

## Advocacy positions

### Introduction

This year, a year of celebrating volunteers and volunteering worldwide, and as part of our global campaign 'Find the volunteer inside you', we have released an International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) report entitled 'The value of volunteers'. It is an important document, not only for the launch date or the year ahead, but far further into the future, as it provides clear evidence that we have the capacity to immediately and substantially scale up our developmental role.

It talks directly to our partners in community development – governments, donors, community partners – about the unmatched breadth and depth of our network in local communities. Perhaps more importantly, it provides hard evidence that volunteers extend our paid workforce by ratios as much as 1:327 in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, delivering exceptional value for donor dollars.

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Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies should advocate on positions based around the three key pillars of recognition, protection and promotion.

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### Recognition

#### Context

Volunteering is at the heart of community-building. It promotes trust and reciprocity, and is a fundamental part of good citizenship, providing people with an environment where they can learn the responsibilities of community and civic involvement. It is a driver of political, social and economic development. The United Nations system, civil society partners and other stakeholders have "increasingly recognized that volunteerism makes significant contributions to peace and development"<sup>1</sup>.

Voluntary service is one of the seven fundamental principles that bind together the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Volunteering within Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies is carried out by people who are committed to the fundamental principles and motivated by their own free will without the expectation of material or financial gain.

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<sup>1</sup> Laws and Policies Affecting Volunteerism Since 2001, UNV, September 2009.

## Evidence

A report published in January 2011 has found that Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers contributed 6 billion US dollars worth of services worldwide in 2009, or nearly 90 US cents for every person on earth. With a global volunteer workforce of 13.1 million – or two in every thousand people worldwide – Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers make donor dollars go much further by extending its paid workforce by a ratio of 1 to 20 on average – meaning that for every paid staff member there are 20 volunteers.

Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers reach around 30 million people each year through their work in disasters alone and even more through community development initiatives that reach vulnerable people each day. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, thousands of Red Cross volunteers have helped protect over 2 million people from polio by allaying fears about the safety of vaccines and by administering the vaccine in the most isolated of communities. In Pakistan, Red Crescent volunteers provide psychosocial support to victims of conflict in order to provide them with a feeling of normality and hope for the future.

In fact, Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers add social value that is either incalculable – such as the local knowledge required to respond quickly and reach the most vulnerable and isolated people during an emergency – irreplaceable: such as their contribution to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative total volunteer effort valued at 10 billion US dollars that UNV described as far beyond the reach of governments or international and national organizations<sup>2</sup>; or immeasurable: such as the commitment of Danish Red Cross volunteers who comfort people without family in the final days and hours of their lives.

In the survey, partner organizations observed that Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers share a set of principles and values, their commitment is long term, and their participation is well organized and structured. In short, they provide a professional quality service to their communities<sup>3</sup>.

2 Laws and Policies Affecting Volunteerism Since 2001, UNV, September 2009.  
3 The value of volunteers, Dalberg, 2011.

## Call to action

The IFRC and its partners are calling on governments around the world to formally recognize the value of volunteers by incorporating their contribution into key economic and social indicators used in decision-making and planning at the highest levels.

## Protection Context

Volunteers play a critical role in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable, and should be provided with a legal framework and protection in order to carry out this vital work.

As living trends continue to change the way in which people volunteer – including more informal involvement such as spontaneous volunteering when a disaster strikes or sharing professional skills through mentoring – we must find ways to enable people to get involved. There are also many non-institutionalized ways in which volunteers are becoming involved outside of traditional office hours and spaces by contributing their ideas and skills online or volunteering from their workplace with the support of their employer. This must be encouraged.

However, in many places around the world a lack of understanding, and gaps or barriers in existing legislation often result in an environment that is not conducive to volunteering.

## Evidence

Although the Geneva Conventions identify and protect volunteers during conflicts, there are considerable gaps in domestic legislation and policies to protect volunteers involved with emergencies or community-based development. A legal framework for volunteering can have a significant impact on volunteering – both positive and negative. Examples of positive impact include legislation that clarifies the continuance of social welfare benefits for unemployed volunteers, tax exemption relating to volunteers' expenses, the extension of health and safety laws to cover volunteers and other such positive initiatives. Barriers to volunteering can include a lack of clarity regarding insurance, the

blurred distinction between employment and volunteering, as well as questions of liability.

Since the 2001 International Year of the Volunteer, a number of gaps in legislation or legal barriers that may prevent volunteers from operating in a safe and enabling environment have been identified. As a result, more than 70 laws or policies on volunteerism have been adopted during the decade. However, there is still a need to close gaps where they exist by working with governments to fine-tune legislation or remove legal barriers.

## Call to action

The IFRC is calling on governments worldwide to continue to increase protection of volunteers by identifying gaps or barriers in laws and policies relating to issues such as liability, insurance, and health and safety, with a special focus on volunteering in emergencies, and to close any gaps by working with organizations like Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies as a matter of urgency.

## Promotion

## Context

Volunteering is one of the foundations of a strong civic society. By promoting the spirit of volunteering through their actions, volunteers encourage others to participate. By highlighting the impact that volunteering can have and by celebrating volunteers' achievements, we can foster a culture of volunteering and grow our global volunteer workforce.

## Evidence

During the complex response to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in May 2008, local volunteers were among the first to respond – they were able to act quickly because they were part of the isolated communities affected, and they were well prepared and well trained. After the disaster, local volunteers took part in international forums, sharing their experiences and profiling volunteerism in Myanmar, which boosted the morale of Red Cross volunteers and motivated many others in local communities to get involved.

On the other side of the world, in the summer of 2009, President Obama and the First Lady announced the 'United We Serve' initiative to make service a way of life for all Americans. The American Red Cross posted more than 3,000 volunteer opportunities on the White House's volunteer web site, which resulted in a 30 per cent increase in volunteer placements in one region alone.

By promoting the very tangible impacts that volunteers can have and making people aware of the ways in which they can get involved, we can build social capital and quality of life in a society, regardless of its wealth, geography or politics.

## Call to action

The IFRC is calling for people around the world to 'find the volunteer inside' by giving their time, creating a safer environment for volunteers, providing workplace opportunities that enable employees to volunteer or by exploring innovative ways to fit volunteering into their busy lives.



For further information,  
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