

Volunteering Policy

Introduction

Voluntary service is a fundamental principle of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Strategy 2030 emphasizes volunteering as one of the key transformations required to respond to future challenges. Through this policy the IFRC network commits to re-imagining volunteering and to taking measures to generate a healthy and sustainable increase in the engagement, motivation and retention of volunteers in National Societies, including ensuring the safety, security and wellbeing of volunteers.

While we are collectively committed to work towards a re-imagination of volunteering, we recognize that volunteering is constantly changing. The variety of ways people want to volunteer are rapidly transforming, and the avenues in which people can engage with social and humanitarian causes are also changing. ‘Brand loyalty’ to one humanitarian organization is becoming less significant. Participation patterns and motivations will likely continue to change, also related to the technological development and connectedness.

In some contexts, people are volunteering for shorter periods of time and want faster access to making an impact. Volunteer development, including recruitment and management, needs to be proactive in adapting to the skills and interests of volunteers rather than serve as a reactive network. The fact that the world is changing at a fast pace makes it more critical that we address these issues in an innovative way.

IFRC Volunteering Vision¹

The IFRC network strives to be a global network that nurtures voluntary action to deliver dynamic, flexible, and value-based humanitarian services and to serve people and communities in need, locally, globally and across generations, in line with our Fundamental Principles.

This voluntary action is supported by a leadership that creates and measures the enabling conditions for inclusive, safe and secure, and innovative engagement, and provides opportunities for a diverse group of volunteers, representing the diversity of their own countries, to learn from each other and act together, locally and across the globe.

Scope

¹ Adopted by the 43rd IFRC Governing Board

The purpose of this policy is to set our collective commitment to volunteering within the IFRC network and it applies to all National Societies, and the IFRC Secretariat. It should also inspire and guide other partners who engage with Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers, and it could be a model for other organizations to adapt this policy according to their needs. The policy replaces the previous IFRC Volunteering Policy (2011). The policy draws from the Volunteer Charter, adopted by the General Assembly in 2017 and the Council of Delegates in 2019, the study of the implementation of the 2011 Volunteering Policy by National Societies, the Global Review on Volunteering, and is framed by Strategy 2030. This policy should be considered in relation to the National Society Development Policy, the Gender and Diversity Policy, the Youth Policy and the Guidance for National Society Statutes. Key outcome indicators are included as an annex to the policy to enable the monitoring and evaluation of progress in the policy implementation at branch, national and global level. This policy is complemented by a toolkit of practical solutions to implement the different elements of the policy.

Definitions

A Red Cross Red Crescent volunteer² is a person who carries out volunteering activities or services, out of their free will and not by a desire for material or financial gain, on behalf of the IFRC Network, occasionally or regularly and always working in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Volunteer management refers to the people development process that creates an enabling environment which promotes, recruits, maintains, innovates and motivates volunteer action inspired by the mission of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Volunteer management includes the management of volunteers in programmes, the design of volunteer tasks, based on the skills of volunteers, and ensuring that volunteers have the essential means and training to perform their tasks safely.

New forms of volunteering include creative and innovative forms of volunteering, such as but not limited to digital volunteering, spontaneous volunteering, micro volunteering, online campaigning, skilled volunteering, corporate volunteering, swarm volunteering, self-organizing volunteering or combinations of all of these³.

Policy Statement

The following general operational principles underpin the IFRC network's approach to volunteering.

All National Societies and the IFRC Secretariat shall:

- **Comply with national legislation:**
States regulate the volunteering sector directly and indirectly through legislation. National Societies must ensure that relevant country legislation regulating volunteering

² National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have different ways of engaging volunteers who are:
Directly engaged on humanitarian action and who deliver services, in person and/or online;
Primarily in Governance positions;
Skilled professionals engaged in pro-bono work for a National Society;
At times members of the organization who only contribute with financial resources.

³ Examples of the above are available at the Volunteering Alliance webpage

is followed. In addition, the IFRC guides National Society volunteering through international resolutions and policies for local adaptation and National Societies should adhere to these global commitments. Furthermore National Societies, as auxiliaries to their public authorities in the humanitarian field, engage with governments to promote legislation that creates an enabling environment for volunteering.

- **Ensure that volunteers participate in the programme development and in the development of the National Society in general:**

It is essential that volunteers are involved in the decision making and, in the design, development and evaluation of programmes in which they are involved. Volunteers, as key stakeholders of the National Society, should be given an opportunity to play a role in their governance through participation on boards and other governance committees and to become members of their National Societies, as appropriate. This will allow a stronger connection of the National Society with the communities and enhance accountability and transparency.

- **Promote inclusive and culturally appropriate volunteering:**

In each context, volunteering is shaped by particular social, cultural, political, economic and religious factors. National Societies are responsible to engage volunteers in line with local volunteering cultures and to promote them to their partners who engage with volunteers.

- **Create learning opportunities for volunteers:**

National Societies should ensure a culture of learning for and from volunteers and members. This can be done through different forms of learning, such as specific training programs (for example on the application of Fundamental Principles), think tanks, networking, analysis of humanitarian trends and challenges and briefings and debriefings from the humanitarian action and services provided. National Societies should create coaching and mentoring models in support of leadership development, recognizing and strengthening volunteers' professional and personal competencies.

- **Measure and recognize the volunteering contributions:**

Successful volunteer management includes creating a simple volunteering tracking system which enables the systematic appreciation and gratitude to volunteers and the measurement of each form of volunteering contribution, including service delivery, administrative volunteering work, volunteering in governance as well as other specialized volunteering.

- **Ensure fair volunteering engagements:**

Volunteers should neither gain nor lose economically due to their voluntary activity: this means clearly differentiating between paid staff who receive a salary and volunteers who are reimbursed for their actual expenses. Volunteers should not be used as a substitute for paid workforce. When there is a need or an opportunity for a volunteer with the National Society to carry out paid work, the National Society should recognise this change in status and ensure that the employment complies with the relevant laws of the country. Volunteering time commitments should be mutually agreed between National Societies and volunteers. This agreement aims to ensure that the time commitment of the volunteer is not negatively impacting their wellbeing, especially in exceptional situations such as emergencies.

- **Promote volunteering to build value-based societies:**

Volunteering should be portrayed as a contribution from the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to build a more value-based society in their countries. By building a culture of tolerance, peace, mutual respect, solidarity and care through volunteering, National Societies can demonstrate how volunteering can foster development and resilience.

The following commitments further describe our approach and commitment to specific aspects of volunteering which emphasize the changing landscape of volunteering.

All National Societies and the IFRC Secretariat shall:

- 1. Make volunteer motivation an integral part of volunteer management**

National Societies shall monitor, on a regular basis, the level of engagement, motivation and wellbeing of their volunteers and further strengthen evidence-based management practices by taking the necessary actions to improve volunteers' motivation.

- 2. Ensure volunteer safety and protection in a comprehensive way**

The duty of care for volunteers is a National Society's primary responsibility. Volunteer safety and protection needs to be addressed in a comprehensive way, including:

Safety nets: It is the duty of care of all National Societies to provide the relevant safety nets, including adequate training, mechanisms to prevent and address issues such as harassment and exploitation, personal protective equipment depending on the nature of the volunteer work and insurance, for volunteers who engage with the Red Cross Red Crescent.

Risk management: National Societies continuously review potential threats to their volunteers to ensure that plans, programmes and activities include measures to reduce and mitigate these risks. National Societies shall carry out continuous volunteer risk management, by identifying, analysing, evaluating and monitoring risk factors.

Security and safety training: National Societies shall provide all volunteers with the necessary safety-related training, starting with the proper understanding of what constitutes applying the Fundamental Principles and what sort of ethical behavior are expected from volunteers. Training on safety and security measures in operations should be organised and assessments on volunteers' abilities to undertake particular functions and roles should be undertaken. Refresher courses should be provided to guarantee volunteers' continued readiness and up-to-date knowledge.

Psychosocial support: Volunteers are often exposed to risks, traumatic events and work under stressful conditions which affects their mental health and psychosocial well-being. As local actors, they are often themselves faced with the same vulnerabilities of the affected population they assist. National Societies shall systematically provide all volunteers with effective access to psychosocial support and equip them with the necessary skills, tools and supervision needed.

- 3. Ensure that National Society's volunteer base reflects the diversity of the country's population**

National Societies shall actively recruit volunteers, irrespective of, gender, ethnic origin, nationality or citizenship, geographic location, age, disability, language, political opinions, religious beliefs, social background, sexual orientation, physical appearance, color, or any identity factors. The recruitment of volunteers should be based on their potential and competencies. This recruitment approach requires removing physical, economic, social and cultural barriers to create space for everyone to be able to contribute through volunteering for the National Society.

National Societies should undertake targeted engagement with under-represented groups by effective and culturally appropriate communication with new and diverse communities, by developing human resource policies that foster diversity, by setting inclusion targets, and by establishing physical offices or spaces within new or emerging communities.

4. Invest in volunteer data management systems

National Societies shall strengthen their approaches to data, to ensure volunteers are effectively onboarded, managed, engaged, accredited and insured. In order to be fit for purpose, volunteer data management systems have to be structured around harmonized ways of capturing, processing, and sharing data internally, regardless of the type of the system, in order to support National Societies in evidence-based decision-making, and to share accurate data to the IFRC. Data management systems should be simple, flexible and agile, balancing volunteer-oriented approaches and the need to deal with volunteering management in a standardized way. National Societies need to ensure proper data protection of all volunteers.

5. Develop volunteering approaches which are more attuned to new and flexible forms of volunteering

National Societies should adjust the different forms and depth of volunteer engagement as required by the changes in volunteering. National Societies shall create systems and processes which are more agile for volunteers to join their organization and to contribute in different ways.

National Societies shall focus their attention on catalysing, mobilising and convening people-led action through volunteerism. They should develop more open models, that allow lighter engagement, less control and more action dedicated to providing resources, tools, skills, expertise, platforms and spaces where people can create and implement the change they want to see in the world. National Societies should provide a multitude of creative supports that help people take control over action focusing on causes and impact. They should be proactive in adapting to the skills and interests of volunteers by developing new approaches to policies, recruitment and management of volunteerism.

National Societies should expand national volunteer models to include a distributed network of volunteers across borders co-creating and driving impact together. Volunteers, branches and initiatives should be connected beyond National Societies borders and develop joint campaigns, innovative projects and collaborative action to address common issues. National Societies should explore collaboration opportunities with other organizations and the private sector.

Responsibilities

The leadership of National Societies and the IFRC, including its Governing Board, shall ensure this policy's implementation. National Societies are expected to align their approaches to volunteer experience and engagement practices to this policy, with appropriate adaptation to their contexts.

National Societies are encouraged to collaborate with sister National Societies and other organizations in the exchange of knowledge, experiences and resources focused on volunteering development.

National Societies need to provide the appropriate financial and human resources to make sure that volunteering is not taken for granted but nurtures the spirit of volunteerism in their communities.

The IFRC Secretariat, will support National Societies, in the policy implementation by developing further tools and guidance as well as providing peer-to-peer support, through the appropriate identified mechanisms.

This policy was adopted by the 23rd session of the IFRC General Assembly in 2022 and will be reviewed by the 27th session of the General Assembly in 2029.

Indicators of success

Operational principles

- Number of National Societies with a volunteering policy or equivalent aligned to the IFRC Volunteering policy.
- Number of National Societies that have clearly defined within their statutes and rules and regulations, the difference between volunteers and members including their roles and responsibilities.
- Number of National Societies which have mechanisms in place to ensure volunteer participation in their decision-making processes.
- Number of National Societies with full-time equivalent paid staff dedicated to volunteering development.

Volunteer Motivation

- Improvement in the level of engagement and motivation of volunteers as measured by motivational tools over time.

Volunteer protection

- National Societies implement the standards on the safety, security and wellbeing of volunteers.
- National Societies have a local volunteer insurance mechanism for their volunteers.
- National Societies report on volunteer safety and security incidence to the IFRC

Inclusion

- National Societies' volunteer representation is reflective of the diversity of its population.

Volunteer data management systems

- Number of National Societies that have some type of homogeneous system that applies to the entire organization for the management of volunteers' data.
- Number of National Societies reporting to the IFRC's Federation-wide Databank and Reporting System on volunteering.

New forms of volunteering participation

- Number of National Societies co-developing initiatives with sister National Societies.
- New initiatives developed with volunteers' participation.