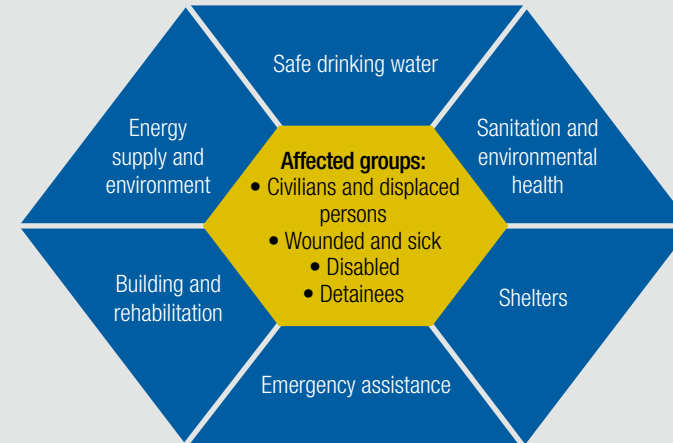


# WATER AND HABITAT

## WATER AND HABITAT : ENSURING DECENT LIVING CONDITIONS



ICRC



## WATER AND HABITAT ACTIVITIES

Neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian action during armed conflicts and situations of internal violence is at the heart of the ICRC's mandate and is a fundamental part of its identity. This approach helps the organization to reach conflict victims and respond to their needs.

The ICRC's Water and Habitat Unit carries out building and engineering projects designed to ensure that people caught up in armed conflict have access to clean water and proper

sanitation at all times and that they live in a healthy environment.

ICRC engineers assess the water and housing needs of conflict victims, plan projects to solve the problems encountered, negotiate with local authorities and firms regarding project implementation, supervise the execution of the projects and handle all aspects of their management.

**Because it is essential to survival, water is afforded special protection under international humanitarian law.**

See Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977.



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## SAFE DRINKING WATER

By 2050 the world's population, estimated today at 6.8 billion, will have grown by 50 per cent. In addition to the expected depletion of the world's natural resources, issues such as urbanization, migration, new forms of land use, global economic crises and climate change will have far-reaching consequences for access to clean water. Well-managed water resources are indispensable for sustaining economic development and agricultural and industrial production.

The strain on obsolete infrastructure – unable to meet existing demands for water, sanitation and electricity – has already led to increased tensions within communities and, in some cases, to armed violence. Although water-related issues usually encourage cooperation between countries sharing cross-border resources, it can also be a source of tension or conflict between communities; water shortages can exacerbate

existing problems and force people to migrate. In such circumstances, water-supply projects can help ease tensions.

Access to water is frequently restricted because water-supply or water-treatment systems have been destroyed, because water reserves are located in areas that have become dangerous or because of mass displacement. People ultimately have to resort to sources of water that pose a major health risk.

- Installation or rehabilitation of water-supply systems in urban and rural environments
- Ensuring safe water for medical facilities, places of detention and camps
- Hygiene promotion

## SANITATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

The ICRC's sanitation activities range from installing human-waste disposal systems in camps for internally displaced people, to ensuring proper sewage networks in towns and villages affected by armed conflict, and organizing campaigns to promote hygiene. The ICRC also improves sanitation in medical facilities and places of detention.

Cultural beliefs and behaviour play a major role in the success of water and sanitation projects. In many rural areas the ICRC makes use of participative approaches that enable it to take account of social aspects and to ensure local ownership of the projects. Community involvement is vital to the sustainability of its work.

The evacuation of waste water and the disposal of refuse are often the most intractable sanitation problems encountered in places of detention.

A large proportion of the diseases observed among inmates are either water-borne or due to overcrowding. To keep the detainees in good health, the ICRC pays special attention to waste-disposal systems and, in various countries, supports vector-control measures. It also takes preventive action to ensure that human waste, waste water and refuse are removed to areas where they can be treated and thus rendered harmless.

- Sanitation in camps
- Management of waste in places of detention
- Emergency response to outbreaks of water-borne diseases
- Management of medical waste in hospitals
- Vector control in places of detention
- Waste-water treatment in urban areas



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## EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

Wherever large numbers of people are displaced, humanitarian organizations must not only provide emergency aid for them but must also take into consideration the living conditions of the resident population to limit potential conflicts between the two groups.

Displaced people, who make their way to camps or are taken in by relatives, often have nothing. Most of all, they need access to safe water, sturdy shelter and sanitary facilities to prevent the outbreak of epidemics.

- Installation and rehabilitation of water-distribution points in camps, along migration routes, and within host communities
- Provision of sanitation and hygiene facilities (latrines and waste-collection systems)
- Deployment of "water and sanitation kits" containing water bladders, pumps and pipes
- Support to National Societies involved in emergency activities for displaced people

## BUILDING AND REHABILITATION

In areas of growing and unplanned urbanization, public services are often inadequate, if they exist at all. A shortage of funds and qualified human resources are the primary reasons why essential public infrastructure, such as hospitals, is not properly maintained.

The ICRC repairs and builds public facilities and centres for housing internally displaced people. It also helps develop basic infrastructure in places of detention, creating a safe and hygienic environment.

- Improvement of essential buildings and infrastructure
- Rehabilitation of, and support to, health infrastructure and centres for internally displaced people
- Rehabilitation of roads, dams, rain-water catchments and irrigation schemes

## ENERGY SUPPLY AND ENVIRONMENT

Many communities are now facing increasing pressure on their natural resources, such as fuel, coal, and wood. Where conditions are favourable, the ICRC promotes the use of solar-powered devices and energy-efficient stoves.

The ICRC installs biogas systems in places of detention to improve the treatment of waste water. These systems also produce methane, a gas used for cooking food in prisons, thus helping to reduce reliance on traditional fuels.

Energy-saving solutions are implemented in various communities to respond to humanitarian needs while reducing the ICRC's carbon footprint on the surrounding environment.

- Installation of solar-powered water pumps
- Promotion of wood-saving stoves and biogas systems
- Support to national energy boards in providing electricity for water-pumping stations



## THE ICRC AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Ensuring sustainable and environment-friendly operations and presence in the field

The ICRC, and in particular its Water and Habitat Unit, makes every effort to mitigate the impact of its activities and presence in the field (housing, energy consumption and use of resources) on the ecosystem and the environment as a whole.

Since it was set up in 1983, the Water and Habitat Unit has sought to promote respect for the environment and to employ eco-friendly tools and techniques. Its engineers are encouraged to take account of environmental aspects in their

projects as long as assistance for conflict victims is not delayed or compromised. In emergencies, ICRC engineers always try to strike the right balance between the immediate needs of victims and the medium- and long-term consequences of their activities.

In the post-emergency phase of a crisis, some projects can also bring about positive environmental changes. Wherever possible, the ICRC tries to boost the interest of its local partners in ensuring the sustainability of these projects.

## MISSION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.



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