

 **Norwegian Red Cross**

INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY

2021 – 2023

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THE NORWEGIAN RED CROSS

The Norwegian Red Cross is Norway's largest volunteer humanitarian organisation. Established in 1865, we are mandated through royal decree as an auxiliary to the Norwegian authorities both in times of war and times of peace. We have had international programmes since the 1960s.

We are a member of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (the Federation, IFRC) alongside more than 190 sister National Societies. Together, the National Societies, the Federation, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) constitute the Red Cross and Red Crescent (RCRC) Movement – the largest humanitarian network in the world, with more than 13 million volunteers. The RCRC Movement has a shared mission **‘to alleviate human suffering, protect life and health and uphold human dignity, especially during armed conflicts and other emergencies’**.

The Norwegian Red Cross is a membership-based organisation with a countrywide presence, carrying out humanitarian activities through more than 43,000 volunteers. As an auxiliary to the Norwegian authorities, our activities in Norway aim to assist and complement relevant public services. Our activities are grounded in local needs, resources, and competencies, and are carried out by volunteers within their own communities.

The RCRC Movement is uniquely positioned through the presence of National Societies and volunteers in communities before, during and after disasters, conflicts, and other crises. The Norwegian Red Cross' international approach consists of a combination of support to and collaboration with the Federation secretariat, National Societies, and the ICRC, facilitating humanitarian action rooted in local communities and complemented by international efforts. We aim to create synergies and draw upon the capacity and strength of the RCRC Movement as a whole.

This strategy establishes the strategic direction and objectives of our international work as part of the RCRC Movement as well as the broader humanitarian system.

The objective of our international work in the upcoming strategy period is to improve the health and protection of the most vulnerable people affected by conflict, crises, and climate change.

OUR SEVEN FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

The seven Fundamental Principles – **HUMANITY, IMPARTIALITY, NEUTRALITY, INDEPENDENCE, VOLUNTARY SERVICE, UNITY AND UNIVERSALITY** – are the RCRC Movement's ethical, operational, and institutional framework. The principles are at the core of our approach to helping people in need during armed conflict, natural disasters, and other emergencies.

GLOBAL CHALLENGES

At the beginning of 2020, nearly 168 million people in the world were in need of humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian needs are growing, and projections estimate that more than 200 million people may need assistance by 2022.¹

While recognising that global humanitarian trends are complex and interconnected, three current challenges stand out as particularly relevant for the Norwegian Red Cross' international engagement:

- Armed conflicts are more protracted and intense, while respect for international humanitarian law is under pressure.
- The humanitarian consequences of climate change and environmental degradation intensify existing vulnerabilities.
- Access to safe and quality health care remains a challenge for at least half of the global population.

Armed conflict remains the key driver of humanitarian needs, exposing affected populations to public health risks and disease, including significant mental health issues, and increased mortality. As areas become uninhabitable, people are forced to flee and families are separated, adding to the world's forcibly displaced population which reached a record high of 70.8 million in 2018.²

Protection needs soar in situations of conflict and crises. Women and girls in disasters, armed conflict, and other situations of violence face increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).³ We now also know more about the extent and impact of SGBV against men and boys. Highly violent settings severely affect access to education, leaving an estimated 27 million children out of school in conflict zones.⁴ The consequences of armed conflict last well beyond the cessation of hostilities.

In many places across the world, the space for neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action is under threat. Disregard for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is widespread, resulting in basic principles of proportionality, precaution, and distinction being ignored. Attacks on health care have reached a new high, disrupting health systems in situations where people need them the most.⁵ The devastating impact of urban warfare on civilians, critical infrastructure and essential services is aggravated by rapid global urbanisation.⁶

The impact of climate change and environmental degradation is intensified in conflict settings and other situations where people are marginalised, institutions are weak, and people's coping capacities are stretched.⁷ We are adapting to a reality where the climate crisis is a current and not a future threat. It is already contributing to an increase in the frequency, intensity and unpredictability of severe weather events and related health effects, which are overwhelmingly negative.

Natural disasters continue to affect millions of people and lead to great economic losses.⁸ Large-scale disasters like floods, storms and earthquakes cause massive destruction and death, and heat waves and wildfires are occurring with intensified frequency. Slow-onset disasters linked to climate change are also expected to both directly and indirectly cause further displacement.⁹

Millions of people lack access to safe and quality health care, particularly in contexts facing a combination of conflict and climate change.¹⁰ Half of the world's 7.3 billion people are still not receiving essential health services.¹¹ Lack of access to health care and functioning water and sanitation services turn preventable and treatable conditions, diseases, and injuries into deadly ones.¹² Infectious diseases

are becoming more prevalent and harder to control, and new and unexpected health threats add pressure to already insufficient and fragile services.¹³ The outbreak of COVID-19 has revealed weaknesses in the global ability to contain and respond to pandemics, leading up to a global health emergency that is likely to have long-term impact. The pandemic has particularly demonstrated the vulnerabilities in situations where conflict, emergencies and weak health systems coincide.¹⁴

International humanitarian assistance from governments and private donors continues to increase, yet humanitarian needs are growing faster.¹⁵ Humanitarian assistance is increasingly politicised, adding to the challenge of safe and impartial access to affected populations. The combination of growing humanitarian needs and a shrinking humanitarian space calls for new approaches as well as reaffirming, practicing, and promoting principled humanitarian action.

Continued advances in technology have opened new doors for access and response for humanitarian actors and populations in need. Connecting directly with people and communities in vulnerable situations, collecting and sharing information, and increased transparency improves the delivery of assistance and makes it more relevant and efficient. At the same time, new technology creates new vulnerabilities, and greater use of digital data increases the need for improved data protection to ensure the security of people at risk, and the impartiality of humanitarian action.

In an environment that is becoming increasingly polarised, the RCRC Movement is often one of few actors able to access hard-to-reach populations, through the presence of National Societies or the ICRC. The RCRC Movement's fundamental principles and protective emblems help to mitigate the challenges of operating in sensitive and volatile situations while reducing risk and gaining the trust of those who control access to people in need.¹⁶



Photo: Olav Saltbones/Norwegian Red Cross

OUR AMBITION

This international strategy is directed by the Norwegian Red Cross' Institutional Strategy for 2020–2023. Our international work will primarily contribute towards the goal corresponding with the first goal in IFRC's Strategy 2030: **'People anticipate, respond to, and quickly recover from crises'**.

Our priorities are based on a combination of the scale and scope of current and projected future humanitarian needs, and where our capacity and competence can add value. Against this backdrop, we will deliver and support services and efforts to:

Improve the health and protection of the most vulnerable people affected by conflict, crises and climate change.

We will respond to needs in conflict settings, often exacerbated by disasters, emergencies and the impact of climate change and environmental degradation. This includes protracted crises, various stages and consequences of conflict, and other situations of violence.¹⁷ We will also address humanitarian challenges and the need for new approaches in urban settings.

Our priority is to improve the health and protection of the most vulnerable people in areas where delivery of health services is limited or non-existent. We aim to increase access to quality health care in line with the universal health coverage agenda¹⁸ and the Sustainable Development Goals.¹⁹ We will strengthen our efforts to protect people in vulnerable situations from harm in accordance with established principles, standards and international law, and mainstream protection principles in all programmes supported by the Norwegian Red Cross.

Taking advantage of the RCRC Movement's presence before, during and after conflict and crises, we continue to support the IFRC secretariat and invest in long-term partnerships with National Societies and the ICRC, ensuring access to vulnerable populations in hard-to-reach areas. By staying involved in humanitarian settings over time, we aim to address both immediate and long-term needs in a sustainable manner.

Based on our domestic experiences and capacities, we will engage with other European National Societies to address humanitarian challenges and needs on the continent. We maintain an especially close relationship with our Nordic neighbours, collaborating across borders when possible and necessary. We will participate in RCRC Movement efforts to address humanitarian challenges and strengthen the Red Cross and Red Crescent footprint in Europe, not restricted to conflict and crises.

To achieve the overall objective of improved health and protection of the most vulnerable people affected by conflict, crises and climate change, we will centre our efforts to deliver results towards the following priorities:

We will improve the quality of and ensure safer access to health care for the most vulnerable and hard to reach populations in conflict and crises. We will prioritise increasing access to health care in contexts where services are inadequate or unavailable. Recognising the impact of climate change on the health of vulnerable populations, we will support the development of programmes addressing changing health needs arising from the combined effects of conflict, climate change and environmental degradation.

To address the gaps and barriers to health services available to affected communities, we will support health programmes, including primary health care services, first aid, and related community-based health activities and -surveillance. Specific efforts will be made to strengthen assistance and professional health services for survivors of SGBV. We will deploy emergency medical teams and invest in adapting cash-based modalities to reduce financial barriers to health care. We will strengthen our response capacity by further specialising and expanding within public- and community health. All our efforts are developed in line with established humanitarian principles and technical standards, and we will integrate climate in risk assessments of our programmes, operations and advocacy.

We will improve and ensure safer access to clean water and sanitation in situations of conflict or crises. Water and sanitation is vital to public health and a prerequisite to good health and the preservation of human dignity.²⁰ Our interventions will strengthen sustainable access to safe drinking water, improve hygiene practices and contribute to reducing waterborne diseases and outbreaks.

We will strengthen protection from harm and the violation of rights. We will address specific protection issues in collaboration with the RCRC Movement, ensuring that health workers, -facilities and patients are better protected, and that vulnerable people in conflict and crises have better protection from risks related to weapons and their use. Together with the RCRC Movement we will continue to address and increase protection from SGBV through global initiatives, and contribute to the tracing of those missing in conflict in order to restore family links. Recognising the impact of armed conflict on education, we will work in partnership with the ICRC to enable more children to access education in conflict settings.

We will work through and with the RCRC Movement to develop and implement policy, tools and standards, and invest in humanitarian diplomacy²¹ to increase respect and adherence to IHL and principled humanitarian action. We will strive to develop policies and strategies that are relevant and applicable, maintaining close links between policy and operational activities.



Photo: Mari Affret Mørtvedt/ICRC

We will actively contribute to improving the collective humanitarian impact of the RCRC Movement. We will invest in targeted areas of RCRC Movement capacities and continue to develop and make available our own specialized expertise and competencies to increase our joint capacity to deliver on institutional commitments.

We are dedicated to strengthening RCRC Movement coordination and cooperation and will continue to support and participate in established processes. We will further invest in collaboration with the ICRC, complementing our support to and collaboration with National Societies. We will contribute to strengthening the role of the Federation secretariat in carrying out its core services in coordination and membership services, with specific attention to global and regional disaster preparedness and response, National Society Development, and humanitarian diplomacy.

We will contribute to the development of policy, tools and standards within health, protection, and financial management and resource mobilization, in collaboration with the Federation secretariat, the ICRC and relevant National Societies.

We will strengthen our systematic approach to coordination and collaboration with RCRC Movement partners in Europe, increasing exchange of experiences and capacity building based on our domestic activities through international branch-to-branch cooperation. Nordic collaboration with our neighbours on mutual domestic challenges, interests and capacities will remain a priority.

We will promote and cultivate strong and effective local humanitarian action by supporting National Societies. Our focus area within National Society Development is strengthening financial management, where we have a lead role in the RCRC Movement in strengthening systems and methods to enable National Societies to implement their humanitarian action and fulfil their humanitarian mandate.

In selected contexts, we will support National Societies to strengthen their ability for results management of programmes supported by the Norwegian Red Cross.



Photo: Angela Hill/IFRC

OUR APPROACH

The Norwegian Red Cross' international work is realised through partnerships within the RCRC Movement.

We have four key criteria in assessing organisational priorities for humanitarian activities:

- There are unmet needs among people in vulnerable situations.
- The task follows naturally from the RCRC mission and is in accordance with our principles.
- The needs are not met by others with greater competency or that are better placed to respond.
- The RCRC Movement has the competency and resources to carry out the task.

We seek to maximise available resources for RCRC Movement impact through the most effective and efficient RCRC channels and have established guidelines for choosing operational modalities. We operate exclusively inside the framework of the RCRC Movement and seek to complement and cooperate with other National Societies.

To achieve our humanitarian objective, we work through the following modalities:

Long-term programmes	<p>Our preferred modality at country level is multi-year programming in direct partnership with National Societies, regulated by partnership agreements. Partnerships are managed based on established guidelines. Given our focus on conflict settings, and the mandate of the ICRC, complementarity and a co-designed response with the ICRC and National Societies is a priority.</p>
Emergency Response	<p>We respond directly to disasters and crises, and their aftermaths. Emergency response is carried out in line with established intervention principles for the Norwegian Red Cross. We may contribute with funding and/or deployment of personnel or assets under the auspices of the Federation, the ICRC, or National Societies. Norwegian Red Cross emergency response is organized from our National Office in coordination with RCRC Movement partners.</p>
Support to the Federation and the ICRC	<p>We support the Federation secretariat to fulfil its core responsibilities within membership services and humanitarian activities, with specific attention to coordination of global and regional disaster preparedness and response; National Society Development; and humanitarian diplomacy and international representation.</p> <p>We support the humanitarian action of the ICRC, mandated by the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols to provide humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of war and armed violence. We contribute to ICRC annual appeals in line with institutional agreements, including the tripartite cooperation with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the ICRC.</p>

Humanitarian Diplomacy and Policy

Humanitarian diplomacy is understood as persuading decision makers and opinion leaders to act in the interests of people in vulnerable situations, and with full respect for fundamental humanitarian principles. We are an active member of the RCRC Movement, contributing to global initiatives with and within the Movement as well as promoting RCRC positions and principles in our domestic context. In this strategy period we prioritise international humanitarian diplomacy efforts related to health, protection, and the humanitarian consequences of climate change.

Branch-to- branch cooperation and youth exchange

Norwegian Red Cross branches engage in international district-level cooperation with other National Society branches in Europe. The cooperation takes place through formalised partnerships and is based on principles of good programming, and results-based management. The approach is anchored in our domestic activities, building on the capacities and competencies of our volunteers. Youth exchange will be integrated in the branch-to-branch cooperation, providing international opportunities for young volunteers within Europe.

Global thematic cooperation

To strengthen the collective impact of the RCRC Movement, we provide forums for collaboration and support the development and specialization of capacities and competencies based on our own expertise. We contribute to the development of standards and best practices, focusing on specific components within the areas of health, protection, and finance development. To support the country-level implementation of the global thematic cooperation, such as finance development and community-based surveillance, we may enter into thematic project agreements with other National Societies.



Photo: SRCS

ORGANISATIONAL PRIORITIES

In the strategy period 2021–2023 we will invest in our ability to achieve results in a sustainable and responsible manner for the most vulnerable people affected by conflict, crises and climate change.

We prioritise and implement evidence-based action with a humanitarian impact. We will uncover and document vulnerabilities and humanitarian needs to inform operations, humanitarian diplomacy, and communication.

We will further invest in results-based management and learning, mainstreaming of protection, community engagement and accountability, and gender and diversity. We will continuously improve our approach in relevant areas of health and protection, and develop and implement technical standards. We will use data and digital tools to improve insight and accountability of humanitarian action. To better address the humanitarian consequences of climate change for people affected by conflict and crises, we will invest in research and analysis on this topic in cooperation with Movement partners and external actors.

We will further develop our capabilities as an open and adaptable organisation skilled at change. Internally, we will strengthen leadership and change management, with a focus on being adaptive and agile. We will strengthen resource and workforce planning, and improve our ability to attract, develop and retain talent related to our prioritised areas in health, protection and the humanitarian consequences of climate change.

We will work actively towards increasing gender equality and diversity, with a focus on representation and management positions against concrete and measurable targets. We will strive towards a safe, inclusive, and diverse work environment, developing a healthy organisational culture founded on openness, inclusion, and mutual respect. We will strengthen our work to prevent, detect and respond to sexual harassment and abuse.

We will collaborate with the private sector and academia, invest in learning, knowledge management and innovation. We will also apply technological and digital solutions in collaboration with other parts of the RCRC Movement.

By acting in a sustainable and responsible manner, we ensure the trust of volunteers, donors, and the communities we serve. We will increase and diversify funding to ensure our independence and ability to meet evolving humanitarian needs.

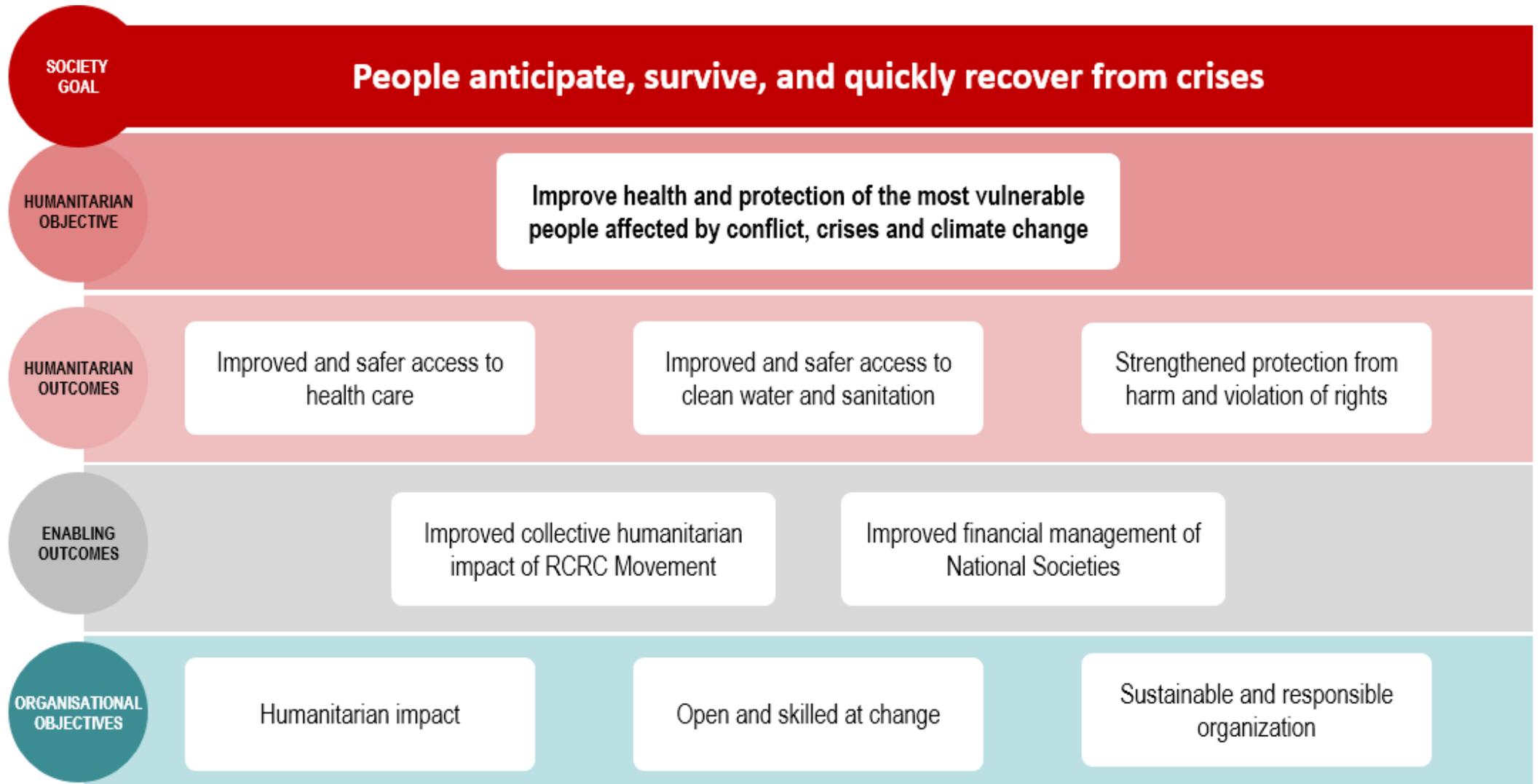
Transparency, and risk and integrity management are continued priorities at institutional, partnership and project levels. We will ensure open, regular and accessible information about our resource use and results.

All our actions shall be carried out in a sustainable and accountable manner with an active consideration of their negative impact on the climate and the environment. We commit to reducing our emission level and will dedicate resources to map our carbon footprint to understand sources of emission. We also commit to set an emission reduction target for our international work towards 2030, and to develop a concrete plan to achieve this target.

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- ¹⁰ WHO (2019). *World Health Statistics 2019: Monitoring Health for the SDGs*. Available from: <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/324835/9789241565707-eng.pdf>.
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- ¹⁴ International Crisis Group (24 March 2020). *COVID-19 and Conflict: Seven Trends to Watch*, Special Briefing number 4. Available from: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/sb4-covid-19-and-conflict-seven-trends-watch>
- ¹⁵ Development Initiatives (2019). <https://devinit.org/publications/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2019/international-humanitarian-assistance/>
- ¹⁶ IFRC & ICRC (2015). *The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement: Ethics and Tools for Humanitarian Action*. Available from: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/0513_002_Fundamental_Principles_low.pdf.
- ¹⁷ OSV is defined as situations of collective violence, perpetrated by one or several groups, that do not reach the threshold of an 'armed conflict', but that may have significant humanitarian consequences.
- ¹⁸ UHC2030 (1 April 2019). *IFRC and the universal health coverage agenda*. Available from: <https://www.uhc2030.org/news-events/partner-insights/ifrc-and-the-universal-health-coverage-agenda-544229/>
- ¹⁹ UN (n.d.) *Sustainable Development Goals*. Available from: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>
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- ²¹ IFRC (n.d.) *Humanitarian Diplomacy. Humanitarian diplomacy includes advocacy, negotiation, communication, formal agreements and other measures*. Available from: <https://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-diplomacy/humanitarian-diplomacy-policy/>

INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY MAP



SOCIETY GOAL

People anticipate, survive, and quickly recover from crises

HUMANITARIAN OBJECTIVE

Improve health and protection of the most vulnerable people affected by conflict, crises and climate change

HUMANITARIAN OUTCOMES

Improved and safer access to health care

Improved and safer access to clean water and sanitation

Strengthened protection from harm and violation of rights

ENABLING OUTCOMES

Improved collective humanitarian impact of RCRC Movement

Improved financial management of National Societies

ORGANISATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Humanitarian impact

Open and skilled at change

Sustainable and responsible organization



Photo: Olav Saltbones/Norwegian Red Cross



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