



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge  
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja  
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

## Psychological support policy

### Introduction

Addressing the psychological needs of populations affected by crises has become a prominent concern in international humanitarian assistance. The need for this approach is supported by research findings, that people closest to disasters are more at risk for physical and psychological disorders, harmed mental functioning, and antisocial behaviour.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies addresses three target groups who would benefit from information on stress reactions and concrete psychological support:

- a) the vulnerable people affected by disaster or living under stressful condition
- b) volunteers and staff engaged in disaster response and community programmes and
- c) expatriate delegates

Psychological support applies across the range of humanitarian activities, being relevant to disaster preparedness, disaster response, first aid, emergency health and development programmes such as community health, HIV/AIDS and social welfare projects.

### Scope

The psychological support policy is based on the International Federation's Strategy 2010 and the International Federation's health policy.

The psychological support policy establishes a basis of Red Cross and Red Crescent action both in emergency response operations and in the implementation of long-term developmental programmes.

It applies to any type of psychological support activity carried out by an individual National Society or any of its branches, staff or volunteers or by the International Federation acting collectively, noting that:

- Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity (WHO 1948) and an inalienable right of all people without any regard to race, religion, colour, nationality, sex or origin;
- Psychological support can be adapted to particular needs and attributes of a situation and should respond to the psychological and physical needs of the people concerned, including the affected population and volunteers and staff, by helping them in accepting the situation and coping with it;

- Psychological support should take into account issues such as: local human resources, building capacity, enhancing resilience, networking, advocacy, and coordination with other actors when addressing the psychological well-being of a population.

## **Statement**

The International Federation and each individual National Society shall:

- Include a psychological perspective in every area of intervention as a basis for identifying the needs of the population to be assisted, including the needs of the care providers;
- Design psychological support as an integrated component in other programmes such as disaster preparedness, disaster response, tracing, first aid, health, social welfare, youth, and organizational development. It should only be designed as a vertical programme when local circumstances warrant this;
- Provide psychological support as a long-term and reliable commitment to ensure that the psychological aspects of relief work are professionally implemented and make a crucial difference to the population, volunteers and staff affected by disaster;
- Design psychological support according to the basic principles and best practices of community mobilization and programme implementation;
- Adapt the provided psychological support services to the special characteristics of the community and individuals involved;
- Refer people with marked psychological reactions or disorders to appropriate health and care facilities;
- Recognize the role and value of volunteers in psychological support by providing the opportunity for training and guidance by experienced professionals;
- Utilize stress management, security measures and skill development in promoting safe environments for volunteers and staff while dealing with disasters or long-term multiple loss through HIV/AIDS, violence and other public health issues;
- Work collaboratively with relevant government institutions and agencies, non-governmental organizations and other civil society organizations, academia, media and private sector, ensuring transparency, accountability and ongoing dialogue with the beneficiaries, volunteers and staff involved.

## **Responsibilities**

National Societies and the International Federation have a shared responsibility for ensuring that all psychological support programmes and/or activities are in compliance with this policy; that all staff and volunteers are aware of and adhere to the rationale and the details of this policy; that staff and volunteers are equipped with the necessary skills and tools to implement psychological support activities; and that all relevant partners are adequately informed of this policy.

National Societies and the International Federation have the responsibility for ensuring that programmes achieve optimum impact on the development of the capacity of the individuals, communities, volunteers and staff involved by building a

system for ongoing monitoring and evaluation into all psychological support activities.

- Integrate/mainstream psychological support in all relevant programmes such as disaster preparedness, disaster response, tracing, first aid, health, social welfare, youth, and organizational development;
- Promote a community-based approach and ensure community involvement in needs assessment, decision-making, programme identification, implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
- Promote coordination and collaboration between organizations and agencies working with psychological support;
- Implement psychological support in the acute phase of complex emergencies and major disasters as a component of disaster response, tracing, first aid or emergency health (or in rare occasions as a vertical programme), including management and supervision of volunteers;
- Implement psychological support in the rehabilitation phase of a crisis as applied in the acute phase paying attention to humanitarian and ethnic/religious issues, organizational development and partnership building;
- Implement psychological support as part of development programmes such as disaster preparedness, first aid, community health, social welfare, youth and organizational development, including close collaboration with the government structure.

The International Federation should:

- Develop an overall psychological support strategy and guidelines to support the implementation of this policy;
- Integrate/mainstream psychological support into the International Federation's assessment methodology, training courses, disaster preparedness, disaster response, tracing, first aid, health, social welfare, youth and organizational development programmes where appropriate;
- Develop standards within psychological support training and produce scientifically-, technically-, and culturally- sound training materials;
- Provide technical training and support in project design and mainstreaming of psychological support to National Societies and to Federation delegations;
- Provide a protocol for volunteer and staff care, including care of the care providers;
- Provide information on psychological research findings and psychological support programmes;
- Promote coordination and collaboration between organizations and agencies working in the psychological field;
- Provide advocacy on the importance of psychological support, and support National Societies in international lobbying for funding psychological support activities.

## References

The 7th Session of the Governing Board of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, adopted this policy in May 2003, Geneva.