



## Volunteering in emergencies

Practical guidelines for Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies managing volunteers in emergency situations

## How we work

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**Saving lives, changing minds.**



*Strategy 2020* voices the collective determination of the IFRC to move forward in tackling the major challenges that confront humanity in the next decade. Informed by the needs and vulnerabilities of the diverse communities with whom we work, as well as the basic rights and freedoms to which all are entitled, this strategy seeks to benefit all who look to Red Cross Red Crescent to help to build a more humane, dignified, and peaceful world.

Over the next ten years, the collective focus of the IFRC will be on achieving the following strategic aims:

1. Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disasters and crises
2. Enable healthy and safe living
3. Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace

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During the Myanmar Cyclone Nargis, the winds and the tide lifted up the family's boat and smashed it into their house, which collapsed. Myanmar Red Cross volunteer and community-based first aid trainer Nyi Nyi Zaw and his family jumped on board the boat, which then started to move in the high waters but luckily got caught in the branches of a tree.

"When I looked around I found that people were floating and looked for help. Surprisingly, I did not panic at that time. I tied my right foot to the boat and another rope to the boat's mast, and we were able to rescue 27 people. The next morning when the water level went down, I organized people to stay in a temporary shelter and then reported to Bogalay Red Cross for help," says 32-year-old Nyi Nyi Zaw.

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# Foreword

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The significance that volunteers play in disaster response is a hallmark of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. I am proud to release the latest guide aimed at developing excellence in volunteering practice in emergencies. National Societies around the world play different roles in disaster response; some are primary responders, some play support roles, some National Societies exist in countries where disasters are regular occurrences, others mercifully only rarely deal with these calamities. Regardless, this guide will provoke useful thought and discussion for all.

Volunteers are central to our disaster response efforts and they need our protection and care. They are, in many instances, the first on the scene, at times endangering their own lives and exposing themselves to considerable psycho-social stress. It is also not unusual for volunteers to come from the affected communities themselves, lending their service and support whilst enduring their own significant personal challenges.

We must ask ourselves: how can we facilitate enabling environments for volunteers serving in emergency situations? How can we manage the influx of volunteers responding to emergencies, both locally and internationally? Recruiting, managing and supporting volunteers during emergencies presents numerous challenges, and at the same time opportunities to enhance legislation, advocacy and partnerships with stakeholders to grow volunteering to scale.

This guide explores a range of issues and ways in which National Societies can improve the protection and safety of volunteers. It builds on our previous work on legal issues and legislation relating to volunteers including Resolution 4 adopted at the 2011 International Conference, which commits us to work with Governments to improve the legal and social frameworks for volunteers.

Volunteers are our most valued resource. They bring local knowledge and contacts, know the language, customs and operating environments, as well as bring a wide range of skills and capacities to rapidly scale up activities when needed, and sustain these services in the long-term. We must continue to do all that we can to promote and support our volunteers. I am glad that we are able to add to this support through the publishing of this guide.

I wish you continued success in enabling greater environments for volunteering.



Bekele Geleta  
Secretary General  
IFRC

# Introduction

## Why write these guidelines?

Emergencies challenge National Societies to deliver services to vulnerable people in confusing and difficult conditions. One key aspect of the National Society's capacity to deliver such services is the capacity to mobilize and manage volunteers.

The sudden nature and complexity of emergencies means that National Societies require robust volunteer management systems in place prior to emergencies in order to be able to deliver services when required.

Recent years have seen National Societies face a number of challenging issues relating to volunteering in emergencies, for example:

- Effective coordination of volunteers, including management of spontaneous volunteers
- Volunteer training and safety during emergencies
- Psychosocial support to volunteers during and after emergencies
- Legal issues relating to volunteering in emergencies, in particular National Society liability for volunteer accidents, and for the actions of volunteers
- Legal issues around payments made to volunteers working long hours in emergencies
- Decrease in ongoing National Society volunteer capacity following large emergency operations

Training of community volunteers on water and sanitation subjects by Afghanistan Red Crescent.



Ali Hakim / IFRC

The purpose of these guidelines is to pull together good practice from around the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement (Movement) into a framework to support National Societies in improving their work with volunteers in emergencies.

## Who are these guidelines for?

These guidelines will be primarily useful for National Society focal points for volunteer coordination and disaster management. The guidelines provide insights into policy and operational issues that need to be negotiated within National Society management, and with volunteers.

## How to use these guidelines

Every National Society operates in a different social, legal and political context. Some National Societies are the primary responders in their country, while others play subsidiary roles to government responses. Some respond to emergencies on a daily or weekly basis, while for others emergency response is an unusual activity. The goal of these guidelines is therefore to promote discussion around management of generic issues within National Societies, and suggest examples of how issues can be approached based on the practice of other National Societies. The guidelines should not be read as prescriptive.

The guidelines should promote discussion within the National Society between volunteer coordination and programme volunteers and staff. Some of the issues raised relate to National Society policy, and will need reflection at governance level, while others are operational decisions that are likely to be taken by management either before or during an emergency in response to circumstances.

In testing and implementing these guidelines it is strongly recommended that National Societies consult extensively with volunteers to gather their input and feedback.

## Guidelines structure

The guidelines are broadly structured around preparation prior to an emergency, response during an emergency, and transition to ongoing volunteer services after an emergency. They are preceded by general information on the different types of volunteers in emergencies, the added value of volunteers in emergencies, and generic patterns of volunteering within National Societies.



A box with this icon provides a tool or a link.



A box with this icon provides an example.



A box with this icon asks a critical question.

## Other related resources

This toolkit makes reference to ideas explored in more depth in three recent publications:

- *Legal issues related to volunteering – Toolkit for National Societies*
- *The legal framework for volunteering in emergencies*
- *Protect. Promote. Recognize. Volunteering in emergencies – an IFRC advocacy report*
- Guidelines on psychosocial support to volunteers during emergencies produced by the Psychosocial Support Reference Centre
- A publication on Organizational Development (OD) in Emergencies under development in Asia Pacific zone

Please make use of these in order to develop further understanding of some of the issues raised.

## Terminology

In this document we will use the following terminology, taken from the 2011 IFRC volunteering policy:

A *Red Cross Red Crescent volunteer* is a person who carries out volunteering activities for a National Society, occasionally or regularly.

*Volunteering with the Red Cross Red Crescent* is organized by recognized representatives of National Societies and is aimed at furthering its services and activities, always working in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. It is carried out by people motivated by free will, and not by a desire for material or financial gain, nor by external social, economic or political pressure.

In using the term “emergency”, we refer to any sudden onset crisis that exceeds a community’s usual coping mechanisms. While some of the information contained in the toolkit is relevant to slow-onset emergencies, the main focus of these guidelines is sudden onset emergencies although there are also references to armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

*Each morning, hundreds of ‘spontaneous’ volunteers arrived at Thai Red Cross headquarters in Bangkok to help pack family kits and relief trucks.*





# 1. Volunteering in emergencies

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*Strategy 2020* identifies volunteering as being at the heart of community building and the essential foundation for making and sustaining strong National Societies. Yet sometimes it is easy to overlook the reasons why volunteers are such an asset to National Societies during emergencies. Henry Dunant expressed his view of the need for volunteers in his book “*A Memory of Solferino*”:

*“Would it not be possible, in time of peace and quiet, to form relief societies for the purpose of having care given to the wounded in wartime by zealous, devoted and thoroughly qualified volunteers? ... For work of this kind, paid help is not what is wanted. ... There is need, therefore, for voluntary orderlies and volunteer nurses, zealous, trained and experienced, whose position would be recognized by the commanders of armies in the field, and their mission facilitated and supported.”*

Put in more modern terms, and in the context of natural disaster rather than the conflict that Dunant was referring to, we might suggest the following advantages to mobilization of volunteer help in emergencies:

- The process of people coming together in local organizations is an aspect of community resilience
- Volunteers provide a first response at community level that often cannot be provided by government or external agencies
- Community volunteers bring local knowledge and contacts unavailable to people from outside a community
- Volunteer involvement allows National Societies to involve lots of trained people at short notice: the capacity to scale up activities is related to the capacity to mobilize people, not to the capacity to pay them
- Volunteer involvement is cost-effective: while volunteer mobilization costs money, volunteers are often less expensive than paid staff, or carry out tasks for which there is not enough money to pay staff
- Volunteers bring a wide range of professional skills with them from their other roles in life
- Local volunteer involvement promotes local ownership and accountability of operations if volunteers are meaningfully involved in planning



## **What volunteers do during emergencies**

In 2005, Vietnam Red Cross volunteers were mobilized to help contain the spread of avian influenza. The volunteers, well trained and equipped, conducted public awareness and public education at community level to promote behaviour change.

Indonesia Red Cross has a SATGANA Disaster Response Team, specially developed and established to participate in disaster management in the geographical area of the branch. During emergencies, they do search and rescue, evacuation and first aid, field kitchens, relief distributions, tracing etc.



Indra Yoganara / Indonesian Red Cross

## Overview of volunteer involvement in National Societies

There are two broad approaches to volunteering within the Movement which are reflected in volunteering in emergencies:

- 1) The **member-based model** is one where local groups of National Society members self-organize in order to meet local needs. The members are often the legal owners of the organization, and elect local, regional and national leaders. Not all members are active members (i.e. volunteers). These groups are not managed directly by the National Society, but led, or self-led.
- 2) The **service delivery model** is similar to a standard human resources (HR) process for paid staff. Volunteers are recruited against role descriptions to carry out a task that contributes to fulfilling a mission. This model of volunteer engagement is often used in project-based activities, especially those funded by external partners, or for the recruitment of specific volunteer roles (e.g. financial advisor).

The **member-based model** is more common in the Movement, although most National Societies will make use of both approaches at different times and for different roles within the organization. Patterns of volunteering in emergencies typically involve both models, often as follows:

- An initial response to the emergency is provided by local volunteers who are often grouped in a membership model. These volunteers may be involved in other National Society programmes, and have little or no specialized disaster response training.

*PMI (Palang Merah Indonesia – Indonesian Red Cross) volunteers respond to a bomb explosion in the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta, Indonesia.*

*PMI Satgana (Disaster Response Team) volunteers played an essential role in providing first aid, evacuating survivors and handling the remains of those who perished in bombings at two hotels.*

*Indonesian Red Cross runs a major ambulance service, with seven ambulances having been deployed to the scene of emergency.*

- As the National Society response gathers speed, these may be superseded by volunteers with specific training in emergency response, who may well not belong to the local community and be organized at a regional level. As the situation is assessed, it becomes clearer what help is needed, local volunteers and members of the community coming forward as spontaneous volunteers are recruited and managed within the service delivery model.

It is important for National Societies to be clear about which approach to volunteering their volunteer structures are based upon, and at which point of the emergency cycle, as this affects many aspects of volunteer coordination.

Volunteer involvement with any organization, and in both paradigms described above, usually follows the volunteer involvement cycle.

Even in emergencies, volunteers go through the same cycle. Volunteers who are already involved in the National Society are already trained and oriented: their initial response is likely to be based on this training. As the National Society assesses and develops plans for its response, the level of coordination that it provides will increase.

Spontaneous volunteers, on the other hand, will go through a compressed version of the cycle based on quite specific National Society planning, and, in all likelihood, will receive shortened training and orientation.

## Different types of volunteers in emergencies

National Society contingency planning should include specific plans for the different types of volunteers that are likely to be involved in an emergency. There are strategic choices for National Societies to make about how they train, maintain and deploy volunteers in emergencies.

*Fiji Red Cross staff preparing essential relief supplies for families most affected by the floods. Severe flooding and landslides caused by constant heavy rains in the northern and western division of Fiji's largest island of Viti Levu, forced thousands from their homes. Staff and volunteers of the Fiji Red Cross Society played a critical role in responding to the most immediate needs of many of those displaced during this emergency. The National Society distributed emergency relief items to over 3,000 people in 74 evacuation centres and to stranded communities who could not make it to those centres.*



Fiji Red Cross Society

The following are broad categories of youth and adult volunteers with which National Societies are likely to engage before, during and after emergencies:

## Volunteers trained in disaster management

They are specifically trained volunteers with roles and responsibilities relating to emergencies. The National Society is likely to rely on their support on a regular basis, depending on the frequency of emergencies. Typical roles that they might play include:

- Rescue
- Relief distributions
- Evacuation of those injured
- Family reunification
- Provision of health care

## Other existing National Society volunteers

While the National Society may not have emergency response volunteers in every community, it may have other volunteers carrying out health, disaster risk reduction or social services. These volunteers can be an important resource to a National Society in a response, in particular if they are present in emergency-affected communities.

Typical roles that such volunteers play include:

- Acting as a focal point for initial community rescue efforts
- Providing an initial response to immediate needs, for example first aid
- Communicating an initial assessment of the situation to National Society regional or national structures
- Providing local information and knowledge as the National Society response grows
- Filling further volunteer roles in support of an ongoing emergency response
- Crowd control

## Spontaneous volunteers

The 1995 Kobe earthquake in Japan illustrated how imaginative and creative volunteer managers have to be. Literally tens and thousands of newcomers came every day to Kobe, eager to help the disaster victims.

The same phenomenon of spontaneous volunteering happened during the 2005 Pakistan earthquake, the 2001 Gujarat Earthquake, the 2005 Hurricane Katrina in the United States, and the 2011 social unrest in the Middle East and North Africa. Likewise, more than 30,000 spontaneous volunteers converged on the city of New York in response to calls for help in the World Trade Centre disaster.

Studies on spontaneous volunteering have shown that the emergence of spontaneous volunteers is directly related to the following factors:

1. The greater the size, density and proximity of populations to the area of impact, the more emergent groups of volunteers will arise.

2. The greater the intensity and scope of the impact of an event, the more conducive will be the environment for mutual help and for emergent volunteer groups.
3. The more extensive the media used, that generates interpersonal and group communication, the more emergent volunteer groups will develop.

Spontaneous volunteering is inevitable and the inclusion of spontaneous volunteers in the National Society's emergency management plan may be challenging.

## Corporate volunteers

Some National Societies have agreements with private sector companies which make human resources available to the National Society during emergencies. These could involve specific forms of expertise (for example logistics) to support the National Society, and might be linked to in-kind or financial donations, or to the needs and well being of volunteers.

This guide will not address corporate volunteering in emergencies specifically, but it is likely that some secretariat guidance will be developed in 2012 that addresses the broader issue of corporate volunteering.

## International volunteers

There is a growing trend for individuals to travel to disaster-affected areas from other countries to volunteer. Such actions are often well-meaning, but very often such individuals face serious linguistic and cultural barriers to effective work. There are significant challenges arising from having international volunteers who are not part of a coordinated response, nor having been trained for such demanding work. Their presence can also add additional stress to scarce local resources.

In relation to perception, acceptance and identification, National Societies should be aware of the challenges arising from deploying international volunteers attached to government programs or deployed as Red Cross volunteers and working with other local NGOs or the government and not directly deployed with the Red Cross.

This guide will focus on mobilization and management of national volunteers by National Societies.

## Online volunteers

A further growing trend is for volunteers from outside disaster areas (nationally or internationally) to provide online volunteer time to support emergency operations. This might involve mapping disaster-affected locations, developing IT tools or providing other forms of online IT support.

This guide does not address the work of online volunteers: however it is likely that some secretariat guidance will be developed in 2012 that addresses the broader issue of IT and volunteering.

*Volunteer recruitment by Maldivian Red Crescent on the International Volunteers Day – volunteer fills in a volunteer registration form.*



## 2. Prior to emergencies: Focus on policy and planning

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As part of a National Society's contingency planning, it needs to have a coherent plan for how it will mobilize and manage the different types of volunteers described above to respond to emergencies through the emergency cycle.

There are different management issues associated with each type of volunteer, and a National Society is likely to develop different strategies, policies and procedures applicable to each group.

Obviously the scale and scope of an emergency will determine how a National Society responds, and so procedures need to be developed that lead from an assessment of the situation to concrete steps to appropriate volunteer mobilization.

### **Key strategic decisions to be made prior to emergencies:**

#### **Role of existing volunteers**

National Societies adopt different approaches as to what volunteers in other programmes should do during emergencies. Some National Societies require all volunteers to undertake basic training, often in first aid, and to make themselves available in emergencies. In other National Societies, emergency response is a specialized area of work, and other volunteers will not usually be involved. This is a decision that National Societies must make based on an assessment of their likely needs and capacities.

In any case, the National Society should:

- ✓ Clearly inform volunteers of what is expected of them in emergency situations
- ✓ Provide relevant training as appropriate
- ✓ Ensure that volunteers understand their responsibilities in the application of the Fundamental Principles as this would have an immediate effect on the acceptance of the national society, access to vulnerable people, safety and security.

Underpinning mobilization of all existing National Society volunteers is an effective communications system that can identify and make contact with volunteers at short notice at local and intermediary levels of the National Society.

#### **Positioning and availability of trained disaster management volunteers**

Disaster management volunteers are often highly trained and specialized, and hence represent a big financial investment by the National Society. They also often work together in specialized teams. Both of these factors mean that a National Society is unlikely to be able to position such highly trained disaster response volunteers in every community: they are more likely to be based at a regional or even national level, and be activated and deployed by the National Society depending on the scale and scope of an emergency. Their usual geographical location may



also mean that it takes some time for them to reach an emergency-affected area, and that when they are there they require accommodation of some sort.

Given the nature of their role, it is likely that a National Society may need to develop special agreements with the employers of such volunteers, allowing them time off work in order to respond to emergencies.

One challenge for National Societies can be maintaining the skills and interest of such volunteers between disasters. One approach can be for volunteers to be involved in other programme areas, carrying out disaster response work in addition to their other commitments.

Another is for volunteer skills to be maintained through simulation exercises. Simulation is an important process for volunteers to develop skills and understandings in order to be able to perform in real-life situations.

## Planning for spontaneous volunteers

The appearance of spontaneous volunteers may place National Societies in a dilemma. On one hand, additional voluntary help may be desperately needed. The National Society may also feel that it is morally obliged to accept offers of help, or that it will damage its reputation if it does not. There is also the possibility that volunteers recruited during an emergency will remain with the National Society afterwards.



### Earthquake and tsunami disaster

#### Thank you... but no.

#### How the Japanese Red Cross effectively declined spontaneous volunteers after the March 11, 2011 Earthquake and Tsunami

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

First of all, we thank you very much for your expressions of concern and offers of support to the Japanese Red Cross Society (JRCS).

The disaster areas, including Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima and Ibaraki, are in a serious situation and JRCS's national headquarters has received information on various needs and preparations from the disaster site office. In response, we have been mobilizing Japanese Red Cross volunteers, who have previously been registered and received training specifically as "disaster relief volunteers", from all over the country through our branches.

However, we regret to inform you that JRCS has not yet constructed its system to accept any unregistered volunteers, both internationally and domestically. Any updated information will be posted on our web site: <http://www.jrc.or.jp/english/index.html>

We are sorry that we cannot provide any volunteer opportunities to you at this stage, but you may be able to get other information if you contact "xxx xxx xxx", which is operating some disaster volunteer centres in affected areas. Please note that it is a separate entity from Japanese Red Cross Society and contact them directly if you would like to get any information in detail:

- 1) The disaster volunteer centre in Miyagi prefecture: +81-22-xxx-xxxx
- 2) The disaster volunteer centre in Iwate prefecture: +81-19-xxx-xxxx
- 3) The disaster volunteer centre in Fukushima prefecture: +81-24-xxx-x

We highly appreciate your understanding.

Thanking you once again for your kind offer, we remain, with best regards.

Yours sincerely,

Organizational Development Department  
Japanese Red Cross Society

On the other hand, acceptance of spontaneous volunteers places a moral and legal obligation on the National Society towards the volunteers and also towards National Society beneficiaries. In order to meet this obligation, the National Society must invest resources in training and supporting spontaneous volunteers to a level at which they can perform to the high standards expected of National Society volunteers, both for their own safety, the safety of other people, and the reputation of the National Society.

In preparing for emergencies, National Societies should develop policy and procedures to guide operational decision-making regarding spontaneous volunteers. There are three broad approaches to the question:

- ✓ The National Society never accepts spontaneous volunteers
- ✓ The National Society only accepts spontaneous volunteers in given circumstances (for example a certain level of disaster), or with specific skills (for example trained medical staff)
- ✓ The National Society always accepts spontaneous offers of help.



If a National Society is not going to accept spontaneous volunteers, then it should develop a clear communications strategy for how this will be communicated to potential volunteers given the strong feelings often felt by potential volunteers during emergencies. Such communications could include:

- ✓ Thanks for interest
- ✓ A short explanation of why the National Society is not accepting further volunteers at this time
- ✓ Links or referral to other organizations that may have volunteer roles
- ✓ Encouragement to consider volunteering with the National Society in other circumstances.

The National Society should also consider in advance how this message will be communicated: through local media, National Society website etc., as appropriate.

If a National Society may, or will, accept spontaneous volunteers, then it should likewise develop a communications plan. Such a plan should include:

- ✓ Thanks for interest
- ✓ What skills the National Society is looking for and any further requirements of volunteers (for example driving licence, health)
- ✓ How potential volunteers should contact the National Society

The National Society should likewise consider in advance how this message will be communicated: through local media, National Society website etc., as appropriate.

If the National Society may, or is going to accept spontaneous volunteers, then it needs to prepare in advance for how it will process such volunteers. Planning should include:

- ✓ Where volunteers will be processed
- ✓ What types of role they will carry out
- ✓ How their suitability for work in emergencies will be assessed
- ✓ How they will be trained and taught about our Fundamental Principles and the role of the Red Cross Red Crescent in emergencies
- ✓ How their personal information will be captured
- ✓ How they will be followed up after the emergency phase



#### **Gender-sensitive approaches for disaster management**

This is a practical guide for National Societies published by the IFRC Asia Pacific Zone in 2010, in hard copy and CD format.

The IFRC's "Training Pack on Gender Issues" may also be a useful reference. This training pack is included in the above CD.

As part of the contingency planning of the National Society in responding to conflict and situations of collective violence, it is recommended to seek support from the ICRC to ensure that elements of the Safer Access Framework are incorporated in the plan.

Based on the responses to these questions, National Societies can train staff and volunteers to respond appropriately to the needs of spontaneous volunteers.

## **Gender and diversity**

The role of gender in emergencies is complex. In planning for volunteering in emergencies, however, National Societies should ensure that adequate steps are in place to involve both men and women in leading and delivering volunteer services. This should be based on an appropriate gender policy within the National Society.

In responding to emergencies, the importance of diversity amongst the volunteers is important. Having a diverse group of volunteers during emergencies may enable a National Society to have more access to those affected by the disaster and to the most vulnerable.

## **Pre-disaster coordination with other organizations**

Coordination and communication among volunteering and disaster related organizations are important to ensure cooperation in an actual operation.



### **Emergency and early recovery volunteering (EERV) in Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru** *Pre-disaster coordination*

The Red Cross National Societies in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru implemented a 16-month project, “The Red Cross Auxiliary Role to the Andean Committee of Prevention and Disaster Response – CAPRADE: Strengthening of volunteering national systems in the Andean region improving capacities for resilience and disaster response”.

The project is organized around 4 results. The 3rd result reinforced EERV networks, exchanges, and resource and skill sharing to support volunteering. EERV organizations from the private business sector and universities were incorporated into existing EERV networks. The Peruvian Civil Defence, with the support of the Peruvian Red Cross and the participation of the national bodies and civil society, founded the National EERV Network. In Bolivia, nine departments committed to the State response institutions’ action plan. Support has been provided to the national volunteer system in Colombia. A volunteer working group, incorporating EERV, has been formed with the Ecuadorian Government and non-government institutions, with the Ecuadorian Red Cross in a leading role.

More information available at [www.desaprender.org](http://www.desaprender.org)

Prior to disasters, meeting other agencies will be helpful in assessing overlaps and gaps in services that would be made available in the event of a disaster.

The effectiveness of volunteers in emergencies can be limited by poor coordination with local authorities in particular. Building such relationships and mutual understanding of the role and capacities of volunteers in responding to emergencies is therefore a key preparatory step.

Some National Societies have agreements with other national volunteer organizations for mutual help and support. In this type of agreement it should be clear which organization will have operational control of volunteers. National Societies entering into such agreements should ensure that any volunteers working under the umbrella of the National Society are properly inducted into the role and responsibilities of Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers.

### **Policy on volunteers affected by an emergency**

Volunteers may themselves have been affected by an emergency. Being affected by the situation is a well known risk factor for helpers in terms of stress and recovery. The National Society is therefore potentially faced by a dilemma as to how these volunteers should be treated in comparison to other vulnerable people. This is clearly an extremely sensitive area, and one in which there is no right answer. However, two broad policy approaches are possible:

- ✓ Volunteers are treated in exactly the same way as other members of an affected population at all times
- ✓ Volunteers receive a level of preferential treatment in circumstances in which lack of this treatment will otherwise prevent them from volunteering.

It is suggested that National Societies only take the second option in exceptional circumstances and in an open and transparent manner with communities.

Mobilizing volunteers who are themselves affected by the disaster is not necessarily negative. Being active and approached as a capable person with expert skills on needs and local resources, rather than a “helpless victim,” is a key element in early psychosocial support.

In armed conflicts and other situations of violence, the National Society has to reflect or assess not only the psychosocial element but also the acceptance of volunteers in the community and that they be continually provided support particularly in the areas of adherence to the Fundamental Principles.

## Policy on volunteer hours, incentives and payments

The acute nature of emergencies can mean that volunteers often work for long hours for days on end. There is clearly an ethical issue about the length of time for which this can continue without becoming exploitative. There are also the practical issues of how volunteers survive financially and physically while volunteering

Lack of sleep, working for too long without pauses etc., affect both judgment and performance. Studies have also shown a link between exhaustion and risk taking behaviour. It is important to set these limits within the organization, since exhaustion can affect self-awareness and the ability to see one's own need for rest. There are studies suggesting that sleep deprivation at work can have as hazardous effect as being drunk at work.

National Societies should develop policy and procedures that address

- ✓ How the National Society will provide for volunteers working for it. This should include food and accommodation (if necessary) for volunteers working long shifts and away from home.
- ✓ For how long it is reasonable to expect volunteers to work before volunteers receive a wage for their work and are properly employed according to local labour law.

A common situation is for National Societies to pay incentives or per diems to people working in emergencies over long periods of time, but continue to call them volunteers. Such incentives are often unrelated to the actual cost of volunteer involvement (in contradiction to the IFRC Volunteering Policy), and amount to a wage, often below the national minimum wage. In some major operations, the amount of external funding available and the scarcity of labour means that this payment becomes several times the average wage.

The impact of this can often be that the term volunteering becomes confused with paid labour, which can decrease a community's willingness to volunteer for the National Society after the emergency is over. People engaged under such terms are likely to leave the organization for better-paying opportunities, leading to high turnover. National Societies may be taken to court for violating minimum wage legislation if payments do not meet minimum requirements. National Societies may also contravene labour/employment law, as volunteers may be deemed employees based on the length of service, and be entitled to certain benefits due to this status. In short, it is strongly recommended that National Societies develop clear guidelines to separate volunteer involvement from paid work during emergencies, and hire people where necessary under employment contracts in line with national minimum standards.

Such an approach:

- Recognizes that it may be exploitative to expect volunteers to work unpaid for long periods of time
- Maintains a clear dividing line between volunteer work and paid employment for individuals



### Set limit for volunteering hours

A team leader of a disaster response team gave an interview in close connection to a natural disaster. The interview was recorded. When watching the video, one can see that the team leader is so tired that he can no longer speak in an understandable way. He had been working around the clock for several days. Afterwards, he explained that he realized he was tired at the time, but did not think it was too serious.



What is the maximum length of time that your volunteers can undertake activities and under what conditions before being considered employees under labour legislation?

- Is less likely to create confusion in local communities about the meaning of volunteering
- Means that the National Society is less likely to face legal challenges under national labour laws.

All of the discussions above have operational (including financial) implications, as well as policy implications. There are not necessarily any right answers that can be transferred from one National Society to another: what is important is that National Societies approach these questions in good time, invest in appropriate systems and procedures to put in place, and review them in the light of experience.

## Planning for strong volunteer management in emergencies

Volunteer management is the process of putting policies relating to volunteers into practice. As explained above, it can be very different between National Societies: one size does not fit all!

In planning for emergencies, National Societies will have to consider a whole range of issues related to volunteer management. Some have financial implications – for example volunteer insurance. Emergencies place volunteer management systems under particular strain because of the intensity and risk of work in emergencies.

### Volunteer leadership and management

The National Society must provide enough adequately trained volunteers and staff to lead and manage volunteers effectively. Where possible, team leaders and similar leadership positions should be identified prior to an emergency and suitable training given. Without such leadership and management, volunteer involvement is likely to have little impact. Simulation exercises should model a National Society's capacity to effectively lead and manage existing and spontaneous volunteers in an emergency.

### Understanding legal issues around volunteering and legal risk management

The National Society must manage volunteers in emergencies in line with national legislation and practice. Not only does it have a moral duty towards volunteers, it may also be held legally liable for its work with volunteers, as well as their actions.



**For more information, please refer to the 'Toolkit for National Societies: Legal Issues Related to Volunteering'**

The toolkit provides a framework to support National Societies in analyzing the national legal issues that may impact on volunteers and volunteering, and suggest practical steps that National Societies can take in order to reduce and mitigate risk.

A more technical scoping study on volunteering in emergencies provides an analysis of the legal framework relating to volunteering in emergencies, across diverse jurisdictions.

A National Society should have a general risk management framework for its work with volunteers, as well as a clear understanding of the legal standards applicable as well as any alteration in these standards (for example on declaration of a state of emergency). In general, this is an underdeveloped area of law in many countries, and the IFRC legal department has undertaken research to develop a better understanding in this area, as well as to develop broader guidelines relating to volunteers and the law.

## Volunteer insurance

Are volunteers insured for accidents while they render their volunteering work? It will be important to review the insurance policies to make sure that they are updated and cover all volunteers. Do they also cover spontaneous volunteers that have been accepted and mobilized in emergencies? If not, what procedures have to be followed to ensure that they cover these additional human resources as immediately as possible?

Are volunteers protected from personal civil liability for personal injuries caused by acts made in good faith and without recklessness, in the course of carrying out their volunteering?

If so, does this protection extend to spontaneous volunteers? If not, what procedures have to be followed to ensure that they cover these additional human resources as immediately as possible?

## Volunteer data collection systems

National Societies should have simple and robust volunteer data collection systems in place prior to an emergency. These can be paper-based or electronic, but the key point is that they enable the National Society to mobilize volunteers effectively through providing accessible contact details for volunteers.

## Key policies to have in place prior to an emergency – checklist

- ✓ A National Society volunteering policy
- ✓ A National Society gender policy
- ✓ Policy on mobilization of existing National Society volunteers
- ✓ Policy on mobilization of spontaneous volunteers
- ✓ Policy on volunteers as beneficiaries
- ✓ Policy on volunteer reimbursement, expenses, and point at which volunteers should be employed

### Accident Insurance Scheme Red Cross Red Crescent Volunteers

**For the cost of only 1 Swiss franc per volunteer per year**, this insurance provides some basic cover in case of death or serious injury requiring emergency treatment.

You can ask for more information at [insurance.unit@ifrc.org](mailto:insurance.unit@ifrc.org), and a summary of the insurance and subscription forms are available on FedNet.

#### Who is insured?

Volunteers who have joined the global accident insurance scheme are insured while participating in activities organized by National Societies and/or the IFRC.

#### What is the period of insurance?

1 January to 31 December.

#### What is the maximum age of insured persons?

The age limit is 70 years. Insurance covers the year when the volunteer turns 70.

#### Where is the insurance valid? Worldwide.

#### What about war and conflict?

The coverage is extended to accidents resulting from an act of war or civil war provided the volunteer does not take any active part in the event.

#### What compensation can a volunteer get?

For a payment of 1 Swiss franc:

\*Disability: 6,000 Swiss francs

\*Medical expenses: 3,000 Swiss francs

\*In case of death: 3,000 Swiss francs

Medical expenses will be reimbursed up to the defined level. In case of death, a lump sum payment will be made.

Email: [volunteering@ifrc.org](mailto:volunteering@ifrc.org)  
[youth@ifrc.org](mailto:youth@ifrc.org)

Tel: +41 22 730 42 22

Fax: +41 22 733 03 95



### Communications

#### Practical issues to consider

- Prior to disasters and crises, develop media and public education campaigns that encourage people to be a Red Cross Red Crescent volunteer
- Develop standardized public education and media messages to use immediately after a disaster, during ongoing response and recovery, and after a disaster
- Establish relationships with diverse media outlets and community leaders to ensure messages are designed to reach all segments of the community.

## Key procedures to have in place prior to an emergency – checklist

- ✓ National Society mandate in relation to planned response known and understood by NS leaders and volunteers.
- ✓ Decision making system on volunteer mobilization
- ✓ Communications system to mobilize existing volunteers as required
- ✓ Communications system to communicate National Society needs for volunteers
- ✓ Appropriate insurance for volunteers involved in emergencies
- ✓ Systems to assess, register and train spontaneous volunteers
- ✓ Systems to lead and manage volunteers
- ✓ Legal risk management integrated in all the systems developed
- ✓ Provision for psychosocial support to volunteers involved in emergencies
- ✓ Coordination mechanisms with other volunteering organizations and relevant government agencies
- ✓ Contingency plan that provides clarity on volunteer mobilization and incorporates elements of the Safer Access Framework

## Key financial investments to consider

- ✓ Volunteer insurance (acceptable to include in emergency appeals or Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) funded operations)
- ✓ Volunteer equipment
- ✓ Volunteer food and expenses (if necessary)
- ✓ Training for existing National Society volunteers and staff in emergency management
- ✓ Adequate volunteer record-keeping systems
- ✓ Materials to support engagement of spontaneous volunteers

*Wenifredo Guico (first from right) is a volunteer of Philippines Red Cross for nine years now. According to him, "I find fulfillment in volunteering for the Philippines Red Cross, for through this simple act, I can serve my fellow citizens."*





## 3. During emergencies

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### **Adapting plans and policies to the situation**

Obviously the early stages of an emergency will see policies and practice applied to a real-life situation which is potentially unpredictable and fast-changing. Planning in this environment may well be short-lived, and renewed regularly. Early decisions affecting volunteer involvement might include:

- The nature of the National Society response
- Whether specialist disaster management volunteers will be mobilized
- Whether specific types of volunteers, or spontaneous volunteers more generally, are needed

As the emergency response becomes more stable, the National Society is likely to develop medium-term services to meet the needs of disaster-affected populations. These may be externally funded, or resourced by the National Society or indeed the affected population.

At some stage the National Society will start to develop an exit strategy that sees a return to normal services, and perhaps further long-term services developed to meet new needs.

All of these phases will have implications for volunteer involvement, and will have an impact on the sustainable growth, or otherwise, of the National Society. Volunteers should be consulted and involved in these decisions, especially if the National Society is seeking to expand its volunteer base.

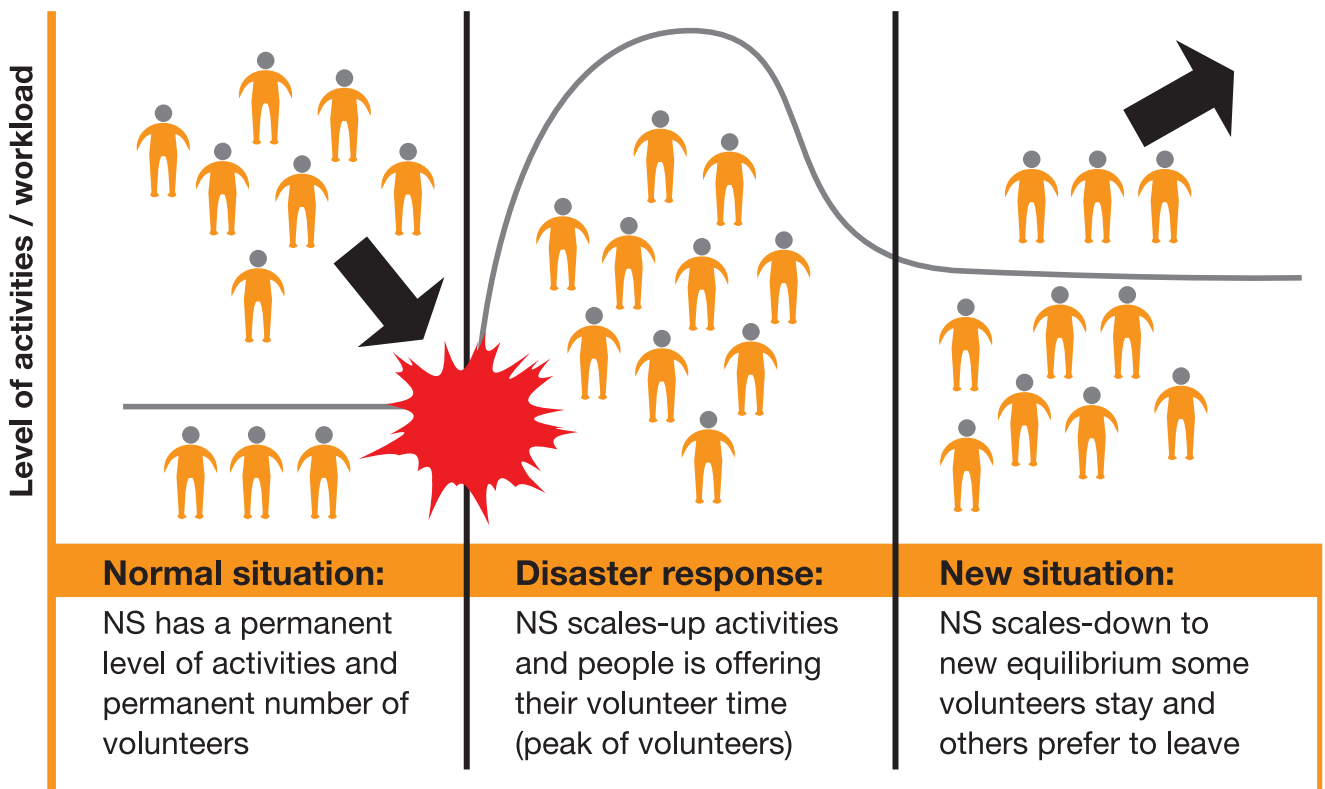
### **Planning for National Society growth through emergencies**

Planning should bear in mind a National Society's potential for sustainable growth during and following the emergency phase. Evidence suggests that large emergency operations can significantly weaken National Societies, and key areas of policy and planning should address how the National Society will deal with potential damage through:

- Confusion of volunteers with temporary labour (in particular through payment of incentives and per diems to people called "volunteers") – see discussion above
- Carrying out activities which are not based on volunteer work (for example professional construction of houses)
- Poor levels of supervision and support of volunteers leading to negative volunteer experiences

Figure X – to complete represents National Society growth during an emergency. The National Society may grow through developing existing and new services which it can resource itself. This is what will determine whether the National Society's expansion is sustainable or not after the emergency. It may

Figure X



develop externally resourced activities that are time bound for the duration of the period of emergency funding, but which will cease when funding finishes. And there may be activities for which funding is available, but which do not fit into the mandate and expertise of the National Society.

Obviously volunteer capacity is one way through which the National Society can grow during emergencies. More volunteers may come to the National Society to help with the response, and the National Society may also be able to use the success of its response to attract further volunteers after the emergency.

## Managing all volunteers during emergencies

As with any volunteer activity, volunteer management in emergencies requires the National Society to match the needs of the situation with the skills and experience of volunteers. In doing so, National Societies must ensure the safety and well-being of volunteers, as well as meeting the needs of vulnerable people.

Although the volunteering cycle described above depicts a logical sequence of events, in reality some



### During Emergencies

#### Sample public message

Here are examples of messages that may be adapted. These messages reflect the changing nature of disaster response and recovery over a period of time.

Sample message immediately following a disaster event:

“We are continuing to assess the damage and whether volunteers will be needed. We are requesting volunteers not to enter the area as they can distract attention from the community in need and slow disaster response. We expect to need volunteers in the future and will provide the public with updates in the next xxx hours or days.”

Sample message after several days following a crisis:

“Long-term recovery efforts are ongoing, and volunteers are desperately needed to assist in these long-term efforts. To volunteer, please contact us at telephone xxxx or mobile xxxx.”

Sample message several months after a crisis:

“Volunteers with professional experience in xxx and xxx are needed to begin the reconstruction efforts. Living conditions continue to be challenging as electricity, running water, and food are not available in most areas. Volunteers will need to be entirely self-sufficient and bring in their own food and water.”



Australian Red Cross volunteer Lynette Tyler provides personal support for Mary Stanton, a Kamilaroi Aboriginal elder, who had to evacuate her home along with 3,000 others from the town of St. George, when unprecedented flooding swept through south-western Queensland and northern New South Wales.

of these processes are likely to take place at the same time, or indeed be repeated over the course of the emergency operation as information and priorities change.

## Situation assessment and task design

Before volunteers start work, there needs to be a clear understanding of what tasks volunteers will carry out. Obviously, in a confusing situation the National Society is unlikely to have full information, but initial decisions should be made and updated as required. Indeed, one early role for volunteers may well be in carrying out assessments of the situation.

In matching individual volunteers to tasks, National Societies should bear in mind volunteers' previous experience, skills and physical and emotional condition.

A primary concern of the National Society should be volunteer safety. In assessing the situation and designing appropriate tasks for volunteers, National Societies should regularly reflect on the level of risk involved in the activity, and how that risk can be managed.

## Ongoing volunteer briefing

It is important that all volunteers are briefed before they start work, and regularly updated on the changing nature of the emergency, any hazards, and any changes in policies and procedures by the National Society. This ensures they have an understanding of:

- The current emergency situation and the National Society's response, their tasks and objectives
- The resources that will be required
- Any administration requirements
- Communication and reporting lines and requirements
- Occupational health and safety, including self-care and available ongoing support
- Ethical aspects and Code of Conduct (e.g. use of alcohol, picture taking and private blogs)

It is also important that people have an opportunity to ask questions during or at the end of the briefing to ensure they have a clear understanding of every-



In Australian Red Cross, staff and volunteers can be deployed for a maximum of five days before taking a two-day break. Each individual must have a minimum of 10 hours off between shifts.



### Monitoring volunteering in emergencies

In this regard, you may consider using simple methods of monitoring volunteers. The most simple would be the list which the shift manager should have before the beginning of a particular shift.

Colour coded identification cards could also be issued. Anyone having a differently colored ID on that day means s/he is overworking and must rest.

Any practical method that would facilitate the identification of those who have been at the site for too long will be important.

thing that has been said, and the opportunity to say if they do not feel that they are appropriately trained and supported to meet expectations.

## Leading and managing volunteers and supervision

All volunteers should have a clearly appointed leader responsible for their activities and wellbeing. This person could be a volunteer or staff member themselves, but they should have had training in volunteer management, and ideally should have prior experience of emergencies. This person should be responsible for:

- Volunteers carrying out their tasks safely and effectively
- Updating volunteers with new information
- Ensuring that volunteer well-being is maintained, in particular volunteer mental health
- Collecting information to report back to the National Society
- Thanking volunteers at the end of their activity and collecting and passing on any volunteer feedback

The level of supervision that is appropriate will depend on the task the volunteer is being asked to complete and the level of previous experience they have. Obviously people responding to their first disaster may have different needs to people with much more experience.

It may come about that it is clear that some volunteers are not coping with the demands of the situation, or are behaving in inappropriate ways. In this case it may be appropriate to consider reassigning the volunteer to other work, or it may be necessary to ask a volunteer to leave the emergency response for a period of time, or altogether. This obviously needs to be handled sensitively, and in line with National Society volunteer disciplinary procedures if these exist.

## Providing volunteer equipment and sustenance

To enable volunteers to do their tasks efficiently and safely, National Societies should ensure that they have appropriate personal protective equipment. Depending on the tasks that they will be carrying out, this could range from boots and helmets for manual work, to paper and pens for recording information. This could also include items of personal clothing that should not be worn in certain situations: for example jewellery or expensive clothes.

One of the tasks that will arise in a crisis is about food for those involved in the emergency operations. National Societies have experienced that food may be provided in the following ways:

- Each staff and volunteer will take care of his/her own food



### Psychosocial support for volunteers in emergencies

The Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support has prepared a manual on how to support volunteers in emergencies before, during and after disasters.

The manual deals not only with recruitment, preparation and training, but also with support from managers and peers, including “do’s and don’ts”.

The manual (ready by end of 2011) can be found on the web: [www.ifrc.org/psychosocial](http://www.ifrc.org/psychosocial) or ordered through [psychosocial.centre@ifrc.org](mailto:psychosocial.centre@ifrc.org)



### Emergency Policy, IFRC

“...The International Federation must, with the National Society concerned, be constantly vigilant to minimize the risk to the safety and security of volunteers and staff working for the programmes...”



*A boy chases a volunteer with the Pakistan Red Crescent Society in Dadu, Sindh province. Volunteers visited villages daily, and used fun activities to help children recover from the trauma they experienced during the monsoon floods.*

- The operations centre will organize a community kitchen to cook for the staff and volunteers (e.g. volunteers specifically tasked to cook and distribute food), or, the operations centre may purchase ready-to-eat meals
- The operations centre may coordinate and accept food donations (e.g. bread, hot meals etc.) from neighbours, local restaurants and businesses and make these available to staff and volunteers of the emergency operations

Whatever the situation, the National Society needs to make sure that volunteers are adequately supplied with food and water for the duration of their activity.

## **Psychosocial support to volunteers in emergency operations**

During operations, National Societies should pay particular attention to volunteers' psychological well-being. Each volunteer should be debriefed on a regular basis by someone with experience, and volunteer hours and rest days should be monitored. The National Society should make provision for psychosocial support to volunteers in its programming and budgeting for the emergency.

Spontaneous volunteers and volunteers working on their first emergency should be particularly monitored, and possibly paired with experienced volunteers or staff where possible or required according to the task.

Monitoring stress and fatigue levels of staff and volunteers, and being able to provide psychosocial support, will be a vital part of the intervention that

should be offered. Initial support should focus on strengthening social support, giving advice on self-care and caring for others, and information on when volunteers should seek professional help. If stress reactions are severe, increasing, or still present after a month, the recommendation is that people should then be referred for professional treatment. Where possible, it is important to identify resources with specialist skills in trauma for such professional help. If possible, form a network with e.g. psychologists and psychiatrists, with special skills in traumatic stress – they can also be a resource at trainings and in supervision.

Volunteer managers should be willing to send volunteers home to rest. If this is a sensitive task, a staff or volunteer may be appointed to accomplish this specific task of sending home a volunteer.

## Daily debriefing and learning from volunteers

It is important to give volunteers the opportunity to debrief at the end of each shift as well as at the end of their deployment. This allows them to reflect on what went well and what went badly, and improve the quality of the response. It is also an opportunity for the volunteers to discuss any situations they found challenging and request help or guidance or support.

## Thanking and recognizing volunteers

As volunteers continue to carry out hard and stressful work, it is important that the National Society continue to thank them for their work. This can be through direct thanks, but it is also often very motivating to volunteers to hear what they have achieved through their work. This can be communicated to individuals and groups of volunteers, and also to media and other agencies.

## Dealing with spontaneous volunteers

During operations, National Societies need to make decisions on whether they need additional volunteer help, and if so, how these are going to be recruited and trained. As discussed earlier, preparation is essential: there are regular tales of uncoordinated spontaneous volunteers hampering emergency efforts. National Societies therefore need to monitor their needs at any given time and be prepared to communicate clear messages to potential spontaneous volunteers, including that their help is not required at present.

Decisions to spontaneously volunteer typically come within the first week of a crisis. A National Society should be prepared for an influx of offers of support at this time. Therefore, a National Society's message about the crisis must commence within the same week and within that message should be whether or not volunteers are needed, and what are the required skills.

One analogy is with donations of food and medicines to National Societies. It is accepted that National Societies turn down offers of food or medicines that may be offered in a humanitarian spirit, but which can actually impede the National Society in carrying out its activities. National Societies should adopt a similar approach in considering the offers of spontaneous volunteers.

At any point in time when an offer to help is declined or unable to be accepted, the National Society should communicate this quickly and sensitively. This avoids

frustration and ill-feeling among potential volunteers. National Society communications turning down offers of spontaneous help should give clear possible alternatives, for example:

- Volunteering with another organization
- Donating blood
- Volunteering with the National Society at a later date, especially in their own branch of the Red Cross or Red Crescent.

If a National Society does accept spontaneous volunteers, it may need to set up a processing centre to assess, register, train and assign volunteers. Such a “volunteer centre” could be set up on its own, or in collaboration with other response organizations such as other NGOs, local government etc. What is important is that the centre is:

- Big enough to deal with the number of spontaneous volunteers
- Not in an area that might hamper in any way the on-going response operations.



#### *Establishing a volunteer centre*

It may be one option for National Societies to set up a virtual volunteer centre to carry out initial screening. The efficient processing and deployment when a volunteer first offers his/her time will increase the likelihood that the volunteer will later agree to be a longer term volunteer or a supporter of the National Society.

However, a National Society does not necessarily establish a volunteer centre by itself. In some countries, volunteer centres are set up in collaboration with other response organizations such as the Social Welfare Council, local government etc.

### **Registering and screening spontaneous volunteers**

Emergencies require a balance to be struck between the need for speed in engaging volunteers, and managing the risks to the National Society and to vulnerable people of a poor choice of volunteer, or one who is poorly trained.

The National Society needs to ensure that it has details of any volunteers who come forward during an emergency, and may use its normal volunteer data collection systems for doing so, or a shortened version. It is equally important that the National Society ensures that potential volunteers are suitable for work with vulnerable people. Volunteers’ personal identity should be checked, and references taken up if practical.

If there is a mass of spontaneous volunteers, applicant registration could be prioritized depending on volunteers’ expertise and the needs of the National Society.

Communicating clearly what skills are needed by the National Society makes it easier for potential volunteers to “self-select” before deciding whether to approach the National Society or not.



#### **Belize Red Cross**

##### *Consequence of no volunteer screening*

Belize Red Cross accepted spontaneous volunteers during the 2010 Hurricane Richard. Among these spontaneous volunteers was a man who was extremely helpful; we can call him the “perfect” volunteer. Although he had no Red Cross training nor background, in the heat of the moment when there was a real need for help, we immediately deployed him. His duties were in distributions and in warehouses. After the emergency operations, he also participated in fundraising by soliciting donations on the highway and he never left us. A few weeks later, we received a report from a resident of Belmopan City, 52 miles away from Belize City. This man was misrepresenting the Belize Red Cross, soliciting donations with a collection box, wearing the Belize Red Cross hat and T-Shirt and giving away other T-shirts, obviously stolen from our warehouses at different locations. The police arrested him, locked him up for the weekend, took him to court, and he was fined \$500.

Now, we do accept spontaneous volunteers, but we register them and schedule trainings for them before they are actually deployed in any activity. This will also weed out those that come with wrong intentions. (Lily Bowman, Director General, Belize Red Cross)





During the Myanmar Cyclone Nargis, Maung Maung Myint led 15 volunteers in the evacuation of 30 families who were living on a riverbank near Labutta. He had alerted his community about the cyclone but did not know the ferocious scale of it.

*“While I was working, I was hit by something and had six stitches to my left leg. It was really painful and I could not do more that day,” he recalls. However, the next day Maung Maung Myint was heading the Red Cross first aid post with 50 volunteers. Hundreds of people were treated, many of them for terrible wounds after having clung to trees or being blasted by sand and water.*

*The first aid given by the volunteers saved many lives – and saved time for clinics and hospitals which could concentrate on more severe cases.*

## Orientation and training of spontaneous volunteers

It is important that potential volunteers have an understanding of the organization’s mission in the current emergency context as well as the role they will be undertaking.

Training for spontaneous volunteers might include the following:

1. Information about the National Society, its mission and the Fundamental Principles
2. The National Society’s role in the current emergency
3. Information on the National Society Volunteering Policy and Code of Conduct
4. Any organizational policies that volunteers must adhere to
5. A briefing on working with affected people
6. A practical guide on what to do if certain scenarios happen (e.g. accidents), where to go, what to do, and who to immediately inform
7. Stress reactions, field-friendly strategies for handling stress, when and how volunteers should seek further support for stress reactions

## Key policy decisions – checklist

- ✓ Does the National Society need to engage spontaneous volunteers?
- ✓ At what point should volunteers be offered employment contracts in line with national employment law?

## Key systems to monitor

- ✓ Volunteer management
- ✓ External communications on the need for volunteers
- ✓ Registration and screening procedures for spontaneous volunteers
- ✓ Volunteer orientation and task briefing
- ✓ Access to psychosocial support and mechanisms for such support for volunteers

## Key investments

- ✓ Appropriate volunteer equipment and sustenance
- ✓ Volunteer insurance (if not already in place)

*Kiyoko Sato, a Japanese Red Cross volunteer gives a facial to an elderly resident of the Tagajo temporary housing centre as part of the Red Cross psychosocial support programme for tsunami survivors.*



## 4. After emergencies

Towards the end of the emergency phase, the National Society will start the process of transitioning back to a more normal level of activity. Engaging strategically with volunteers through this process is likely to maximize the chances of volunteers continuing to work with the National Society, or being prepared to return to the National Society if required in the future.



### **Swedish Red Cross**

*(Appendix 6 of the Swedish Red Cross Guidelines for the reception of spontaneous volunteers in connection with emergencies and disasters)*

#### Exit interview

(When the Red Cross decides to exit an assignment because of the volunteer's unsuitability for the assignment.)

Volunteer's name: .....

Give the volunteer credit for his/her efforts during the assignment: .....

Give specific examples of things that have not worked well during the assignment (use the agreement as a starting-point). .....

Tell the interviewee that you are reporting the exit agreement to the branch board. ....

Date: .....

Interviewer .....

\*The volunteer leader must make sure that this document is kept together with the agreement and contact details for the person in question.

## **Volunteer management beyond the emergency**

### **Thanks and recognition**

As the emergency operation winds down there is the opportunity to celebrate volunteers' involvement. For some, this might mean the end of the association with the National Society; for others, it might mean return to ongoing volunteer commitments, or even new opportunities for volunteer involvement. In any case, the National Society should communicate broadly the achievements of volunteers, both as a means to thank volunteers as well as to highlight the importance of volunteer contribution to communities, partner organizations and other potential volunteers.

Many studies have shown that recognizing the efforts of volunteers is important to successful repeat volunteering offers in the future and to volunteer retention. Recognition also has an important role to play in the psychosocial well-being of those who volunteered in the emergency. This is also a good opportunity to promote ongoing or future volunteering opportunities in a National Society by discussing with the volunteers their expectations of future involvement and ideas for other services they could foresee giving, based on the needs they have seen.

### **Post operation volunteer debriefing**

After the emergency, a review process should be activated as soon as possible, and include as much volunteer feedback as possible to learn from the emergency experience. This should be qualitatively different to the day to day debriefings that volunteers should have at the end of each work period. While it may not be possible to include all volunteers in face to face meetings this could be done through smaller groups or by email or phone. This is an opportunity to review how the operation performed, including what went well and what could be improved next time, and gives individuals a forum to talk about their experiences. Use this information for evaluation and future planning, especially in the updating of contingency plans, where appropriate.

Volunteers should receive advice as to where they can seek help related to occupational health, psychosocial support and safety, following the debrief, should they feel the need for further assistance.

As part of its internal evaluation of the emergency response, the National Society should reflect on the impact that volunteer involvement had on the response. This might include questions such as:

- Was volunteer involvement effective?
- What value did volunteer involvement add to the response?
- Were volunteers well managed?
- Did the volunteers' response support the long-term growth of the National Society?
- Are volunteer units stronger after the emergency than before?

Questions should be analyzed and the change implications explored. The evaluation should then come up with a suggestion to accept or incorporate the changes in future operations, or reject the proposed changes. In short, the lessons learned and insights identified should be converted into revised tools, practices, and policies.

## Provide further psychosocial support if needed post emergency

National Societies should be aware that psychological distress may not show itself immediately but may instead manifest long after potentially traumatic events: part of its debriefing of volunteers should include plans for future psychosocial support if individual volunteers require.

Some of the questions that a National Society has to ask itself when providing further support:

- How will we identify volunteers in need of professional and further support? (simple screening tools exist for these)
- Who does and when?
- Where do we refer volunteers when this is needed? Resources for peer support? A network for professional help? Does the professional help have specialist knowledge of traumatic stress?



### Lelly Pimentel Mendez, 43

*A spontaneous volunteer who appreciates her work in Haiti through the Dominican Red Cross*

When Lelly became a volunteer for the Dominican Red Cross she actually did not know more about it than the fact that they had a blood service. She became a volunteer the same day that the earthquake took place in Haiti. She heard about it and phoned the Red Cross asking if she could sign up as a rescue volunteer. They told her that she needed training and experience, which she did not have, but as she was a psychology student she could join the psychosocial support volunteer group. She was sent to Jimani, a border town with Haiti. There were three Spanish delegates that gave trainings on how to give psychosocial support to the Dominican volunteers.

Lelly went to Jimani every Friday and came back Sunday evening. The volunteer group organized games for children, visited old people in hospitals and helped with any other issues faced by the affected Haitian refugees that had crossed the border. They went to hospitals in the town and spent time with anyone in need. Lelly tells that even if the language was an issue, since they did not speak Creol or French, she could understand what they said due to having lived in a Batey as a child (Bateys are Haitian settlements close to sugar cane plantations) and thus had heard Creol before even if she was Dominican and speaks Spanish.

For Lelly it was an amazing time to be a psychosocial volunteer but also hard. Still today she starts crying when she thinks about the stories that she heard. She thinks that it would be necessary to have some debriefing and counselling because the cases they have to deal with are very hard. Despite that, she feels that she lost many years of opportunities as she did not know about this possibility of being a volunteer until the earthquake in Haiti took place. She recommends it to anyone, but also thinks that it has to be something you feel you want to do and that you expect nothing in return.



### *Post emergency psychosocial support*

**Myanmar Red Cross:** After cyclone Nargis in May 2008, the Myanmar Red Cross and the IFRC cooperated with the psychology faculty of Yangon University to study the well-being of the volunteers, many of whom had themselves been affected by the disaster and/or supported survivors who had lost their entire family. The survey showed that some volunteers/staff had severe reactions and needed professional help, and others needed support in terms of individual or group sessions.

**Norwegian Red Cross:** The Norwegian Red Cross became heavily involved in providing psychosocial support after the bombing in the capital Oslo and the shooting of youth at Utoya in July 2011. Volunteers were supported throughout and briefed. As Norwegian Red Cross decided to continue its psychosocial support – including in those areas where many survivors and relatives to those killed returned to – an agreement was made with professional psychologists to advise and support the staff and volunteers as well.

## **Return to “normality” for existing National Society volunteers**

Existing National Society volunteers should return to their regular services if these are still being run after the emergency operation.

### **Key policy decisions – checklist**

- ✓ Will new activities develop that require new or more volunteers?

### **Key systems to monitor**

- ✓ Internal evaluation process documenting and reflecting on the impact of volunteer involvement
- ✓ Communication of impact of volunteers in the emergency
- ✓ Volunteer debriefing, thanking, rewards and recognition
- ✓ Contact details of new volunteers
- ✓ Access to psychosocial support by volunteers post emergency operation, if needed

### **Key investments**

- ✓ Items to thank, reward and recognize volunteers

# The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

**Humanity** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

**Impartiality** It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

**Neutrality** In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

**Independence** The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

**Voluntary service** It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

**Unity** There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

**Universality** The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

For further information, please contact:

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