

# Ethical guidelines for our communication

May 2021

# Introduction

- The Swedish Red Cross is part of a global movement to help in crisis and disaster. Communication is a central part of this work; to provide information and advice to affected people and to mobilize financial resources and personnel.
- Our communication must not do any harm and must build trust. Not do any harm means that we show respect and that we do not do anything that negatively affects the situation for those we work for. We build trust by being honest and transparent in communication with donors, members and volunteers, i.e. we provide a picture that reflects the facts.
- We have worked for a long time on ethical guidelines for our communication. The summary on the following pages is an update made in 2021, based on, among other things, interviews with employees and a review of our material.
- Working with communication is complex, because everyone interprets images and texts differently. Our guidelines aim at learning and helping us develop. We continuously test and analyse new perspectives.
- The industry association Giva Sweden's ethical guidelines for fundraising from the donor's perspective complement our guidelines as well as our brand platform.

# Three ethical pillars

## **We are honest and transparent**

Our starting point is to reflect situations as they really are. We let people talk about their lives, in their own words. We do not exaggerate or diminish anyone's experience, or our own efforts, and put the story in context.

## **We show our diversity**

We highlight the diversity of people represented in the global Red Cross and Red Crescent movement. We challenge ingrained patterns and stereotypical notions of how people are portrayed.

## **We care about people's safety**

We have a responsibility to the people portrayed by us. Their safety must never be jeopardized.



*Severe floods hit Sudan in 2020. Our volunteers helped to evacuate.*

# 1. We never do this

- We do not show pictures of dead people.
- We do not show pictures of people who are unconscious that can be identified.
- We do not show pictures of people in situations that are not perceived as respectful, such as children lying in dirty sheets or with flies on their faces.
- No one appears alone in a difficult crisis. People who suffer from malnutrition or are very vulnerable in other ways should be presented in a context where it is clear that help is available, and this is especially important for children.
- We do not show people naked. Genitals, the lower abdomen or breasts should not be exposed (except for breastfeeding women where nipples are not visible).



## 2. From victim to actor

We always portray people with dignity. We want to portray people as actors in their own lives and not just as passive victims in need of emergency assistance, without any opportunity for change. We talk about challenges and needs when the crisis occurs to create commitment, but always carry this perspective with us.



*Nur Begum was nine years old when the family was forced to flee Myanmar to Bangladesh in 2017. She says that she misses her home, especially the school and the family's animals.*



*The Abouzid family's escape from war-torn Syria split the family and left deep scars. With support from the Red Cross in Hedemora, the family is now reunited and living a good life together (2020).*



*Chantal Mambala in Congo-Kinshasa walks a long way every day to collect water or harvest. The Red Cross is on site and helps with e.g. water supply, care and efforts against sexual violence (2019).*

### 3. Everyone has a voice

We strive to put our stories in context and let them be based on people's own stories. More people should be able to express themselves in their own words about their situation.

*Marcelinne Zaina lives in Congo-Kinshasa. She stands by a water pump built by the Red Cross and talks about what it means for women's safety in the village - they do not have to go on dangerous hikes to springs in the mountains where the risk of abuse is high (2019).*



## 4. Everyone has a name

We primarily choose pictures and stories where people are named.

*Malak Mohammad Saad lives in Aden, Yemen. She collects water from one of the Red Cross water stations.*



## 5. Transparency

When we portray people for fundraising purposes, we should always be able to tell afterwards that the person in question has received our help, if asked questions. It is a bonus if we can describe what the help looked like and what it contributed to.



*Some of Aziza Abdallah's 7 children in the opening of their tent in an informal refugee camp in Akkar, northern Lebanon. The family has moved here from Syria and the Red Cross is on site to help with food, health information and much more.*

## 6. A picture of the whole

The stories we use must be representative of the situation/ disaster/group of people depicted.

*Many people who fled to Lebanon from Syria live in neglected neighbourhoods and in abandoned buildings, such as here in Saida.*



## 7. Inclusion over stereotypes

We work actively for inclusion and not to get caught up in stereotypes in our stories and images. We prioritize images where the person who helps comes from the same area/has the same background as the person who receives help.



*Food distribution in refugee camps in Iraq.*

## 8. Safety first

The safety of the person portrayed by us is our highest priority. This means that we always follow established procedures regarding legitimate interest, consent, portrayal of children and anonymisation in cases where this is required.

*Amina in Yemen suffers from malnutrition and gets help at one of our clinics. Here she is fed by her mother.*



## 9. Erasure

We erase images from our archives if we become aware that the person has died since the image was taken, unless the image itself has historical value and should be used only for this purpose.

## 10. Images age

We are careful with images that are not current and always use these in a context, for example to describe a historical event and a type of event.

We strive to ensure images are as up-to-date as possible, in order to contribute to the greatest possible authenticity. After 5 years, we believe that images are out of date.

*Volunteer in Syria carries children. Unclear date.*



## 11. Collaboration internally

We get help from colleagues with local knowledge, in case of uncertainty about whether and how a picture or story can be used.

KOMIN's image council follows up guidelines and makes decisions in difficult questions about images and stories based on a risk assessment.

