



IMPACT-DRIVEN. ADAPTIVE. INCLUSIVE. LOCALISED.

Strategic framework for Finnish Red Cross international aid

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1. Finnish Red Cross

The Finnish Red Cross is the most significant Finnish civil society organisation providing humanitarian aid. Established in 1877, and governed by public law, our mission is to assist national authorities in times of peace and war to promote human wellbeing. We are a member of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) comprising 192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – the largest humanitarian network in the world.

The seven Fundamental Principles guide all Red Cross and Red Crescent activities: Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity, Universality

IFRC Strategy 2030 drives the Finnish Red Cross Strategic Programme 2021–2023 and its international aid, aligning our focus as a member National Society around three key areas of work: 1. People's capacities to anticipate, respond to and quickly recover from disasters and crises that are predicted to become more common, more costly, more complex, and more concentrated in fragile settings where people are least able to cope; 2. People's ability to lead safe, healthy and dignified lives that recognises the needs, rights, skills and capacities of the communities and mitigate vulnerabilities to health resilience; and 3. People's potential to mobilise for inclusive, equitable and cohesive societies where all people are socially included, experience compassion, and where diversity is celebrated.

2. Purpose of the strategic framework

This strategic framework outlines the organisational vision and goals for the Finnish Red Cross international aid in the next 10 years. The premise of the strategic framing is that our operational environment is changing at an unprecedented pace. Powerful global and societal trends are changing the vulnerabilities, needs and expectations of the people, whose active participation, support, collaboration, and partnership we seek to maintain our global humanitarian network. These changes, together with our own desire to excel in our international partnerships, act as triggers for the development of our international aid in the next 10 years.

3. Basis the Finnish Red Cross builds on

In today's polarised world, the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement's unique role in adhering to **neutral, impartial** and **independent** action counts more than ever. Our principles and values build trust and confidence in the Red Cross Red Crescent humanitarian action, crucial to gain humanitarian access to affected people, protect people from violations of human dignity and abuse, and promote and support more inclusive, equitable and cohesive societies. The Finnish Red Cross sees the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement as a platform for bringing together people of diverse backgrounds, identities, abilities, and ages to seek positive change by participating in our action. The key principle is that our action is **open** to all who are committed to our fundamental principles, accessible and free from discrimination, racism, and abuse of power. We must strive for shared ownership and full agency of the participants and have respect for **volunteering** and the impact volunteering can produce.¹

¹ Finnish Red Cross Strategic programme 2021–2023

Preparedness is at the core of the organisational identity of the Finnish Red Cross. While we reduce people's exposure to risks as well as underlying causes of vulnerability, we must continuously be alert, and assess and strengthen our capacity to assist in disasters, crises, and conflicts as they are now or in the future.

The climate crisis fundamentally impacts the way we use global resources and operate – sustainability, localisation, reduction of emissions and environmental impact must be taken into account. The Finnish Red Cross is committed to green its international aid and is striving to become a **carbon neutral** organisation by 2030.

We value our identity as a **Movement member** and an active promotor of agendas which help us to work and position us as the 'One Red Cross Red Crescent Movement'. We consider it important that all National Societies, including ourselves, can identify themselves as members of the same global Movement with collective strengths in helping us to fulfil our mandates, and visions to shape globalisation as one force.

4. Factors shaping our operational environment

In our rapidly changing world, a series of recognised global and societal developments – and many more we cannot yet clearly identify – will have powerful implications on the way the operational environment for international aid will look like in the next decade.

Interlinkages between poverty, social inequality as well as a lack of political and social opportunities create a vicious cycle which – often in combination with high risk of disasters and low coping capacity – keeps states fragile, and the fragility causes more poverty, instability and violence. Protracted conflicts or chronic violence and the politization of aid limit the access to affected people creating contexts where groups of people, areas and entire countries are left behind.

Humanitarian crises are becoming longer, more severe, and more complex. The effects of climate change – severe weather and rising numbers of natural disasters – erode human security and disproportionately impact poor and developing countries. In a globalised world, risks and emergencies do not follow known patterns: they can occur in high-income countries and urban contexts and become quickly global like the COVID-19 pandemic. The volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity – or the 'VUCA context' of our international operational environment of today is likely to intensify particularly in countries where risks intersect.

Geopolitical rivalry and unexpected shifts in international power relations challenge the capacity of existing institutions and mechanisms to solve crises and conflicts. Advances in information technologies transform social fabrics, create new types of communities, and redistribute power. Affected populations are more connected, more urban, and more empowered. At the same time, information, misinformation, and disinformation are used for disrupting stability or abusing power.

Recent years have seen dramatic shifts in systemic power, declining trust in institutions, the growth of movements driving their own social change, and a demand from previously marginalised people to be seen, heard, and included. Social movements such as 'Me too' or 'Black Lives Matter' challenge structural power inequalities and impact the way 'aid' is defined and delivered.

Our operational environment is not the same as 10 years ago and will not look the same in 10 years' time.

The aid sector is also changing to cope with operational environment changes and growing humanitarian needs. Interlinkages between different forms of assistance (nexus) are becoming a norm for ensuring that the longer-term needs of people living in areas of protracted crisis or chronic violence are met. The aid localisation agenda seeks answers to the demand from disaster-affected countries for a localised management of disasters. The need to acknowledge history and proactively rectify power imbalances for the decolonisation of aid affects international aid organisations also. 'Aid too' demands us to combat exclusion and unethical behaviour within our own structures. Information technologies are changing the aid sector as much as the broader society, offering us opportunities to access and connect people as well as challenges in data protection to ensure the security of people at risk.

5. Vision for the Finnish Red Cross International Aid

To ensure our international aid remains relevant and adds value to the collective efforts of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, we must anticipate, prepare for, and adapt to changes in our operational environment. For this, we will enhance our organisational capabilities for better impact, adaptive capacity, inclusion, and localisation.

Our vision is to be an impact-driven and adaptive international humanitarian partner, whose operating principles are driven by inclusion and localisation.

Our vision aims at reinforcing our organisational identity as a **humanitarian partner** whose mission for its international aid is to make the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement effectively **prepared for disasters and conflicts** as part of our core humanitarian duty. We want this vision to characterise us as a partner and bind our staff members together as a work community.

As local, permanent actors, Red Cross Red Crescent societies are present in-country before, during and after crises enabling the Red Cross Red Crescent action to move across the spectrum of assistance from relief to development – or from disaster risk reduction to preparedness and response. We will use this unique strength as a basis for developing **nexus-specific competencies** across the core areas of our action to add Red Cross Red Crescent value for vulnerable communities and their evolving needs in protracted crisis and conflict situations.

Within our international partnerships, we will continue developing our organisational competencies to support professional, quality Red Cross Red Crescent action in **climate-smart disaster preparedness and risk reduction** and Community Health particularly in the fields of **reproductive and child health**. In emergency response, we will build on the strengths developed in over five decades of provision of **emergency health care** and supporting **emergency logistics** chains as our core areas of action. **Building strong and inclusive** partner **Red Cross Red Crescent societies** with capacity to deliver relevant and sustainable country-wide services through volunteers and staff remains a key priority in all we do.

While keeping firm in these focus areas, our goal is **to do more, better and differently from today** within them, inspired and guided by the following four strategic organisational development directions and goals.

6. Strategic directions and goals

1. IMPACT-DRIVEN

Our goal: As an international humanitarian partner, we are recognised for our ability to facilitate positive impact in health, disaster preparedness and response characteristic to Red Cross Red Crescent action

As a humanitarian organisation, our mission is to provide timely and relevant support to people in vulnerable situations and help them to prepare for, cope with and recover from crises and conflicts. Making a positive impact on the lives of vulnerable people is the key driver of our international partnerships. The impact we seek should be based on strengths **distinctive to the Red Cross Red Crescent** action: produced by optimal synergy between highly motivated volunteers, competent staff members and people we partner with, characterised by our values and principles, and building people's trust and confidence in those values. Ultimately, our action should be accountable to the affected people, pa

In the international aid landscape with less funding for more complex problems, **our ambition** is to make the distinctive impact of the Red Cross Red Crescent count and recognised.

Making our international partnerships more impact-driven means that we must be better prepared to **produce** impact on Red Cross Red Crescent terms, to **evidence** it and to be able to **advocate for** it. We will learn new ways of **gathering evidence** and **measuring and valuing** our distinctive impact with partners and communities we work with. At the same time, we recognise that the scale of global problems requires us to continuously **strengthen and develop our competencies** as well as seek **new ways of partnering** with a much wider range of actors beyond those we traditionally engage with.

We see our success go hand in hand with the capacity of our Movement to complement and build on each other's mandates and strengths. For this we will actively support Movement initiatives that strengthen the Movement's complementarity and reduce fragmentation. In a tightening domestic and European funding landscape, we will transform from a follower to an **influencer** to advocate more actively for our Red Cross Red Crescent agenda which, together with **trust and support** from the Finnish public will enable us to remain independent and pursue the interests of the communities we work with on Red Cross Red Crescent terms. We will pursue being at the forefront in **transformative, ethical, and inclusive communications** about our impact, actively challenging stereotypes and introducing new ways to tell stories of our work.

By 2030...:

1. We add value to the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement as a partner by having recognised expertise and organisational capabilities in climate-smart disaster preparedness and risk reduction, reproductive and child health as well as in emergency health and -logistics as our core areas of action.
2. We are capable of defining distinctive Red Cross Red Crescent action, collect quality evidence on its relevance and impact and we constantly improve our action based on evidence.
3. We have fostered multi-stakeholder partnerships within and outside of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in our core fields of expertise, enhancing the Movement's collective impact in climate-smart disaster management, reproductive and child health and emergency health and logistics.

4. The Red Cross Red Crescent agenda in disaster risk management and health has accumulated public support, inspired, and influenced decision-makers and public opinion in Finland as a result of our advocacy and communication actions.
5. We have diversified our institutional funding base in the core areas of our action and have solid support from public and private donations enabling us to be independent, principled, and focused on the impact the people we work with want to achieve.

2. ADAPTIVE

Our goal: We produce better impact by being a learning-oriented, adaptive organisation, prepared for changes.

To create best possible Red Cross Red Crescent impact in the complex and dynamic operational environments with interconnected risks, requires us as a humanitarian organisation to prepare for, rather than rule out, change. Also, the ways people and institutions connect and interact in a globalised world have changed. Our goals are not achievable without greater responsiveness to the needs, interests, and incentives of the people we work with.

Our ambition is to develop adaptivity as an organisational capability enabling us to anticipate and respond effectively to new and changing needs over time to ensure best possible Red Cross Red Crescent impact on the lives of vulnerable people.

Good planning and risk management processes lay the essential foundations for our organisational and operational adaptivity and ensure we implement activities in a responsible manner. Whilst acknowledging that producing impact takes time and requires perseverance, as an adaptive partner, we will promote processes and mechanisms helping us to **identify and welcome needed changes** to achieve best possible impact. Involving the people we work with in these processes, will underpin our ability to know when a change in action is needed. Taking **community-informed decisions** and making **feedback-based changes** are critical elements in realising our commitment to accountability to affected populations.

To become a more adaptive organisation, we will move towards more **self-organizing, high-performing teams** with strong shared understanding of our organisational and operational goals and capacity to take responsibility for adapting them to the varying contexts we work in. This development will be enabled by investing in **effective administrative processes** and **lean management structures**. Anticipating and adapting to changes allows us as required to make **brave organisational choices** to exit from those engagements and working modalities which are not likely to produce best possible impact.

An adaptive organisational culture entails a specific mindset for continuous improvement, learning from experiments and failures. We will integrate space for **learning and reflection** into our everyday work. We want to be a **creative and future-oriented** Movement contributor actively following developments in the core areas of our action that can play a remarkable role in shaping more agile delivery of disaster risk management and health.

By 2030...:

1. Together with our partners, we have organisational agility to anticipate and adapt to new and changing needs within our operations and programmes, identify new opportunities for impact, utilise a nexus approach and make exit from initiatives not producing impact.

2. Institutionalised community engagement and accountability mechanisms are in place and used actively for adapting our operations and programmes to the potentially changing needs of people we are supporting.
3. Our organisational working culture is characterised by continuous and agile development of approaches, practices, and competencies in the core area of our action that fit and strengthen Red Cross Red Crescent action.
4. Our operational and programming contributions are more effective due to institutional space created for learning and reflection and evidence collected of our impact.

3. INCLUSIVE

Our goal: We are an inclusive organisation capable of impacting the root causes of inequality

Unequal distribution of economic, social, and political power and privilege determine people's level of vulnerability and the extent of their capacity to resist, cope with and recover from hazards. To be effective, our international work must pursue equality of power, opportunities and access to resources and services for women, men, boys, girls and people with any sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and characteristic, of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds. Failing this would risk of not reaching those who need our help, becoming irrelevant to the communities we serve, and risking contributing to vulnerabilities or worsening power imbalances and cycles of violence.ⁱⁱ

For us, inclusion is an organisational commitment to actively embrace different identities and individuals, to guard against all discrimination in all our actions, and to promote the value of a diverse society with gender equality. Inclusive Red Cross Red Crescent action is able to **reach** people with different vulnerabilities effectively and in a non-discriminatory and equitable manner.

To be able to do this, we need to **increase our understanding** of how social norms and models reproduce inequality and exclusion of people, often based on multiple, intersecting sources of disadvantage such as gender, class, ethnicity, and disability. As a partner, we will strengthen our capacity to ensure that our international partnerships follow the principle of "do no harm" and to **learn together with our partners** how to move from enabling to empowerment giving marginalised people more than assistance – voice and the opportunity to participate in and influence society, and protect them from violations of human rights and human dignity, and from abuse.

Our ambition is to go beyond programmes and operations and make inclusive Red Cross institutions the ultimate aim for strengthening inclusion in our international partnerships.

Inclusive Red Cross Red Crescent societies ensure diverse representation and composition of human resources among members, volunteers, intervention or surge teams, staff, leadership and governance, and maintain a culture of inclusion and diversity, and a safe workplace for individuals. They promote social inclusion by **proactively recognizing**, as well as **removing barriers to participation** and facilitating access to resources, opportunities, and fulfilment of rights. They work in partnerships with marginalised people's own organisations, acknowledging they 'own their cause' and make space for it within their action.

We cannot ask more from the people we work with than what we are ready to do ourselves. We will start the work from our own international aid organisation, ensuring that our struc-

ⁱⁱ IFRC Gender policy, 2020.

tures are safe and inclusive and seek meaningful contribution from people with all identities and from different backgrounds to our action. In the future, we want the diversity in our staffing to increase reflecting better the diversity within our own country.

By 2030...:

1. Together with our partners, we reach people with different vulnerabilities effectively and in a non-discriminatory and equitable manner by having adopted a comprehensive Protection, Gender, and Inclusion approach across our joint operations and programmes.
2. We have brokered partnerships, collaboration and learning within the Movement with marginalised people's own organisations to create better protection and more equal and inclusive Red Cross Red Crescent action with their knowledge.
3. We have adopted an effective way of addressing inequality and exclusion in our operations and programmes, informed by a rights-based approach while always respecting our Fundamental Principles.
4. We have ensured that we have the right institutional capacity, staff composition, and commitment to address discrimination and exclusion and gender-based violence and to prevent and respond-- to sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse within our operations and programmes as well as within our international aid organisation.
5. Together with our partners, we have institutional capability for addressing gendered health inequalities jeopardising the right to health of women and girls, and women and girls with disabilities in particular.

4. LOCALISED

Our goal: Our partner Red Cross Red Crescent societies are at the forefront of principled humanitarian action within their countries

Localisation is a process of recognising, respecting, and strengthening the leadership of local actors. Localization of humanitarian aid can improve the efficiency of using resources and minimizing the environmental impact of aid. It should lead to holistic changes about how crises are managed in society, optimising partnerships and coordination and strengthening the agency of the people we work with. As the legitimacy of the Red Cross Red Crescent network is firmly rooted in the local proximity of 192 National Societies all around the world, localisation is a fundamental element and a key strength of our Movement. The Strategy 2030 goal for working together as a **distributed network of independent but dynamically connected organisations** that can collaborate, learn and function together effectively guides our take on localisation within the Movement.

Localisation as a strategic development direction in our international partnerships **is about supporting to place the Red Cross Red Crescent Societies at the forefront of principled humanitarian action within their countries.** For this, strengthening the role of the National Red Cross Red Crescent Societies in national preparedness and response systems and having capacity to act early in times of disasters and crisis, is of paramount importance. Local actors need power, resources, and capabilities – but they also need transparency, accountability, inclusiveness and a zero tolerance for corruption. We support our partners to increase their **financial sustainability, accountability, and safer access to affected people** in order for them to be trusted and accountable humanitarian actors in their own countries.

Our ambition is to influence that the locally distributed and globally connected Red Cross Red Crescent network becomes a recognised leader in the localisation of humanitarian action.

Localisation is also about complementarity between local and international action to maximise the comparative advantages of both. As a strong and committed partner of the wider Red Cross Red Crescent global response system, **we remain ready to mobilise global surge support when local resources are not enough**, based on the Red Cross surge principles of being accountable, fit for purpose and able to deploy the right people and services to the right place at the right time, as local as possible, and as global as necessary.

Our disaster management support will have a strong focus on **local response capacity enhancement**. This is critical to ensure that the Red Cross Red Crescent network has the right capacities and resources to continue responding effectively both in localised disasters as well as in crises of global scale and remain a **partner of choice** in the future humanitarian system. We will promote and contribute to the role and capacity of the **IFRC to coordinate and resource Red Cross Red Crescent international humanitarian assistance** as well as its support in strengthening the institutional capacities of our network members.

Doing better in localisation will also challenge us as an international partner to become as local as possible and global as needed. We will seek opportunities to **utilise local technical capacities** available to support the work we do with our partners and continue evaluating critically our partnership contributions to ensure that we add value beyond funding. We will ensure our staff members have the right capabilities to complement the professional capacities and competencies our partners have locally.

By 2030...:

1. We have scaled up our capacity, expertise, and support to strengthen our Red Cross Red Crescent partners' institutional capacities for principled humanitarian action and their auxiliary role to their governments.
2. We have supported our partners in becoming more financially sustained and accountable local actors capable of delivering relevant, country-wide services according to Red Cross principles and values through volunteers, staff members and affected people themselves.
3. We have developed our surge capacity as part of the IFRC surge system to be fit for purpose in different contexts and to enhance local response.
4. We have actively advocated for the recognition of Red Cross Red Crescent action in the localisation agenda.
5. We have ensured that our staff competencies complement the professional competencies of our partners and local competencies available for optimising the collective delivery of results.

7. How will we do it?

It is not about changing what we do, but how we do it.

Ensuring that our staff members working internationally have the right competencies and capabilities is key in developing the way we work. The strategic framework will be accompanied by specific organisational development processes to ensure our resources, capabilities, processes, and management structures promote the strategic development directions. The organisational development processes are expected to result in a more **united organisation**, where the work of staff members is brought more closely together under the joint development objectives and the renewed working culture **increases staff well-being**.

In addition, we will invite our partners to work with us on context-specific translations of our goals and the four strategic directions guiding to operationalise the strategy through actionable implementation plans wherever we work.

The implementation of this strategic framework will be **adaptive and learning** oriented. The progress made will be monitored annually to identify and react to emerging concerns. The four strategic directions and our current assumptions on how our operational environment evolves around them will be critically looked at in three-year cycles, and goals and implementation plans will be adjusted as needed. In this process, our peers, partners, and collaborators will play an important part in assessing whether we are making the right impact in the right places.

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Impartiality
Neutrality
Independence
Voluntary service
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