



# ASSISTANCE

FOR PEOPLE AFFECTED BY ARMED CONFLICT  
AND OTHER SITUATIONS OF VIOLENCE



ICRC

IN BRIEF



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Front cover: Abdul Majeed/ICRC

# **ASSISTANCE**

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## ASSISTANCE

The aim of the ICRC's assistance programmes is to preserve life and restore the dignity of individuals and communities affected by armed conflict or other situations of violence.<sup>1</sup>

Assistance activities address essential needs of individuals and communities as determined by their social and cultural environment. These needs vary. They are assessed in relation to the context and in close consultation with the affected communities. The ICRC's responses are as varied as the needs.

Assistance programmes may provide food, shelter, water and medical care; they also aim to ensure that access to essential health services and medical facilities is maintained, that safe water and adequate sanitation are available, that people are protected from explosive remnants of war, and that income and means of production are preserved. This may require the direct involvement of ICRC staff, working with, and building on, the existing local capacity to deliver these essential services. It may entail encouraging the authorities and other actors to fulfil their responsibilities, or a combination of both approaches.

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<sup>1</sup> The ICRC works to protect and assist victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence. This brochure looks at assistance programmes, but, in field operations, protection and assistance activities are interlinked in all assessments and in planning and programme implementation.



Olga Wilcheva/ICRC

## THE ICRC'S ASSISTANCE DIVISION

provides field operations with strategic support and professional expertise in:

- Public health<sup>2</sup>:
  - > health services
  - > economic security
  - > water and habitat
  - > forensic services
- Working for a safe environment:
  - > respecting and protecting health care
  - > weapon contamination

The ICRC places vulnerability and resilience at the centre of its response, taking gender and age into account in all its assessments and activities.

Assistance may be provided before a crisis as a preventive measure (distribution of food to avoid malnutrition, improved sanitation), in an acute crisis (war surgery, water trucking), in a chronic crisis (livelihood support for displaced persons, vaccination campaigns, support for water and sewage utilities) or post crisis (repair and reconstruction of essential infrastructure, agricultural support).

Beneficiaries include residents or displaced civilians, vulnerable groups such as minorities, female-headed households and the families of people who are unaccounted for, the sick and the wounded (both military and civilian), and people deprived of their freedom.

In 2009, close to 15 million victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence in 47 countries benefited from the ICRC's assistance programmes.

In December of the same year, over 2,000 international and national staff were engaged in the ICRC's assistance activities.

Assistance programmes represent around 60% of the ICRC's annual field budget.

<sup>2</sup> Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Preamble to the Constitution of the World Health Organization as adopted by the International Health Conference, New York, 19-22 June, 1946; signed on 22 July 1946 by the representatives of 61 States (Official Records of the World Health Organization, no. 2, p. 100) and entered into force on 7 April 1948.



Marko Kokic/ICRC

An ICRC response covers assistance and protection needs. Assessments identify sectors of the population that are particularly vulnerable to the risk and the effects of armed conflict and other situations of violence.

The aim is to promptly recognize and respond to the specific needs and rights of those affected, taking account of their resilience.

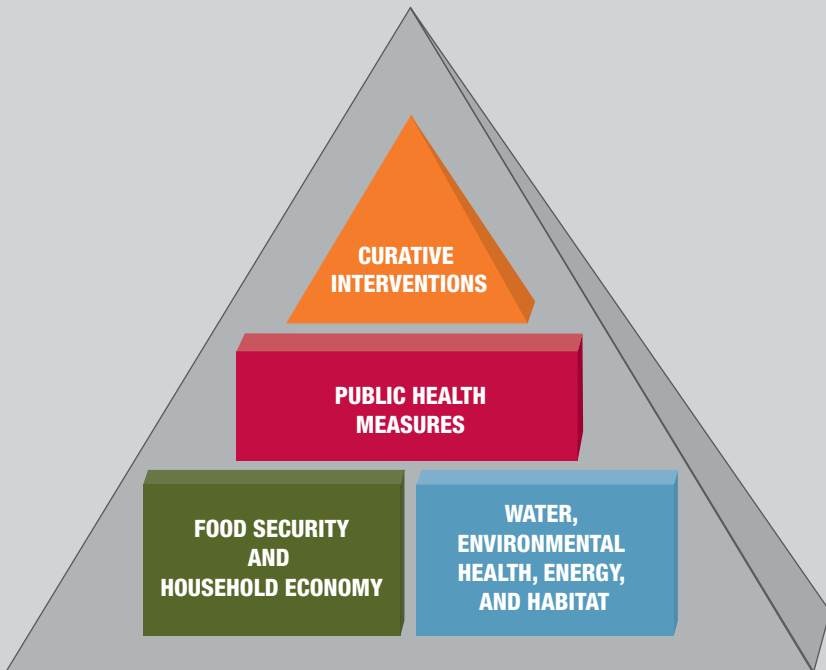
Special attention is given to age, gender and other factors of diversity that increase their vulnerability.

## THE PUBLIC HEALTH PYRAMID

To preserve life and health and ensure respect for people's dignity, assistance activities are developed within an overall concept of public health. People need a safe environment. They also require the basic elements for survival: food, safe water, adequate sanitation and shelter, and access to preventive and curative health care. The correct management of the dead is another important aspect of public health.

When designing assistance programmes, the ICRC strives to ensure that the living conditions of people affected by armed conflict are restored in a sustainable manner and that dependence on outside aid is reduced.

## PUBLIC HEALTH PYRAMID







## HEALTH SERVICES

The ICRC's health activities are aimed at saving lives and alleviating suffering. Its programmes help to ensure that the health needs of individuals affected by armed conflict or other situations of violence are met. This includes both curative and preventive health care.

Health activities include the direct provision of health care, and support for existing facilities, as well as mobilization of the authorities or others to assume these responsibilities. Negotiations are required to guarantee affected communities safe access to high-quality health care and medical personnel a safe working environment.

Health activities require expertise in the fields of first aid, public health, medicine, surgery, nursing, mental health, hospital administration, laboratory work, pharmacy, physiotherapy and orthotics/prosthetics.

### Respecting and protecting health care

A safe environment is essential for the delivery of effective assistance in armed conflict and other situations of violence. This is especially the case for health activities. In many countries, the ICRC has to address security issues concerning hospitals, clinics, ambulances, patients and health-care personnel on a daily basis.

The main areas covered by the ICRC's health activities are:

- first aid;
- primary health care;
- hospitals (war surgery and essential surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics, internal medicine and hospital management);
- health in detention;
- physical rehabilitation.





Ash Sweeting/BCR

### **Physical rehabilitation**

The ICRC's physical rehabilitation projects are designed to provide physically disabled people with prosthetic and orthotic devices so that they can recover their mobility, live with dignity and play an active role in society.

Physical rehabilitation projects may involve:

- manufacturing high-quality prosthetic and orthotic appliances and components;
- providing national technicians with theoretical and practical training in accordance with recognized standards;
- preparing local partners and authorities to take over orthopaedic services;
- developing vocational-training programmes and creating employment opportunities for physically disabled people.



## ECONOMIC SECURITY

The ICRC provides support for the economic security of affected populations. This is to ensure that households and communities can meet essential needs and maintain or restore sustainable livelihoods. Responses range from emergency distributions of food and essential household items to programmes for sustainable food production and micro-economic initiatives.

Economic security is assessed and addressed through expertise in livelihood analysis, nutrition, agronomy and economics, training, veterinary science, livestock production and management, and small-business management.

Economic security activities aim at:

- providing conflict victims with the basic commodities essential for survival when they are no longer able to obtain these by their own means (such as food, blankets and cooking utensils);
- enabling communities and individuals to maintain or regain self-sufficiency by protecting and/or restoring the necessary means of production (e.g. providing seed, tools, cash grants, and work opportunities).



Pedram Yazdaji/ICRC



Jordi Raich/ICRC

## WATER AND HABITAT

The ICRC's water and habitat activities are designed to ensure that communities affected by armed conflict or other situations of violence have access to safe water and adequate sanitation at all times and live in a healthy environment.

In particular, water and habitat activities involve:

- providing displaced persons and civilians affected by armed conflict with emergency water, sanitation and shelter;
- developing safe water and sanitation solutions for the resident population in rural and urban areas;
- repairing and upgrading hospitals and health centres that do not meet current needs or have been damaged as a result of armed conflict;
- improving environmental health in places of detention.

Water and habitat programmes can encompass a wide range of activities in both rural and urban environments: supplying essential materials and energy, constructing emergency shelter, sanitation, and rehabilitating or constructing health structures. The ICRC's engineers are also involved in hygiene-promotion activities and capacity building of partners and communities. Efforts are made to ensure that projects are sustainable in the long term.

The ICRC's areas of expertise include hydrogeology, geology, civil engineering, architecture, electro-mechanical engineering, environmental engineering and urban planning.



## Forensic services

The ICRC's forensic services help prevent and address the tragedy of people becoming unaccounted for as a result of armed conflicts and other situations of violence. They promote and support best practices for the proper management and identification of human remains. The objective is to ensure the dignified management of the dead and to help uphold the right of bereaved families to know the fate of their loved ones.

The ICRC's areas of expertise include forensic medicine, anthropology, archaeology and disaster-victim identification.

The forensic services focus on:

- providing support for ICRC field operations on all matters related to human remains and forensic sciences;
- providing training and advice on best forensic science practices applicable to the search for the missing, including during natural disasters, and their dissemination and promotion;
- developing tools, including for the collection and management of information on human remains, as well as guidelines and manuals on preventing persons becoming unaccounted for and investigating missing-person cases.





Jim Holmes/ICRC



Jim Holmes/ICRC

### **Weapon contamination**

The ICRC seeks to reduce the impact of weapon contamination on people while ensuring that its staff can operate safely.

The presence of unexploded and abandoned weapons can hinder the return of civilians to their homes, limit the delivery of aid, and prevent the repair and reconstruction of infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, roads, wells and markets.

The ICRC's areas of expertise include explosive-ordnance disposal, demining, public-health education, community development, epidemiology and training.

The ICRC's activities may include:

- field assessments of weapon use and the threat posed by weapons;
- deploying clearance experts to survey, destroy or make safe unexploded or abandoned ordnance;
- providing direct support for communities through risk-reduction and risk-education activities – ensuring that these communities do not have to put themselves at risk during their day-to-day activities.



## Partnerships

Coordinating activities with the authorities, civil society and the wider humanitarian community is an integral part of assistance programmes. In their field operations, the ICRC's assistance staff work closely with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. While the Assistance Division implements its own activities, it often joins forces with the National Society of a given country as its natural "primary partner" to maximize the benefit for the people affected by conflict or internal strife. Working together enhances the ICRC's ability to provide support for National Societies, as well as National Societies' capacity to conduct their own operations.

At headquarters and in the field, the Assistance Division interacts with academic institutions and professional associations as well as with the relevant agencies of the United Nations system.

## HELP course

The HELP (Health Emergencies in Large Populations) course is a multicultural and multidisciplinary learning experience created to enhance professionalism in humanitarian assistance programmes carried out in emergencies. Since 1986, approximately 3,000 professionals have attended the course, which is run in partnership with the World Health Organization and with research institutions and universities worldwide.

[www.icrc.org/helpcourse](http://www.icrc.org/helpcourse)



## **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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