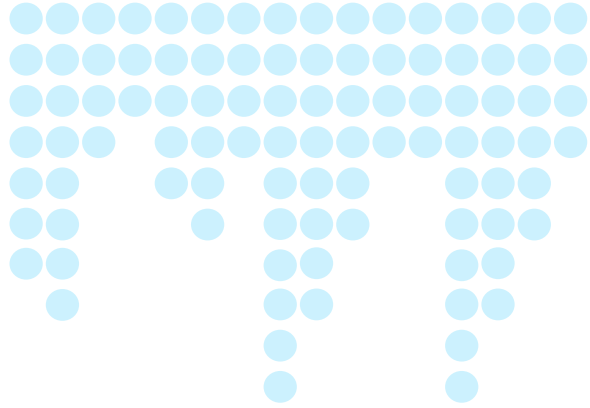




THE IMPACT OF INVESTMENT IN THE AUXILIARY ROLE OF THE ARGENTINE RED CROSS

Working together in partnership





Executive Summary

A change in leadership was the catalyst for strengthening the auxiliary role of the Argentine Red Cross Society (ARCS). Informed by the results of an assessment of its organisational capacity, the new leadership team launched a transformation agenda to modernise ARCS and increase its relevance, reach and sustainability. The core components of this agenda were updating the Red Cross Law, leadership and branch development, gender equality, accountability, and transparency, and strengthening relationships with public authorities. The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, along with its donors, has played an instrumental role in supporting the key elements of this journey.

Investment in legislative advocacy, humanitarian diplomacy, public relations and partnering with public authorities at all levels, have been at the centre of the ARCS's reinforced auxiliary status. These initiatives have provided the ARCS with the legal, relational and reputational channels necessary to supplement and, at times, replace the efforts of public authorities in tasks such as disaster-risk reduction, preparedness and response, health promotion, community health and First Aid, medical transport and social-support programmes.

Commissioned by the IFRC, ICRC and British Red Cross, this case study aims to identify the associations between long-term investment in the development of National Societies, and changes in services and their impact at community level. The case study demonstrates how a better-defined auxiliary role allowed the National Society to supplement and fill gaps in the COVID-19 pandemic response of public authorities, from epidemic control to home care and livelihood activities. Acting as a trusted intermediary between private donors and public authorities, the National Society facilitated the procurement of COVID-19-related supplies, equipment and medicines using private donations, which were then offered to public-health institutions. The IFRC, with its global sourcing and supply-chain management capabilities, was an important supporter in this process. The case study further highlights how the updated Red Cross Law has increased the ARCS's reach to underserved communities. Prime examples include a collaboration in Northern Salta, where the ARCS partners with local authorities to deliver clean water, health, hygiene and community-development initiatives, serving thousands of indigenous households; and its role as a social auditor of public water-supply programmes.



Key points from the Argentine Red Cross experience

A revised Red Cross Law clarified, strengthened, and safeguarded the auxiliary role, facilitating the ARCS's work in supporting public authorities in addressing humanitarian needs arising from socio-economic vulnerability, health emergencies, migration, and disasters.

Leadership understanding of and commitment to the Fundamental Principles, the auxiliary role and working collaboratively with public authorities have been crucial for maximising the potential of the organisation's auxiliary status.

The ARCS's success in updating its auxiliary status in law stems from its competencies in legislative advocacy, humanitarian diplomacy, public advocacy, and marketing communications. By utilising social media, harnessing the voice of its volunteers, and engaging with all political parties and legislators to explain the mandate, principles, auxiliary role and capacities of the National Society and the wider Movement, the ARCS successfully secured unanimous support for the legal revision.

Parallel investment in nurturing balanced partnerships with public authorities at all levels, along with organisational changes that have strengthened management processes, accountability, and transparency, as well as the volunteer and branch network, have enabled the organisation to fulfil its auxiliary role effectively.

The policy guiding the National Society in complementing or substituting for public services is clear and direct. In areas with a robust public presence, the ARCS considers its role minimal or redundant. On the other hand, in regions where public services are scarce and the needs are more acute, the National Society focuses its efforts and prioritises its involvement.

During the COVID-19 response, ARCS added significant value due to its reputation as a trusted, neutral and independent auxiliary to the public authorities. This role enabled the ARCS to act as an intermediary between private donations and public health agencies, facilitating the procurement of COVID-19 supplies, equipment and medicines for the public healthcare system.

Leveraging its reputation, auxiliary role, expanded relationships, and long-term experience in community-based water and sanitation, the ARCS has expanded its reach by taking on the role of technical and social auditor for public-water and sanitation activities in vulnerable communities.

A strong and visible presence during emergencies has increased expectations that the ARCS will always be present to assist alongside public authorities and will take a public stand on socio-political issues. The ARCS remains focused, providing support and engaging when the action is aligned with its auxiliary role, and commenting on social issues when it is meaningful and appropriate.





Investing in the Argentine Red Cross is investing in humanity, in a better tomorrow, in a better today.

Diego Tipping, President, ARCS, Legislative Campaign Launch, 2016





What is the auxiliary role?

The auxiliary role of a National Society is to support its public authorities by supplementing or substituting for public humanitarian services, while acting in conformity with the Fundamental Principles, in particular neutrality and independence. Resolution 2 of the 30th International Conference explains the auxiliary role, and the special relationship that it entails between a National Society and its public authorities.

The auxiliary role is enshrined in the First Geneva Convention of 1949 and originally focused on assisting the medical services of the army, such as in the collection, transport or treatment of the wounded or sick, or the prevention of disease on the battlefield. The scope of a National Society's auxiliary function has considerably expanded due to the changing nature of crises and the resulting humanitarian needs.

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Public authorities and the National Societies as auxiliaries enjoy a specific and distinctive partnership, entailing mutual responsibilities and benefits, based on international and national laws, in which the national public authorities and the National Society agree on the areas in which the National Society supplements or substitutes for public humanitarian services; the National Society must be able to deliver its humanitarian services at all times in conformity with the Fundamental Principles, in particular those of neutrality and independence, and with its other obligations under the Statutes of the Movement as agreed by States at the International Conference.

Introduction

In Argentina, the Red Cross plays a pivotal role in responding to the needs of vulnerable rural and urban communities. The National Society's programmes include disaster-risk reduction, preparedness, response and recovery, health promotion, community-based First Aid, provision of First Aid at mass events, First Aid training, blood donor recruitment and training for health-care workers – laboratory technicians, blood technicians, nurses, radiologists, surgical instrumentation technicians and lifeguards – through its network of Red Cross Institutes. ARCS branches implement these programmes, as well as locally defined and resourced activities that respond to the specific needs of their communities.

The capacity of the National Society to deliver essential programmes and services hinges on its auxiliary role. This unique mandate allows the ARCS to amplify the efforts of public authorities, either by bolstering existing humanitarian services or stepping in when gaps arise.

Until 2020, the ARCS's auxiliary role was enshrined in a 127-year-old law. An assessment of its organisational capacity, conducted in 2015, highlighted the need for the National Society to improve its relations with public authorities and to update its auxiliary role.

The National Society's auxiliary status and reputation were significantly enhanced through a far-reaching four-year advocacy campaign involving media relations, strategic communication, and coalition-building to increase understanding of the Red Cross and build support for a revised law. In 2020, a new law was unanimously adopted by Congress, ushering in a stronger legal base for Red Cross activities across the country. In 2015, the Red Cross was a mid-level player in humanitarian activities in Argentina. Today, the organisation is one of the most trusted humanitarian actors in the country.

Significant investment in people, cultural change, management systems, advocacy and partnering have facilitated the transformation of the ARCS and the enhancement of its auxiliary role. Equally, the extraordinary contribution of the ARCS to the COVID-19 pandemic response can be traced back to investment in the organisation's auxiliary function, management capacities, strong and effectively leveraged partnerships with public authorities, and targeted support from Red Cross Red Crescent Movement partners (IFRC, ICRC and sister National Societies¹) and donor governments.

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It is not enough for National Societies to understand their duty as auxiliaries to their public authorities; national laws must also appropriately reflect this role to ensure acceptance of coordinated work. Like many other National Societies, the ARCS relied on a law that did not support its work across the territory. However, the community and public authorities recognised the value of its activities. For this reason, the transformation of the regulatory framework achieved by the ARCS is an example for other National Societies regarding the importance of formalising what happens in practice. It's also important because it helps protect volunteers.

ICRC representative





The country

The Argentine Republic is a federation of 24 jurisdictions (23 provinces and one autonomous city) with nearly 2,500 municipalities.² After gaining independence from Spain in 1816, Argentina endured alternating periods of civilian and military rule before transitioning to a civilian-led democracy in 1983.³ Since that transition, the country has undergone radical political, economic and social shifts.⁴ Argentina is considered one of the most stable democracies in the region but faces several challenges, including a large debt, hyperinflation, high levels of corruption⁵ and low levels of trust in the government.⁶

A significant portion of Argentina's population lives in urban areas, and 40 per cent live below

the poverty line.⁷ Rapid urbanisation has led to housing shortages and the growth of informal settlements, or "villas miserias", where residents often lack access to basic services.⁸ Argentina boasts a high literacy rate and has a well-established public education system. Higher education is also widely accessible, with free public universities. The health-care system, similarly, provides broad coverage but faces challenges related to quality, funding, and distribution of services.⁹ As of August 2023, Argentina was hosting more than 230,000 refugees and asylum seekers, mostly from Venezuela.¹⁰ Indigenous communities in Argentina face ongoing challenges related to land rights, cultural preservation, and social and economic marginalisation.¹¹

The National Society

The Argentine Red Cross Society was founded in 1880, following Argentina's ratification of the original Geneva Convention, and in the midst of a civil war. It is the oldest humanitarian organisation in Argentina, and its mission is to improve the resilience of individuals and communities. The organisation's community-development activities (climate-smart disaster-risk reduction, health promotion, livelihoods, water and sanitation, and promoting the rights and dignity of marginalised populations) focus on households living below the poverty line, disadvantaged children and adolescents, migrants, older adults, the LGBTIQ+ and indigenous communities. The National Society provides First Aid training to more than 50,000 people annually, in addition to assisting attendees of mass events. Its higher education centres, founded early last century, have trained 200,000 health professionals.

The ARCS achieves its mission through its 8,000 volunteers, 1,798 employees and its network of 66 branches, 33 Red Cross (health-training) Institutes and its humanitarian research centre, the Observatorio Humanitario (refer to Annex 1). The National Society is legally recognised as an auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, as stated in the Argentine Red Cross Law.¹² This means the organisation works to supplement or substitute public services during conflict and peacetime.

To fulfil its auxiliary role, the National Society has active partnerships with various ministries and other public authorities at national and local levels, including those engaged in health, disaster-risk management, education, nursing, road and air transport, customs and tariffs. Headquarters and branches engage regularly with public authorities to monitor and nurture these partnerships.

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It is important to mention the degree of exchange that exists between the National Society and the various government institutions at central, provincial and municipal levels. The National Society has easy access to government counterparts and decision-makers for advocacy, humanitarian diplomacy, and coordination of humanitarian activities.

External stakeholder

The ARCS has a high level of legitimacy within the country at national, provincial and local levels. It is the only non-state actor in the National Council for Integrated Risk Management and Civil Protection, is an external technical and social auditor of public works in water and sanitation and is widely accepted as an independent and impartial community-based organisation in rural, urban, and indigenous communities.

Investment towards strengthening the auxiliary role

Revising the ‘oldest Red Cross Law in the world’

In 2016, informed by the results of an assessment of its organisational capacity,¹³ the ARCS's new leadership launched a transformation agenda to modernise the organisation and increase its reach and impact. Updating the National Society's statutes and strengthening the auxiliary role by modernising the Red Cross Law, and developing closer relationships with public authorities, were core components of this strategy.

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When the board started its mandate, we saw that we had the oldest law in the world, from 1893! Since then, the world has changed, both in terms of humanitarian risks and politically, so it was necessary to update the law to protect our auxiliary role, binding more securely the special relationship we have with our public authorities.

Diego Tipping, President, ARCS

To achieve the required legislative reform, the National Society drew on its own legal, advocacy and communications expertise, the experience of sister National Societies, technical advice from the IFRC and ICRC, and the passion of 4,000 volunteers.

As a first step, the National Society undertook a comparative analysis of the existing Red Cross Law with Movement guidelines and laws in other countries. Documenting the range of facilities offered by other Red Cross Laws and how these supported National Societies and their public authorities to reach the most vulnerable communities within and beyond the country's borders became an important advocacy tool for ARCS.

This analysis identified a range of concerns with the ARCS 1893 law, including poor protection of the Red Cross emblem, inadequate definition of the National Society's relationship with the State, and a lack of facilities for volunteering and the entry of humanitarian goods and services into Argentina.

Three questions guided the reform of the Argentine Red Cross Law:

- What legal facilities were needed to enhance ARCS's capacity to reach the most vulnerable individuals?
- What added value could the National Society offer public authorities?
- In a humanitarian emergency, what legal recognition did the ARCS require to ensure it could successfully draw on its international network's support?

A significant challenge in revising the law was the limited understanding of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement and the ARCS's mission and capacities within key stakeholder groups. To address this challenge, the National Society launched an advocacy campaign to convince influencers of the need for change. First on their list to convince were the presidents of the two chambers of the National Congress. Next, the Society needed to convince more than 320 legislators and the people of Argentina. They launched a campaign for the revision of the law, drawing on the support of well-known figures from the arts, show business, academia, politics, sport, and journalism.

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I sincerely apologise to the Red Cross. I apologise because...the Red Cross for more than 100 years has brought enormous care to the people of Argentina but has not received the governmental support it deserves. We commit as Senators and Deputies to finalise and approve the revised Red Cross Law. Over and above everything, we thank the thousands of volunteers across the decades and the length and breadth of Argentina who have been there when we needed them most.

Senador Juan Manuel Abal Medina, Buenos Aires Province,
September 2016

The National Society targeted traditional and social media to gather support for its legislative proposal. The hashtag #leycruzroja [Red Cross Law] was at the centre of the campaign, along with a petition.

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The draft law was comprehensive. Initially, we targeted the maximum, including financial support from the State and volunteer service leave. And then, each time we went into a commission and discussed the draft, modifications were made, and items were deleted. So, we were not successful with every request, but in the end, we had a very acceptable document which included tax exemptions, voluntary service leave and income from motorcycle tax.

ARCS representative

Revising laws is not easy in most contexts, but in Argentina, several factors make the task particularly challenging: the bicameral legislature; the number of legislators (329), and the multi-party system with large and smaller parties enjoying representation in the National Congress. The National Society was aware of the gargantuan goal that it had set itself. For the ARCS President, the journey towards the revision was as important as the law itself because he knew that the communications campaign would be valuable for building the National Society's relationships and improving its image with public authorities and the people of Argentina.

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The President of the ARCS always said that even if the Red Cross Law is not revised, at least in the journey towards the vote, we will change the perception and the reality of our auxiliary role in the eyes of the government, public authorities and all political parties. The President knew that the journey was as important as revising the Law.

IFRC representative

The ARCS President and Board Members led the advocacy campaign, dedicating hundreds of hours to meeting with congressional representatives. They focused on developing relationships with legislators, defining winning messages that spoke to the different interests of their interlocutors, media coverage, liaising regularly with legislative staff, and winning over constituents.

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The political scene is very polarised in Argentina. It is important to engage with all actors, but this is not easy to do. The National Society managed to talk to all the political parties and all the legislators represented in the two chambers. This had never been done before. The investment in advocacy was colossal! The National Society was successful in penetrating the circles of power. They did such a good job that when there was a change of government midway through its legislative campaign, it did not affect the outcome.

IFRC representative

ARCS's advocacy strategy involved an infographic of the content of the proposed law, key messages to be disseminated to the public and decision-makers, and the creation of a special website that presented the signatures and messages of support from artists, ARCS volunteers (under the banner 'I want to be protected') and partners.

With 1,000,000 signatures, the National Society doubled the threshold required in the Argentine Constitution to present a proposal by popular initiative before Parliament.

The National Society knew that with an enhanced public image and wider auxiliary role would come greater scrutiny of its governance and operations. Alongside the campaign, the management of the National Society focused on ensuring that the organisation's services were as effective and efficient as they could be. A major initiative involved increasing the organisation's accountability and transparency, including its financial reporting capabilities.

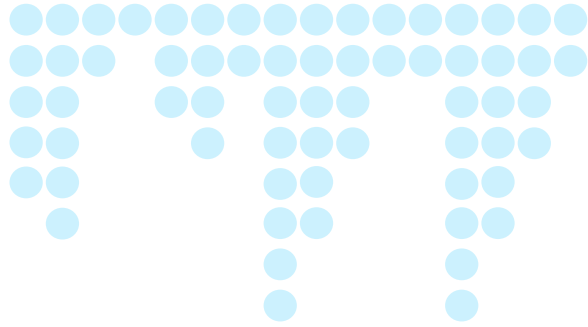


The Revised Red Cross Law

The new Argentine Red Cross Law was approved unanimously in May 2020. Because of the pandemic, this was the first law ever approved through a virtual session of Congress. The new law provides the ARCS with a stronger legal foundation, supporting and facilitating its auxiliary role.

The revised Law has many strong features, including:

- Formal recognition of the National Society's auxiliary role;
- An outline of the humanitarian activities the National Society conducts throughout Argentina in health and disaster-risk management;
- Recognition and protection of the emblem;
- Recognition of the ARCS's emblem and name as a trademark and prohibition of registering any similar trademark;
- Exemptions from paying taxes on imports;
- Facilitation of volunteering. It states that volunteering activities for the ARCS should be considered a 'public charge' for one's employer (up to five days a year for educational purposes and ten for emergency response);
- Giving the National Society the status of a Cooperating Entity with public authorities. This allows the National Society to enter financial or technical cooperation with public agencies. Currently, the ARCS is negotiating access to a percentage of the taxes charged on motorcycle licenses to be applied to programmes and services related to road safety.



Operationalisation of the Red Cross Law

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The goal was to position the organisation not just as another community civil association but as a local chapter of the world's largest organisation, highlighting the added value it brings to the country, especially in times of crisis.

Diego Tipping, President, ARCS

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The work started after the law was adopted! The ARCS saw the law as the beginning. The law opened a new way of working and relating with public authorities. Many doors have opened for us since the law was approved.

ARCS senior executive

The revised law and its operationalisation, combined with investment in management capacities and the ARCS's track record in the country, have strongly positioned the organisation as an entity with legitimacy and credibility, not only to complement public services and provide humanitarian services tailored to local needs, but also to represent the voice of non-state actors in high-level decision-making bodies.

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The investment in developing our management capacities, including administration, human-resource management and communication, at the national headquarters, coupled with developing the capacities of our technical teams at national and branch levels, have significantly enhanced our ability to respond to requests from public authorities for collaboration. Strengthening these capacities has allowed us to respond to needs during emergencies swiftly and to intervene more effectively in longer-term social and health initiatives.

ARCS senior executive

Since the adoption of the law, the National Society's auxiliary activities have grown significantly, as have the requests for partnerships from public authorities.

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I've never seen such exponential growth in a National Society. Even if what they achieved is not applicable everywhere, it shows that if there is leadership will, so much is possible.

IFRC representative

The National Society's approach of complementing or substituting for public services follows a straightforward policy. Where the presence of public authorities is strong, the ARCS perceives its role as minimal or unnecessary. Conversely, where public services are lacking, and needs are greatest, the National Society prioritises its presence.

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Our activities vary across different regions of the country, a variation closely linked to the level of public services available. In areas where public, social and healthcare services are robust, the Red Cross tends to play a lesser role in service provision. Conversely, in regions with limited public service availability, the Red Cross assumes a more prominent role in meeting the needs of communities. This strategic approach enables the ARCS to cooperate effectively with public authorities, maximising its impact in the areas of the country with the greatest need. For instance, in the northern part of Salta Province, home to many indigenous communities, access to public services is limited, particularly in safe water provision. There, the Red Cross is deeply involved. We set up a permanent camp three years ago and have provided and distributed water to communities. We have combined this with health and hygiene promotion, primary care, and community and youth development initiatives.

ARCS senior executive

The National Society now sits on the committee of the National Integrated Risk Management System (Sistema Nacional para la Gestión Integral del Riesgo: SINAGIR) and working groups addressing development issues. They are the only non-state actor to be given access to these forums. The ARCS's level of access to policy dialogue is all the more impressive given civil society's history in the country. Until the 1990s, civil society organisations were viewed with suspicion by the governing authorities. With the return to democracy, civil society grew under the umbrella of a protective welfare state and remained small, with limited visibility or access to policy processes and decision-making.

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We have a welfare state that intervenes directly in people's lives, health, education and employment, and the civic space is small, and the state makes it small. Our public authorities like to lead, to work with small civil society organisations that do not cast a shadow on the state and do not put into question its ability to protect citizens. So, in this kind of context, the adoption of the Red Cross Law is significant. Now, the Red Cross is given a role alongside public authorities and invited to “mesa operativa” [working groups] like SINAGIR. No other non-governmental organisation sits on SINAGIR. Because of our special auxiliary status, we now have an official role as an interlocutor between the state and other civil society organisations.

ARCS senior executive

Enhanced legitimacy and credibility come with benefits but also a range of challenges: a greater number of requests for support or engagement by public authorities, the expectation that the ARCS will take a public stand on scores of political and social issues, and the potential resentment of other non-state actors who are not given the same access to high-level forums.

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This new position comes with great challenges. The first is to stay aligned with our Fundamental Principles. For example, an embassy asked to meet with us and requested that we speak out against a particular issue. The ARCS said it could not speak on this issue, and the representatives were very angry with us, but we stood our ground. Secondly, respecting other humanitarian organisations and acknowledging the important role they play, and thirdly, ensuring that we stay focused.

ARCS senior executive

The auxiliary role does not mean the National Society does not speak up when needed. For example, the Humanitarian Observatory undertakes research that often reveals confronting data about the humanitarian situation in different parts of Argentina. In these instances, the National Society reports its findings and, according to the ARCS, this has not had a long-term impact on its relationship with public authorities.

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Sometimes, it can be tricky, but despite our good relationship with our government, it is our mission to highlight humanitarian needs when we discover them.

ARCS senior executive

Guided by the Fundamental Principles of the Movement and a strong strategy, the ARCS aims to remain focused and effective, providing support and engaging when the action is aligned with its auxiliary role, commenting on social issues when it is meaningful and appropriate to do so, working hard to demonstrate its value as the sole non-state actor at the table, and ensuring that it maintains positive relationships with other non-state actors.

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We cannot do everything In Argentina, where there are so many needs, what is our focus? The government asks us to do everything, but we cannot. A strong strategy is the key, along with the courage to say ‘no’. Recently, we were asked if we could design and manage a system for satellite detection of [distress calls from] sports boats. Of course, this would be a good way to raise revenue, because the owners of the boats would pay for the service, but it is not aligned with our mission. We declined.

ARCS senior executive



Auxiliary role implementation at branch level

Argentina has a federated government structure in which provinces and local authorities have significant independence and autonomy. Navigating the auxiliary role can be complex in such a context since relationships must be established and nurtured at each level. Following the adoption of the law, the President and Board members travelled to all 14 provinces to support branches with the initial conversations with provincial governors, to explain the Red Cross Law and its implications for collaboration between the organisation and local authorities. Branches have played an important role in the ongoing process, meeting regularly with local authorities to discuss opportunities and the progress of the existing collaboration. The in-depth connections made at provincial level have provided the ARCS with increased access and visibility.

In 2021, the National Society applied to the IFRC Capacity Building Fund (CBF) to fund a branch development initiative to standardise management processes and build a network of strong branch coordinators. The development intervention focused on strategic planning, volunteering, reporting and accountability, and a management system. Financial support was also sought from the ICRC for the development of the School of Leaders with the objective of strengthening the management capacities of current and future leaders.

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The ARCS strategically drew on the CBF to develop the capacity of branches and branch coordinators to ensure they could meet the requirements of the updated auxiliary role. The role of these coordinators was to liaise and make ties with each of the governors and their teams. The government is channelling services and items through the National Society and branches, and it pays for this. So, it's important that branches can meet the expectations of the government at each level.

IFRC representative

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Another strategy that continues to be effective for the ARCS and that makes it easier for its members to take ownership of its law, is the development of the “School of Leaders”. Through ICRC Cooperation funds and in association with the Argentine University of the Company, this allows the National Society to train its leaders in their auxiliary role and develops capabilities for the management and enhancement of the law, among other aspects. Knowing the scope of your legal framework and reaching agreements with your local interlocutors is essential for the development of the subsidiaries and the relevance of the activities in the territory.

ICRC representative

The new law has not significantly impacted activities for branches with well-established relationships with public authorities, like Corrientes. However, for branches in Mendoza, Córdoba, Paraná and Salta, the law has made a substantial difference, giving branches the potential to supplement or substitute more visible public services.

In the north, Salta Province is home to many indigenous communities who face significant challenges in accessing essential services, particularly clean water. Recognising this need, the ARCS significantly bolstered its regional presence in 2020. The enactment of the new law facilitated these efforts by supporting initial discussions and enabling a strong partnership with the local authorities. The ARCS established a permanent camp to ensure a reliable, clean water supply for local communities. Their efforts extend beyond water distribution as they also implement health and hygiene promotion programmes, provide primary care services, and support initiatives focused on community and youth development.

An impactful partnership between the Corrientes Red Cross branch and public authorities

For more than 30 years, the Corrientes Branch in the north-east of Argentina, in collaboration with the community and public authorities, has been running integrated community development activities. These have played a vital role in improving well-being, building social networks, and resourcing education and employment opportunities for thousands of disadvantaged families. Some of these activities are run from the Red Cross community centre in Quinta Ferré, with the support of volunteers and students from the Red Cross Health Training Institute. Community-led needs assessments and financial, and in-kind support from the community and local authorities, have been key to the success of these activities.



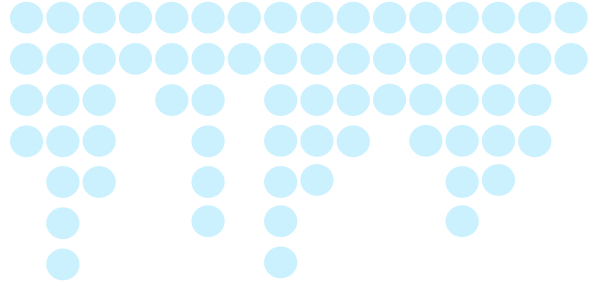
The impact of our work is the result of our partnership over many years with the provincial authorities and with communities. The nursery was established by mothers from the Quinta Ferré community and families continue to be active participants in the ongoing development and maintenance of the centre. The community is very proud of their centre. Some of our past nursery students now even work there! We make a point of connecting our different activities to augment our impact. For example, the women who have set up a sewing business as part of our livelihoods programme are contracted to sew uniforms for our Red Cross Institute students. And our Red Cross Institute students are required to volunteer their time each week to contribute to the community education programme

President, Corrientes Branch, ARCS

Through its Centro Integral B ('Integrated Community Centre'), the branch implements a school support programme for 380 children and adolescents, including those with disabilities and development delays, and other community-development activities in the disadvantaged suburbs of Esperanza, Quilmes, and Quinta Ferré.

As a government-accredited nursery and kindergarten, more than 150 children from six weeks to five years of age receive English, computer, physical education, and music classes. The centre plays an important role in allowing mothers and guardians to work while children attend the centre. From the age of six, students have access to regular mentoring classes provided by students from the Red Cross Training Institute. Students volunteer four hours per week as part of this programme. Over 300 families also benefit from daily meals and access to the centre's social and primary healthcare services. Regular health-promotion workshops and campaigns educate families about emerging and re-emerging diseases, including dengue, yellow fever, tuberculosis, Chagas disease, leptospirosis, STIs and HIV/AIDS. Livelihood activities support vocational training and seed funding. The branch rapid-testing centre for HIV/AIDS provides confidential testing performed in the laboratory of the Red Cross Institute.





Impact The COVID-19 response

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COVID was an accelerator of processes for all National Societies, including the Argentine Red Cross.

IFRC representative

The coronavirus pandemic presented unprecedented challenges for the healthcare system in Argentina. In line with its auxiliary role, the ARCS quickly offered to support the national response. The ARCS reminded public authorities that it was part of a global network that could support the purchase of supplies and equipment that might otherwise be difficult to source.

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The private sector viewed the Red Cross as a trusted organisation. They were willing to give their money to the Red Cross. With these funds, the Red Cross procured equipment and supplies and, with the Ministry of Health, distributed them to hospitals. Basically, the Red Cross was a trusted intermediary. This was a virtuous cycle: first the new law, trust in the Red Cross both from the private sector and the government, collaboration and positive action throughout the pandemic, building more trust in the Red Cross.

ARCS representative

Over the course of the pandemic, the ARCS supported epidemic control measures (testing, screening, contact tracing), risk communication, community engagement, health and hygiene promotion, and infection prevention and control – including at airports, train stations and transit stops. It implemented community-based water and sanitation activities, mental health and psychosocial support, isolation and clinical case management, food distributions, home care and livelihood activities. Moreover, in collaboration with public authorities and the private sector, the

ARCS arranged two major fundraising campaigns, and became the central repository for the funds raised, and the procurer of health equipment and supplies for public authorities.

The ARCS provided remote monitoring and emotional support to over 50,000 people affected by COVID-19 through its teleassistance in emergency telephone lines. The telephone service, which opened in March 2020 and was free of charge, was in operation 24 hours a day. Infected individuals and their families, health workers, migrants in vulnerable situations and people who had lost contact with their families could access the service. The ARCS also trained health workers in intensive, on-call, and respiratory care.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Health, ARCS launched the “Argentina Nos Necesita” (‘Argentina Needs Us’) campaign, which aimed to source donations from individuals and the corporate sector to expand the capacity of intensive care units in public and private hospitals through the provision of beds, artificial respirators, personal protective equipment, testing kits and other medical supplies. The campaign was established thanks to pro bono advice from the law firm Bruchou, Fernández Madero & Lombardi. Given the low levels of trust in the government, it was determined that the funds would be donated to the Argentine Red Cross and audited free of charge by Deloitte Argentina. A coordination committee composed of representatives from the medical community, the Argentine Red Cross and the private sector oversaw the

campaign's governance and management. The campaign raised an incredible 381,472,270 Argentina pesos (US\$5.9 million; the dollar figure is less impressive because the peso has plunged 875% to the dollar in recent years). Secondly, in partnership with the Fundación Banco de la Nación Argentina, the ARCS launched the "Unidos por Argentina" ('United for Argentina') campaign, which unified all TV channels around a telethon. Some 91.8 million Argentine pesos (US\$1.426m) were raised.

Demonstrating its commitment to efficient, effective, accountable and transparent procurement, the ARCS made public its procurement and probity procedures. These included audits of all purchased and distributed items (*detailed in Annex 3*). An agreement signed with Aeropuertos Argentina 2000 granted the ARCS access to an 860-square-metre site at Ezeiza International Airport for storing goods. Aeropuertos Argentina 2000 further supported the initiative by providing worker and technician assistance for loading and distribution, and loaned machinery. Between 2020 and 2023, the ARCS brought in 42 planes loaded with equipment and supplies that were distributed to the country's health facilities, including: 100 respirators; 1,400 volumetric infusion pumps; 200 defibrillators; 200 intensive care beds; 1,500,000 personal protection and hospital equipment; 17,000 non-body thermometers, and 50,000 testing kits. This represents the distribution of 1,100 cubic metres of Humanitarian Aid.

“*The role that the National Society played was incredible. After the planes, it was Red Cross always in the media and the auxiliary role was mentioned every time. The media message was, “This is not the government; this is the Red Cross in its auxiliary role”.*

ARCS representative

During the pandemic, more than 200 volunteers from 41 branches worked with 66 communities nationwide and supported 71 food centres.

“My focus has always been on collective work”, says a volunteer from the Mendoza Branch. The arrival of the virus deepened the fragile situation in Greater Mendoza, where 38.6% of the people lived in poverty before the pandemic. And the situation was worse for women. The same volunteer continued: “I witnessed the harsh situation for families living in Algarrobal Abajo. Due to the pause in the construction industry, the demand for bricks was reduced, and this was almost their exclusive source of income. People were forced to sell their tools to buy food and other basic items. In response, people set up communal kitchens and pots to cook food together, where we, the Red Cross, came to provide support.”

Thanks to this collaborative space, it was identified that the production of bricks heightened the vulnerability of women, most of whom were supervised by men. Workshops were organised to promote new employment opportunities.

“Through a collaborative process, we started baking and sewing courses to help diversify income sources and buy new tools to help women”, the same volunteer from Mendoza highlighted. Since 2021, 43 women have participated in sewing and baking workshops, travelling by an ARCS transportation service. Nationwide, the ARCS is aiming to offer similar training to another 7,000 women.

“*The livelihoods programme in Mendoza is another example of how the ARCS puts its auxiliary role into practice. This activity, which was already in place before the pandemic, was strengthened and became a key and timely response. With the support of the ICRC Cooperation team, branches positioned themselves in communities in vulnerable situations in which, for the most part, women were heads of families, victims of gender violence and, in some cases, migrants who accessed vocational training through the ARCS. In coordination with local organisations, the ARCS offered workshops in baking, hairdressing and sewing, training for small and medium-sized businesses, financial management for new businesses and product sales, and soft skills. These female heads of families managed to find a different, safer and more efficient livelihood. In turn, the ARCS managed to transform lives and protect these women and families from the context of violence and risk.*

ICRC representative

Beyond COVID

Argentine Red Cross Society auditing services

Leveraging its updated auxiliary role, enhanced visibility, and expertise in water, sanitation and community engagement and accountability, in 2022 the ARCS entered a partnership with the state-owned water and sewage authority, *Agua y Saneamientos Argentinos* (AySA), as an independent auditor. The National Society has been contracted to audit the completeness and effectiveness of both technical and social components of a World Bank-funded programme that is expanding equitable, sustainable and affordable access to water and sanitation services for vulnerable households in the Buenos Aires metropolitan area. The programme will connect 10,000 households to the drinking-water network and 20,000 households to sewage services by 2025. The construction works are conducted by members of local cooperatives, providing a new source of local employment, with 50 per cent of those employed being women.

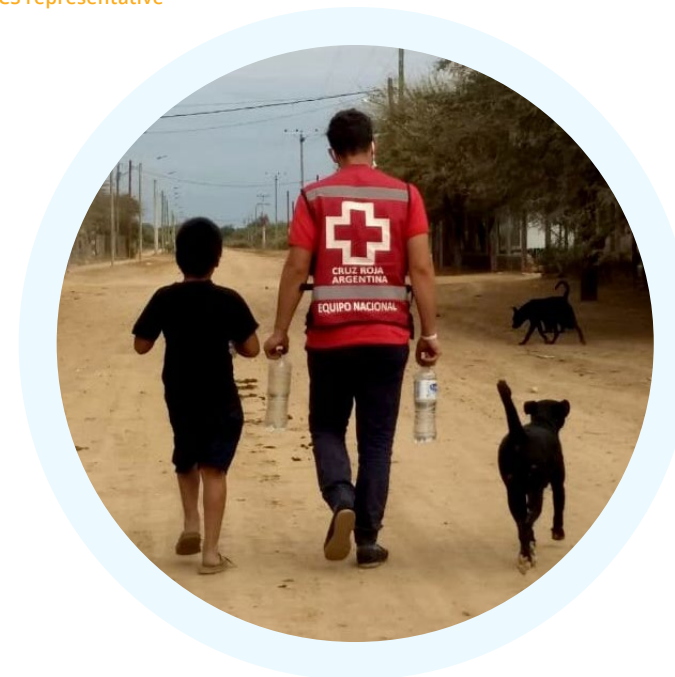
“ We did a seven-day training session where they explained everything about the work and the installation, then two days of everything social, where they explained how to talk to the households and how to deal with conflict. People are very happy; this is a good step forward for the neighbourhood. It is a big job and totally free of charge, where the whole installation is new.

Member of a cooperative

This is not the first external auditing role the ARCS has undertaken. The National Society has previously been contracted by public authorities to audit accessible features in newly built/refurbished residential properties.

“ The AySA programme allows us to reach communities whilst raising revenue to support other programmes. We are playing the role of independent auditor... but we are also changing the traditional role of auditor. We are not only focusing on technical engineering elements, but we are also carrying out social auditing as well, asking questions like: “Is the programme reaching all the individuals it should? Has there been consultation with affected households? Has the community been engaged?”

ARCS representative





Conclusion

This case study traces the ARCS's nearly decade-long journey in strengthening its auxiliary status and examines the impact of this effort on services for vulnerable communities.

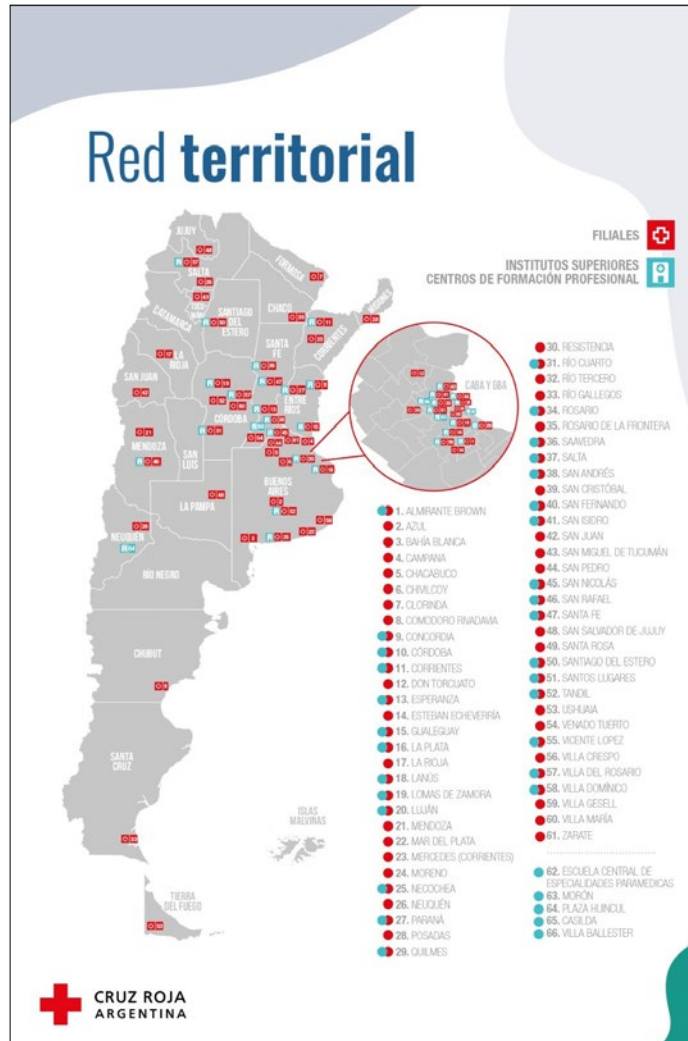
The revised Red Cross Law was pivotal in clarifying, strengthening and safeguarding the National Society's auxiliary status and securing the ARCS's position in supporting public authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ability of the ARCS to fulfil its auxiliary role during the pandemic and beyond is credited to investment in leadership, management capacities, branch and volunteer development, as well as partnerships with public authorities at all levels.

The ARCS's journey underscores the significance of visionary leadership, a robust strategy, cultural and structural changes, and a focus on transparency and accountability. These factors have collectively strengthened the organisation's auxiliary role and enhanced its legitimacy, reach and sustainability.

The ARCS's strong and visible presence during emergencies has increased public expectations of the organisation, including for it to assist alongside public agencies and take a public stand on a wide range of social issues. The ARCS aims to remain focused, provide support and engage when the action is aligned with its auxiliary role, and comment on social issues when they are meaningful and appropriate.

Overall, this case study outlines ARCS's success in strengthening its auxiliary role, emphasising the diverse elements that have contributed to this progression and its evolution into one of Argentina's most trusted and respected organisations.

Annex 1 ARCS branch network



Annex 2 Infographic Developed for the Legislative Advocacy Campaign



Annex 3

Procurement process steps outlined in the ARCS public accountability reports

Step 1 Request: The Ministry of Health identifies items to be procured, together with technical and quantity specifications.

Step 2 The Consultative Committee is convened to monitor the procurement process. It comprises representatives of donor companies and the Argentine Red Cross.

Step 3 Price bidding: A price comparison of the items to be purchased is carried out.

Step 4 Budget information: A comparative table of quotations is compiled, which includes technical characteristics, quantities offered, delivery terms, unit and total value, currency of payment, place of delivery, method of payment, reputation of the supplier, and any other information considered necessary.

Step 5 Purchasing Committee: Three or more individuals (e.g. members of professional associations, universities) with expertise in the technical characteristics, market and purchasing process consider the comparative analysis and procurement criteria set by the Consultative Committee and choose the preferred supplier.

Step 6 Authorisation of the purchase: The minutes of the Purchasing Committee are sent to the Consultative Committee for authorisation. If any changes are suggested, the proposal is returned to the Purchasing Committee for validation.

Step 7 Execution of the purchase: The purchase is executed, and funds are disbursed.

Step 8 Indication of distribution: The Ministry of Health advises the Argentine Red Cross on the destination of the purchased supplies.

Step 9 Distribution: The Argentine Red Cross collaborates in the distribution of supplies.

Step 10 Audit: Audits are conducted at each touchpoint, from the receipt of the donation to the delivery of the supplies to the health facilities.

Endnotes

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THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.