reference Centre Guiding Principles

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INTRODUCTION

A reference centre (in some cases known as a resource centre) is a centre of expertise in a defined technical or thematic area. It is created by one or more Red Cross /Red Crescent National Societies ("National Society(ies)"), in partnership with the IFRC Secretariat. Reference centres embody the idea of shared leadership between the IFRC and National Societies with National Societies taking the lead in building and contributing knowledge and providing services to the Red Cross Red Crescent network globally or in a particular region. The benefits are numerous- the promotion of strong, sustainable National Societies, the strengthening of external facing humanitarian collaboration and ultimately the maximisation of collective humanitarian impact.

Note that these Guiding Principles apply to reference centres generally, but in case of inconsistency with the Founding Agreement for the reference centre, the Founding Agreement applies.

ESTABLISHMENT

A reference centre may be established in accordance with the following procedure:

• One or more National Societies express their interest to formally partner with the IFRC Secretariat based on shared leadership to provide a Secretariat service to the wider National Society membership at global or regional level in a defined technical or thematic area.

• The National Society(ies) shall submit a concept paper to the IFRC Secretariat (to the relevant Regional Director for Regional reference centres and to the USG Programmes and Operations in Geneva for Global reference centres) which will advise the National Society(ies) on alignment of the concept paper with IFRC strategies and priorities. The concept paper should include, but not be limited to, the following:
  o Explanation of the need for this additional or complementary technical or thematic capacity, expertise and service provision.
  o Summary of services to be provided.
  o Summary of past activities and achievements in the technical or thematic area to show capacity and expertise of the National Society/ies to provide the services identified.
  o Commitment to global level service provision (available to all National Societies) or regional level service provision (to all National Societies in the respective IFRC region).
  o A sustainable funding plan.

• Once it is in final form, the concept paper will then be submitted, via decision paper, to the IFRC USG Programmes and Operations, and subsequently the IFRC Secretary General for approval.

• Subject to the approval of the IFRC Secretary General, and where applicable, the IFRC Governing Board, the proposing National Society(ies) and the IFRC Secretariat (hereinafter referred to as the Founding Partners) shall sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or a partnership agreement to establish the reference centre, including specifying its activities and

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1 In this document the term reference centre is used to cover both terms and other variants.
2 Note that there can also be Reference Centres created without IFRC participation. These are outside the scope of the present document.
governance structure (hereinafter referred to as the Founding Agreement).

- A reference centre can operate under the legal identity of a National Society hosting the centre or as a separate legal entity under the laws of the country of establishment. It may also, in appropriate cases, operate under the legal identity of the IFRC. The IFRC and the proposing National Society(ies) shall agree on the appropriate legal structure for the reference centre.

- The hosting National Society may provide office space for the reference centre unless otherwise agreed by the Founding Partners.

- Services offered by the reference centre may include, but are not limited to, the following services:
  - Knowledge management and information sharing
  - Capacity building
    - Development and adaptation of tools and methodologies
    - Research
    - Technical exchange
    - Training
  - Research and innovation
  - Technical assistance and support
  - Operational assistance and support
  - Advocacy and promotion
  - Networking, partnership building and coordination.

- The IFRC will seek to ensure that reference centres can contribute to strategic policy development and to coordinate joint policy engagement where relevant.

- A reference centre adheres to the following statutory principles and regulations:
  - The Fundamental Principles of the Movement
  - The Statutes of the RCRC Movement
  - The Constitution of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
  - Relevant decisions and regulations of the Federation Governing Board and General Assembly, the International Conference and the Council of Delegates and other applicable Movement and/or Federation rules, regulations and policies, applying to the partners.
  - The Federation accountability framework
  - The Movement and Federation rules on coordination and cooperation
  - The rules and regulations on the use of the Movement’s emblems
  - The Seville Agreement and its Supplementary Measures.
  - Statutes, rules and regulations of the hosting National Society where the reference centre is legally part of the hosting National Society.
  - Statutes or other constituent documents of the reference centre.

- Based on expressed interest, a reference centre Founding Agreement may be amended to include additional National Society partners (“Subsequent Partners”).

- Subject to the above criteria governing its establishment and approval by the IFRC Secretary General, a national reference centre or a network may develop into a regional or global

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3 The key IFRC and Movement documents can be accessed on Fednet, http://rrcccconference.org/ or by request to the IFRC.
• **Location of reference centres**
  - Reference centres can have their headquarters in any country.
  - Where a reference centre wishes to establish a presence outside of its headquarters country, it should to the extent possible embed staff into existing IFRC structures and offices by secondment to or hiring by the IFRC. Where the reference centre has an alternative legal basis for working in the country, the IFRC may provide administrative services (such as the provision of office space and other administrative support) to reference centre staff. Reference centres may, alternatively, embed staff into the host National Society in country or base staff in the premises of other partners in country.
  - Before the IFRC will approve the secondment or hiring of Reference Centre staff in IFRC offices or the provision of office space to reference centre staff, the reference centre must provide written justification of the need for the staff member in that location to the IFRC USG, Programmes and Operations, for review and approval with relevant regional directors and technical focal points. The IFRC shall then enter into an agreement with the reference centre setting out the terms and conditions of the arrangement. Where the arrangement involves recruitment by the IFRC, the recruitment shall occur in accordance with IFRC human resources procedures, and funding for the position shall be provided by the reference centre in accordance with IFRC financial procedures.
  - Reference centre staff recruited by the IFRC for this purpose shall have a managerial reporting line to the IFRC Country/Regional Head and technical reporting line to the reference centre manager.

**GOVERNANCE**

• Subject to the status of a reference centre as an entity under the legal identity of a host National Society or as a separate legal entity the governance structure may comprise the following:
  - A Steering Committee, Board of Directors, General Assembly or a similar governance body. Each Founding Partner (National Society(ies) and the IFRC) will be equally represented, though certain Founding Partners may have veto rights in certain areas as set out in the Founding Agreement.
  - An optional technical or advisory group appointed by the governance body, which may include representatives from entities outside the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

• The governance body shall provide guidance on and oversight of key issues including policy, strategy, funding, promotion, business development and sustainability. Their responsibilities, set out in the Founding Agreement, will not be limited to, but may include:
  - Compliance with applicable legislation.
  - Compliance with all relevant Federation and Movement statutory principles and regulations and the Founding Agreement.
  - Alignment of the activities and working modalities of the centre with those of the IFRC Secretariat.

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4 This refers to situations where staff will be physically located in the region, rather than cases where staff, based elsewhere, support the region.

5 Secondment to the IFRC is subject to the IFRC Secondment Policy and to obtaining the required work permit in the particular duty station.
o Adoption of policies and strategies.
o Adoption of annual work plans and budgets.
o Approval of narrative and financial reports.
o Approval of partnerships with third parties and bilateral services.
o Adoption of fundraising strategies and activities.
o Recruitment and oversight of a reference centre manager/director/coordinator.

REFERENCE CENTRE MANAGEMENT

Reference centre management

- Day-to-day management shall remain with the director/manager/coordinator of a reference centre, who will be responsible for overall leadership, management, operational planning and provision of services.

Coordination and communication with IFRC

- A technical focal point for a reference centre will be identified within a relevant IFRC Secretariat business unit. The technical focal point will be responsible for ensuring the required communication and linkages with other technical or thematic departments either globally or regionally as appropriate. See Annex 1 for further detail.

Promotion and Resource Mobilisation

- A reference centre is responsible for its own resource mobilisation, promotion and representation, subject to the relevant provisions in the Founding Agreement.

- The IFRC shall assist reference centres in seeking funds for the activities of the centres through contacts with its international funding sources, such as other National Societies and international organisations.

- The IFRC Secretariat will give visibility to and promote the services of each reference centre as part of the IFRC Secretariat's own services in the respective technical or thematic areas.

- The IFRC Secretariat will create space for the expertise and specialised skill set on offer by reference centres in IFRC operations.

Representation and use of logo

- Where a reference centre is permitted to use the IFRC's name, logo or emblems, the Founding Agreement will include provisions concerning such use which shall be in accordance with the relevant Movement and IFRC rules and regulations.

- Subject to the Founding Agreement or as otherwise agreed with the IFRC Secretariat a reference centre may represent IFRC with reference to the relevant technical or thematic area given its shared leadership with the IFRC in this area.

Financial accounting and reporting standards
- Financial accounting and reporting standards of the reference centre must be consistent with the statutes of the reference centre and the laws of the country in which the reference centre was established.

Human Resources

- Reference centre personnel shall be contracted by the National Society, or the reference centre if a separate legal entity, as agreed by the governance body and subject to the reference centre statutes and respective local laws.

Provision of services by the Reference Centre

- Reference Centres are encouraged to have a business model that aims to provide the reference centre’s basic services as listed in the Founding Agreement (such as training, development of policy and guidelines etc.) to all of the IFRC membership in its defined geographical area, either global or regional, on a no-cost basis. Where the National Society receiving the services can pay for them, the reference centre may charge for the services if mutually agreed. Where the reference centre is not able to provide basic services free of charge, the reference centre will work with the IFRC and other RCRC partners to try to mobilise the resources needed to meet identified demands.

- Specifically commissioned services or the provision of broader support by reference centres may be subject to a fee to be agreed with the service requester, as long as the provision of these services does not jeopardize the ability of the reference centre to continue to provide basic services to all the membership.

Monitoring and evaluation

- Reference centres shall regularly monitor and evaluate their programs to ensure effectiveness and future viability.

Accountability

- Reference centres are accountable to ensure that they fulfil their functions consistently with the Founding Agreement, the statutes of the reference centre and applicable laws.

- The reference centres shall provide their annual reports and any other documentation specified in the Founding Agreement to the IFRC to enable IFRC to include these reports on IFRC web pages, and, if applicable, to report on reference centre activities to IFRC governance bodies.

IFRC Support to Reference Centres

Where separately agreed with the IFRC:

- The IFRC may provide administrative services to a reference centre including provision of office space.
• A reference centre may resource personnel as staff on loan or contracted by the IFRC to undertake dedicated coordination, communication or technical functions (including staff representing the reference centre in a regional location) on behalf of the reference centre.

• The activities and budgets of a reference centre may be included in the IFRC Secretariat’s plan and budget. If so, the reference centre shall be included in the IFRC planning process at the appropriate level through various mechanisms, including participation in planning meetings, communication through the technical focal point or direct requests to input to planning documents.

**Cooperation with ICRC and with external entities**

• Where a reference centre provides support to the ICRC, the director of the reference centre is responsible to ensure good coordination with components of the Movement including through the reference centre governance body.

• A reference centre may collaborate with relevant non-governmental, public and private organizations to further develop and provide services to a wider audience. Any such formal collaboration or partnership with such external entities is subject to the undertaking of appropriate due diligence procedures as advised by the governance body and appropriate contractual arrangements.

**Termination**

• Founding Partners (and any Subsequent Partners) shall together decide on the continued relevance and financial viability of a reference centre.

• Subject to the terms of the Founding Agreement and as determined by the governance body, a reference centre shall be terminated if:
  o Evaluations indicate the end of the life cycle of a reference centre, its stagnation or negative trends.
  o There is diminished interest from National Societies partners or inadequate available funding for further operation.
  o Other mechanisms to provide the required services are considered more effective and appropriate.

• The Founding Agreement shall contain provisions on closure of the reference centre, including specifying what happens to the assets of the centre once it is closed.
## Annex 1:
### Responsibilities in support of Reference Centres

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| Founding National Society(ies)                | • Based on research showing need and demonstrated expertise of the National Society in the technical or thematic area, requests the establishment of a reference centre via a concept paper  
• Subject to the legal status of the centre, provides staff for the reference centre  
• Provides the initial funding for the reference centre  
• Fundraises for the reference centre  
• Requests to terminate the centre in appropriate cases |
| IFRC Country Office/Cluster Office            | • Advises and liaises with Founding National Society(ies) on preparation of the concept note  
• Supports ongoing dialogue, coordination and joint activities between the IFRC office and reference centres  
• Invites technical support and advice from reference centres where relevant, including in annual planning processes |
| IFRC Regional Office (for regional reference centres) | • Performs a technical review of the concept note to ensure proposal is aligned with IFRC strategic and regional plans and priorities  
• Based on the concept note, drafts a decision paper for review by IFRC technical departments, USG Programmes and Operations and approval by the IFRC Secretary General. (Where the concept note originates at IFRC headquarters, the decision paper will be drafted at headquarters level.)  
• Supports ongoing dialogue, coordination and joint activities between the IFRC office and reference centres  
• Invites technical support and advice from reference centres where relevant, including in annual planning processes |
| IFRC Geneva (for global reference centres)     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| IFRC Secretariat Focal Points for Reference Centres (FP) | • Principal point of contact for day to day support between the Reference Centre and the IFRC Secretariat.  
• Generally, the FP is from the IFRC technical area that links with the Reference Centre activities and services (e.g. health, DM etc).  
• FP may be based at IFRC Headquarters or in the region where the Reference Centre is located.  
• FP liaises regularly with the Reference Centre and facilitates coordination with other IFRC colleagues and regions, including other technical focal points (e.g. RM, monitoring and evaluation, communications, human resources etc) and knowledge sharing focal points.  
• FP facilitates contact between the Reference Centre and National Societies and promotes the work of Reference Centres towards National Societies and other partners.  
• FP also coordinates Reference Centre involvement in the IFRC planning process. |
| IFRC Secretariat Knowledge Sharing Coordinators | • Focal points from the IFRC Policy, Strategy and Knowledge Department (Geneva or field), responsible for day to day support to Reference Centres specifically in the area of knowledge sharing- both between Reference Centres and with National Societies and other partners- to promote the work of the Reference Centre. |
| IFRC Global File Holder                        | • Oversees the activities of the various FPs and ensures there is a consistent                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

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for all Reference Centres (IFRC Operational Movement Coordination and Integration Team)

- Responsible for overall liaison with IFRC senior management on Reference Centre issues.
- Assists the IFRC Secretary General in preparing documents for IFRC governance bodies concerning Reference Centres.
- Drafts policy and process documents for Reference Centres and ensures alignment with IFRC policies, rules and Strategic Plan.
- Coordinates a yearly Reference Centre conference and regular teleconferences to maintain momentum, share the latest developments, promote synergies and coordination between Reference Centres and with the IFRC Secretariat.
- Shares reports from the annual meetings with all participants and other stakeholders.
- Disseminates all decisions of the Governing Board relating to Reference Centres to the Reference Centres and to the IFRC secretariat focal points.
- Ensures that Reference Centre Annual Reports and key publications, tools and guidance notes are made available on the IFRC public website.
- Ensure that Reference Centre evaluations and audits occur periodically, in consultation with relevant IFRC technical colleagues.

IFRC USG Programmes and Operations

- IFRC Representative on the Reference Centre governance body
- On behalf of the Secretary General, participates in the governance of the Reference Centre and thereby oversees its work
- Provides the Secretary General with any information or documents needed to report to IFRC Governance bodies on Reference Centres.
- Ensures alignment of Reference Centres with IFRC priorities, rules, IFRC Strategic Plan and decisions of the IFRC Governing Board and General Assembly.
- Ensures that Reference Centre progress reports and annual reports are of a high quality before finalisation.

IFRC Secretary General

- Receives briefings and provides strategic direction to Reference Centres via the IFRC USG Programmes and Operations
- Considers requests for establishment of new Reference Centres, and approves, subject to Governing Board approval in appropriate cases
- Reports to the Governing Board on Reference Centres

IFRC Governing Board

- Approves the establishment of new IFRC Reference Centres
- Receives reports on Reference Centres
- Decides on strategic issues in accordance with its Constitutional functions, including on Reference Centre issues.
1. **Abbreviations/acronyms**

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