

Protection, gender and inclusion policy



Introduction

This policy sets out the approach of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to addressing issues of protection, gender and inclusion: meeting the aim of Strategy 2030, as articulated through the IFRC secretariat's Agenda for Renewal.

In seeking to remain true to the obligations derived from the Fundamental Principles and from the Statutes of our Movement, the members of the IFRC network¹ strive for a world in which everyone's needs are met and their rights are fulfilled: everyone is treated fairly and with dignity, everyone has equal access to opportunities, everyone can participate in making decisions for their own lives, everyone's voices are heard, and everyone is safe from harm.

We can achieve this by understanding their causes, risks and consequences. We acknowledge the real and overwhelming evidence that inter-personal and self-directed violence occurs in all parts of the world and is exacerbated by crisis, conflict and disasters. We see that discrimination is intersectional and recognise the many factors by which people are structurally and socially marginalized, and the compounded effects this has on their lives, wellbeing and safety.

Hence, consideration and action on protection, gender and inclusion (PGI) needs to be an integral part of all that we do as the IFRC network. We must ensure the **protection** of people from all forms of violence, harm, abuse, and exploitation. We must strive for the meaningful **inclusion** of all people in their communities. Our approach recognises that violence, discrimination, and exclusion are inseparably linked, and that to effectively address the causes, risks and consequences of any one of these issues, we need to address them together. We must put considerations of **gender and diversity** front and center of our work to pursue equality of power, opportunities and access to resources and services.

This requires understanding and responding to the ways in which gender and all other aspects of diversity affects the experience of people of any sexual orientation, gender- identity, expression and sex characteristics, of all ages, abilities and backgrounds. By advancing equality and building on the self-determined priorities, capacities and resources of all individuals and their communities, the IFRC can contribute to their empowerment, self-sufficiency, fair treatment, and sustainable development, working towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, to which our Strategy 2030 contributes.

The policy demonstrates the IFRC network's commitment to preventing, mitigating, and responding to violence, discrimination, and exclusion through strengthening its institutional capacity, through programmes and operations, and through advocacy, partnerships and collaboration.

Adherence to this policy will require more than technical steps; it will require resources and a real transformation of our traditional power structures, our accountability processes, institutional cultures, and behaviour. We are committed to make that transformation happen.

¹ IFRC network is a collective term meaning the IFRC and its member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The IFRC refers to the international organization created by National Societies as an independent legal entity separate from its National Societies, IFRC Secretariat refers to the executive arm of the IFRC, based in Geneva and with regional, country cluster and country offices.

Scope

This policy, which replaces the IFRC Gender and Diversity policy (2019), applies to all National Societies and the IFRC in all aspects of our work. It sets out our collective understandings and commitments to protection, gender, diversity and inclusion. Specific operational strategies, frameworks and tools shall be developed to support its implementation.

Definitions

Protection is about keeping people safe from harm. It aims to ensure that the rights of individuals are upheld by preserving the physical, psychological, and emotional safety, integrity, and dignity of those at risk of, or affected, by violence, discrimination, and exclusion.²

Violence: The use of force or power, either as an action or omission in any setting, threatened, perceived or actual against oneself, another person, a group, a community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in death, physical injury, psychological or emotional harm, mal-development or deprivation.³

Identity-based violence: Any act of violence by individuals, groups or societies based on actual, perceived or ascribed aspects of an individuals' identity such as gender, ethnic origin, nationality or citizenship, age, disability, language, political opinions, religious beliefs, social background, sexual orientation, physical appearance and colour. Identity-based violence is facilitated and exacerbated by structures, norms, and laws that condone or promote (explicitly or tacitly) discriminatory attitudes and practices.

Gender refers to an aspect of people's socially determined identity that relates to *masculinity and femininity* – it is not binary. Gender roles vary significantly between cultures and can change over time (including over the course of an individual's lifetime). Social and structural expectations to gender strongly influence people's social role, power, rights and access to resources. The IFRC network fully respects the choice of any individual to define their own gender-identity.

Diversity refers to the full range of different social backgrounds and identities that make up populations. It includes, but is not limited to, gender, ethnic origin, nationality or citizenship, age, disability, language, political opinions, religious beliefs, social background, sexual orientation, physical appearance and colour.

Inclusion refers to reducing inequalities based on social backgrounds, identities, roles and power relations. Providing inclusive services means giving equitable access to resources for all. In the long term, inclusion also focuses on facilitating access to opportunities and rights for all by addressing, reducing and ending exclusion, stigma and discrimination.

Intersectionality refers to the fact that individuals have several layers to their identities, such as gender, ethnic origin, nationality or citizenship, age, disability, language, political opinions, religious beliefs, social background, sexual orientation, physical appearance and colour that woven together. People suffer discrimination against a combination of these factors. An intersectional perspective

² This definition elaborates on the IFRC's specific focus of implementing the broad definition of protection for all humanitarian actors adopted by the IASC and accepted by the Movement: *"all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law)"*.

³ From the [IFRC Strategy for Violence Prevention, Mitigation and response](#)

emphasizes the importance of looking at these forms of discrimination together and at the same time to understand their compound effects on the individual.

Safeguarding for the IFRC Network refers to our responsibility in taking action to: keep people safe from any form of harm caused by the misuse of power by making sure that our staff, volunteers, programmes and communications do no harm to children and adults, nor expose them to abuse or exploitation. Safeguarding also includes protecting staff from harm and inappropriate behaviour such as sexual harassment.⁴

Statement

The IFRC network is **“driven by needs and informed by rights”**. This means that we seek to ensure that people in need are fully protected and included in line with their entitlements under international and domestic law. Our work is informed by and supports the fulfilment of relevant legal rights, including those established by international human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law. However, it is the needs of those affected, rather than upholding legal rights *per se* or holding duty-bearers to account, that determines what we do and how we do it.

We commit to guard against all discrimination in all our actions, and to promote the value of a diverse and inclusive society with gender equality. We recognize that there are often different views within communities about these issues. We will be respectful of these differences, but we will not be deterred from our commitments as they are based on the Fundamental Principles.

The IFRC network promotes a **person-centred approach** in all efforts to prevent, mitigate and respond to violence, discrimination and exclusion. This means listening to, understanding and respecting what people think at all times, and demonstrating adaptation for the perspective, autonomy, experience and need of the individual(s) in question. When responding to violence particularly, this means applying the **survivor-centred approach**.⁵

To achieve these commitments and goals, National Societies and the IFRC shall:

Institutional capacity

- Appropriately **reflect** the makeup of the communities we work with; and be relevant to people in need of our protection, assistance and support by ensuring **diverse representation** among members, volunteers, intervention or surge teams, staff and leadership.
- Continuously **analyse⁶ and monitor organizational protection, gender, diversity and inclusion issues**, including the gender and diversity composition of human resources at all levels (governance, management, staff and volunteers). This data will be analysed considering potential barriers to equal opportunities, diversity inclusion and misuse of power related to decision making within our institutions.
- Commit to ensure that **leadership teams and governing bodies** are comprised of no more than two-thirds of one gender. We will also ensure that the IFRC Secretariat reflects diverse and inclusive global representation at all its levels.

⁴ Safeguarding aims to prevent harm in the following areas: i) Sexual abuse and exploitation (SEA) of children and adults by anyone working for IFRC or a member National Society; ii) Other forms of abuse e.g. physical, psychological or emotional, financial and/ or material, discriminatory, organisational abuse and modern slavery of children and adults by anyone working for IFRC or a member National Society; iii) Harm caused by our programmes and communications that we fund through our partners (including other National Societies, the IFRC and ICRC); and iv) Sexual harassment in the workplace.

⁵ A survivor-centred approach creates a supportive environment in which the survivor's rights and wishes are respected, their safety is ensured and they are treated with dignity and respect. This approach is defined by four guiding principles: 1) Safety, 2) Confidentiality, 3) Respect and 4) Non-discrimination.

⁶ For example by using the IFRC Gender and Diversity Organisational Assessment Toolkit.

- Examine and **understand our own dynamics of power, privilege, and unconscious bias** in order to ensure a **culture of inclusion and diversity**.
- Maintain a **safe and nurturing workplace** in all National Societies and the IFRC Secretariat by creating mechanisms and procedures for safeguarding and through activities such as trainings and establishing policy and regulations on protection, gender and inclusion; prevention of sexual harassment; child protection and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Take necessary steps to ensure that our organisations actively **promote equitable opportunities** through initiatives such as equal remuneration for equal work, anonymized recruitments and mentoring systems, and as far as feasible, maternity and paternity leave, paid whenever possible.
- Include capacity strengthening in **protection, gender, diversity and inclusion mainstreaming** as part of institutional development programs with special attention to staff, management and leadership training on analysis skills.
- Include relevant protection, gender, diversity and inclusion-sensitive approaches and learning materials in all **staff and volunteer capacity strengthening** initiatives at national, branch and community level.

Programmes and operations

- Incorporate a **protection, gender, diversity and inclusion analysis** in all of our programmes, operations, services and tools in order to ensure dignity, access, participation and safety. This is done by analysing the specific needs and risks for persons of any gender, sexual orientation, age, colour, disability, socio-economic and legal status, faith, nationality and ethnic origin. This analysis will cover the full management cycle, from assessment to planning, monitoring and data collection, evaluation and reporting.
- Ensure that all programmes and operations **integrate measures to address the specific needs and risks** for different individuals and groups, by implementing the recommendations of the protection, gender, diversity and inclusion analysis and utilizing the IFRC's "Minimum Standards for Protection, Gender & Inclusion (PGI) in Emergencies". Particular attention should be paid to:
 - sexual and gender-based violence (including sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian actors) in all programmes and operations⁷.
 - all forms of violence towards children
 - trafficking in persons
 - violence and exclusion towards people with disabilities
 - community / communal violence
 - any other form of identity-based violence – including racist, faith-based and other violence linked to perceived or actual differences between people, based on the analysis of each individual context
- Ensure **community engagement and accountability** to acknowledge people's self-determined priorities, especially focusing on the most vulnerable to discrimination, exclusion and violence.

⁷ [Resolution 3, 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent \(2015\), Sexual and gender-based violence: Joint action on prevention and response.](#)

- Ensure that **specialised staff working on protection, gender and inclusion issues are recruited with sufficient technical knowledge and experience** to adequately supervise programmes and operations, ensure appropriate professional standards and support all staff and volunteers in applying their core competencies to mainstream protection, gender and inclusion and the “do no harm” principle. Ensure that the competencies of PGI staff are continuously improved.
- Undertake **specific programmes and activities** to promote protection, diversity inclusion, equality, open-minded attitudes towards gender and diversity and to develop interpersonal skills such as critical thinking, non-violent communication, empathetic listening and mediation.

Advocacy, partnerships and learning

- Engage in humanitarian diplomacy to **support people's dignity, access, participation and safety** and ensure that the voices of people with diverse identities are heard and that their specific needs and rights are met. This includes incorporating diverse perspectives in developing humanitarian diplomacy initiatives on other topics.
- Persuade decision-makers and opinion leaders to act, always, in the interests of people in vulnerable and risky situations by **protecting their equal rights and ensuring their equal access** to humanitarian services, including:
 - addressing the **specific needs and protection risks** of women, girls, men, boys, sexual and gender minorities, people with disabilities and those from other diverse backgrounds.
 - ensuring a **survivor-centered approach** to prevent, mitigate and safely respond to discriminatory and identity-based violence such as sexual and gender-based violence, advocating that states and communities acknowledge that such violence is common and promoting preventative and preparatory actions even before incidents are reported.
 - Integrating specific attention to protection, gender and inclusion issues in disaster laws and policies and revising any **public policies or practices** that lead to violence, discrimination or exclusion.
 - Portray and promote diversity and equality in **the communications and representation** of National Societies and the IFRC Secretariat.
- **Develop partnerships, collaboration and learning with actors inside and outside the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement** to ensure coherent and complementary approaches to protection, gender and inclusion.

Responsibilities

The leadership of National Societies and the IFRC shall ensure this policy's implementation. National Societies are expected to align their existing policy and guidance with it, with appropriate adaptation to their contexts.

Tools for operationalizing this policy include the IFRC, Operational Framework for Protection, Gender and Inclusion, IFRC Minimum Standards for Protection, Gender and Inclusion in Emergencies, the Protection, Gender and Inclusion Organisational Assessment, and related frameworks such as the Movement Strategic Framework for Disability Inclusion and the Strategic Framework for Inclusive Programming. As required, the tools and supporting frameworks will be reviewed and revised to align with this policy.

This policy will be reviewed regularly, at the latest by the IFRC General Assembly in 2029.