

National Society Development (NSD) policy



Introduction

Strong, independent, self-sustained, well-functioning and trusted National Red Cross and Red Crescent Society local action and global reach are key to providing life-saving humanitarian action and supporting community resilience and local development to achieve the ambitions outlined in Strategy 2030 of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). These actions will significantly contribute towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The fundamental importance of local presence and action and the essential role the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies—long affirmed in the establishment of the IFRC and in its Constitution—has also been highlighted in the renewed focus on local actors in the Grand Bargain and in the localization discourse in the broader humanitarian sector.

At the IFRC, sustained investment in our local organisations is not a recent trend. The IFRC network is made up of community-based, trusted local organisations—the Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies—who work as a network, deliver locally and influence globally. Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers across 165,000 local branches and units act as agents of change at the community level, providing support to and enhancing resilience of people in situations of vulnerability and enabling opportunities for people to voice their needs. This unparalleled presence and our investment in local action makes the IFRC a unique global network of strong local action, contributing to community resilience and empowerment, social cohesion and the promotion and maintenance of peace.

Locally-led solutions are more likely to anticipate and respond to the emerging and fast-changing local and global needs. The scale, quality and effectiveness of our local action is, however, dependent on the ability of our National Societies and their branch networks to be fit for purpose, develop their capacities and adapt to the changing environment. This continuous development and transformation is the essence of our National Society Development (NSD) work.

The ownership and primary responsibility for NSD rests with the National Society itself. The IFRC Constitution¹ defines the responsibility of the IFRC to establish, maintain and continuously support its member National Societies to develop their capacities and abilities. This mandate is also reflected in the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement² (the Movement). In addition, IFRC Strategy 2030 defines seven transformations³ to ensure that the IFRC network can address growing global humanitarian and development challenges, thus setting the collective priorities of the IFRC National Society Development agenda.

This policy reaffirms the IFRC commitment to the continuous development of National Societies and defines the focus and key principles for NSD. Furthermore, the policy will guide all NSD support between

¹ See [IFRC Constitution](#) Preamble; Articles 5.A.; 10.

² Article 8, numeral 4, letters a, b, g.

³ Pages 18-26 of Strategy 2030, accessible at <https://www.ifrc.org/media/13322>

National Societies and International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners, the governments and other organisations that engage with the IFRC network on National Society Development.

Scope

This policy applies to all National Societies and the IFRC in all contexts and all aspects of our NSD work. It sets out our collective commitments to NSD and replaces the previous IFRC policies on Development (1995) and Development Cooperation (1997). This policy encompasses the policy level commitments from the National Society Development Framework (2013) as well as the National Society Development Compact (2019), which both provide further guidance on practical aspects of NSD and NSD support. The IFRC policies on volunteering, youth and protection of integrity are also relevant for NSD and complement this policy.

Definitions

National Society Development (NSD) is the continuous effort of each National Society to achieve and maintain an accountable and sustainable organisation that delivers—through volunteers and staff—relevant services to address needs, reduce vulnerabilities and build resilience in a changing environment.

NSD encompasses all aspects of the life of a National Society, including both what is referred to as ***Organisational Development*** and ***Capacity Strengthening / Enhancement***. This policy defines these two interrelated areas as follows:

Organisational Development is the part of NSD work that focuses on fundamental issues within the National Society: its mandate, identity, long-term strategic direction, basic organisational model, leadership drive, capacity to anticipate and adapt, and the relationships between different parts of the organisation or between the National Society and its environment, including the auxiliary role. Organisational Development recognizes the interconnectedness and influence of its different functions and levels and their impact and performance.

Capacity Strengthening / Enhancement is the part of NSD work that focuses on improving existing services and capacities by making them more impactful, effective, widespread and better related to the National Society mandate and mission. This includes both strengthening areas of work that focus on community resilience and empowerment as well as strengthening underpinning systems, procedures and tools.

National Society Development Support is defined as any support provided by an external actor to a National Society, based on the request and priorities of the National Society, that purposefully contributes to helping the National Society to achieve and maintain a sustainable organisation able to deliver relevant, quality, and accessible services in full respect of the Fundamental Principles.

Statement

The following principles shall underpin the IFRC membership collective thinking and practice on NSD as well as the IFRC work in supporting the IFRC network to achieve these priorities:

National Societies are the owners of their own development

The ownership and primary responsibility for NSD rests with each National Society. Each National Society shall aim to ensure that, in all circumstances, the National Society adheres to the conditions of recognition stipulated in Article 4 of the Statutes of the Movement. The National Society leadership bears the responsibility to set its strategic direction by identifying priorities and resources required to develop the National Society at local branch and headquarter level to enhance the impact of its services and programmes.

National Societies activities, services and programmes shall be based on needs expressed by people experiencing vulnerabilities and shall foster community resilience and development

National Societies shall frequently assess the domestic relevance of their services and programmes in relation to the evolving needs of communities—including those with specific needs such as youth, minorities and discriminated groups—as well as take into account the evolution of public policies and the National Society role as auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field.

National Societies shall maximise locally driven solutions to local and global challenges, enabling the communities to lead in the decision-making for any programmes or services involving them. They shall engage with other local actors, and whenever necessary, be ready to convene these local actors.

National Societies shall review, and when needed, revise their mandate, legal base and auxiliary role to safeguard their capacity to perform in accordance with the Fundamental Principles

National Societies shall engage in a regular dialogue with their public authorities to maintain, document and strengthen their auxiliary role⁴ based on National Societies' own assessments and the evolving context. National Society legal basis (e.g. Red Cross or Red Crescent law or decree, Statutes⁵ or Constitution, sectoral laws, rules and regulations, policies) shall be kept updated and relevant, ensuring that the National Society can perform at all times in accordance with the Fundamental Principles.

Volunteering is fundamental to a National Society, and National Societies shall invest in volunteering in all its aspects⁶

National Societies shall nurture voluntary action to deliver dynamic, flexible and innovative services locally, globally and across generations. This voluntary action shall be supported by a leadership that creates the enabling conditions for inclusive, safe, secure and innovative volunteer engagement and provides opportunities for volunteers who represent the diversity and cultural dimensions of their own communities and are therefore of greater value to them.

National Societies shall develop a territorial structure adapted to reach people experiencing vulnerabilities and build resilience

Local presence of a National Society enables early and efficient response to disasters or crises and addressing vulnerabilities. Thus, National Societies shall develop or strengthen the branches and their

⁴ See [Guide to Strengthening the Auxiliary Role through Law and Policy](#).

⁵ See [Guidance document on NS Statutes](#).

⁶ See IFRC Volunteering Policy.

overall territorial structure to be sustainable and close to those communities. National Societies shall extend their development efforts to all levels, locations and functions of the National Society to ensure that services respond to local needs, are led by the local level across the country, and are delivered with transparency, accountability and maximum efficiency. Diverse participation⁷ and the inclusion of different views in National Society structures and activities at all levels should be ensured.

National Society Development is a continual process which includes evidence-based decision-making and anticipates emerging needs and trends

Collecting, analysing and sharing data⁸ and qualitative information is paramount to better support National Societies leader decision-making and risk-taking. Each National Society must seek to be a learning organisation and continually improve to best meet changing needs in complex environments using the evidence of successes and failures to improve processes and systems. Strategic planning processes shall consider future trends and emerging needs, and internal development priorities shall focus on the transformations needed today to be future-ready.

National Societies shall invest in transformational leaders who can drive organisational change

National Societies leaders at all levels must plan, implement and oversee system-wide change aligned with Strategy 2030 and be responsible for its success and failure. They must lead by example, representing and advocating for humanitarian concerns to influence humanitarian agendas. Each National Society shall foster the development of emerging leaders and ensure that the diversity of its leadership at all levels reflects the communities it serves. National Society leaders shall also make a clear commitment to integrity and to championing the Fundamental Principles.

National Societies shall be transparent and accountable organisations who build trust with all stakeholders

Each National Society shall be accountable to the people it engages with and with whom it develops services and programmes. In addition, each National Society shall be accountable to its members, volunteers, stakeholders and partners.

Each National Society must establish policies and strengthen implementation mechanisms and systems to ensure accountability and protect National Society integrity and reputation. Each National Society must comply with the IFRC policy on Protection of Integrity and the Guidance for National Societies Statutes⁹ and work in line with IFRC Integrity Framework.¹⁰ This includes investing in National Society communication capacities and developing a comprehensive risk management approach in National Society functioning and its related support systems.

National Societies shall aim for financial sustainability

Each National Society shall accelerate its work to attract and manage the financial resources it needs to deliver services in a transparent and accountable manner, managing financial risk and opportunities. This includes the key role of the leadership to ensure the design of long-term activities and programmes that are focused and aligned to its mandate, that can be funded through sustainable resources, and that can be supported by solid accountability systems.

⁷ See [IFRC Gender and Diversity policy](#).

⁸ (in full respect of policies for data protection)

⁹ Approved by the IFRC Governing Board in 2018 based on the decision of the IFRC General Assembly in 2017.

¹⁰ The IFRC federal framework of oversight and control over integrity, presented at the IFRC GA 2019.

National Societies and their local branches, units and volunteers shall support one another in their development as a global distributed network

All National Societies shall share knowledge, learning, experiences and expertise with other National Societies to maximize global learning. Data and learning shall be increasingly shared with the IFRC Secretariat as well as across the network to allow for analysis of emerging priorities and lessons learned.

National Societies shall engage in peer-to-peer (P2P) exchange and learning with each other. This includes facilitating exchanges among volunteers, staff and branches within and across National Societies to prioritise collective action and joint problem-solving and unlock unique hands-on expertise in local action. In addition, National Societies will engage in regional networks and communities of practice around NSD to enhance the co-design and co-development of innovative approaches.

National Societies shall pay special attention to short, medium and long-term National Society Development objectives in case of emergencies

Large-scale humanitarian crises bring an increased need to safeguard National Society Development goals. National Societies shall spare no efforts to reduce risks and prepare beforehand to respond to large-scale emergencies and crises¹¹ and to scale up or scale down of humanitarian activities as required. At the onset of an emergency, National Societies shall pay special attention to how the NSD priorities might be affected by the new situation. They shall ensure that the National Society long-term development goals are not undermined by emergency response activities and that transition to recovery and scaling down occur in such a way that National Society capacity is maintained or even strengthened.

Focus on National Society Development Support

National Societies development priorities shall be defined, and their implementation lead by the National Society itself. When a National Society needs it, it may be supported in its development by a wide range of actors. The IFRC Secretariat plays a central role within the Movement to ensure the coordination of NSD support to National Society priorities and to maximise Movement partner contributions to avoid duplication. The IFRC Secretariat also supports National Societies to enhance their partnership with governments and external organisations and partners. While this policy applies directly to the IFRC network, the following principles for NSD support should inspire and guide all actors who provide National Society Development support. Further guidance and operationalization of the principles can be found in the NSD Compact.

NSD support must be aligned with the priorities of the National Society

To maximise its effectiveness, all National Society Development support from all partners shall be aligned with the needs, the mandate and the priorities identified by the National Society, whether articulated in a country NSD plan or other plans.

NSD support shall be predictable, coherent and coordinated

Partners offering NSD support shall draw upon their areas of expertise and recognised competence and make such support known and predictable. All partners shall commit to ensure quality support that can best add value and increase complementarity.

¹¹ See the IFRC [Disaster Risk Management policy](#).

To avoid inefficiencies, duplications, concentrations or gaps, NSD support shall be mapped and coordinated at country, regional and global level. This coordination shall be extended to all partners in NSD support, including external (non-Movement) actors.

At country level, a National Society receiving NSD support must be recognised as leading and coordinating partnership relationships. These relationships must demonstrate mutual partnership, accountability and respect.

NSD support shall be flexible and sustainable

To be truly effective, NSD support should be flexible and adaptable to changing needs or context. Partners shall be ready to realign their support according to changing contexts and needs.

NSD support shall contribute to the sustainability of National Society capacities and services for as long as needed, positioning the National Society in its own context.

Special attention shall be given to NSD support in emergencies

In times of emergencies, all partners shall consider the accrued development needs, including the need to safeguard the integrity of the National Society during an emergency, and contribute to addressing the development needs while not losing sight of the long-term development goals of the National Society. The coordination mechanisms shall consider NSD support needs along operational priorities.

Responsibilities

National Societies and IFRC Secretariat recognise that the IFRC NSD policy impact is a shared responsibility. National Societies and IFRC Secretariat are therefore bound to adhere to this policy and to ensure that their personnel, volunteers and partners are aware of and comply with its content of this policy.

The IFRC will support National Societies to adhere to this policy by:

- Developing strategies, frameworks, concepts and tools to guide, inspire and align NSD action;
- Ensuring coordination on NSD matters at national, regional and global levels, fostering partnerships between and among National Societies and between National Societies and other partners as appropriate;
- Providing direct NSD support and services to those National Societies that request it;
- Establishing mechanisms to foster and promote quality standards and peer-to-peer support as components of NSD support across the IFRC network, while providing quality assurance for all NSD support;
- Acting as knowledge broker, capturing and sharing NSD learning and producing quality information to drive evidence-based decision-making.

The IFRC will monitor implementation of and compliance to this policy by all National Societies.

National Societies shall, where relevant, align their existing policies to this policy with appropriate adaptation to their context. Movement and external partners who support capacity strengthening/enhancement are equally called upon to acknowledge this policy and use it and its associated NSD Framework, NSD Compact, guidelines and tools to guide their engagement in NSD and seek IFRC guidance and support whenever relevant.

This policy will be reviewed regularly, at the latest by the IFRC General Assembly in 2029.

References

This policy must be applied in line with the following other IFRC policies and guidance:

- Volunteering policy
- [Policy on the protection of integrity of National Societies and the bodies of the International Federation](#)
- [Gender and Diversity policy](#)
- [Youth policy](#)
- [Disaster Risk Management policy](#)
- [NSD Framework](#) and [NSD Compact](#)
- [Strategy 2030](#)
- [Guide to Strengthening the Auxiliary Role through Law and Policy](#)
- [Guidance document on NS Statutes](#)