

Power of humanity

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**33rd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT**

Geneva, Switzerland
9–12 December 2019

**Implementation of Resolution 5 of the 32nd International
Conference on the Safety and Security of Humanitarian Volunteers**

**Progress report
2015–2019**

**Document prepared by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent
Societies and the Swedish Red Cross**

Geneva, October 2019

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of the progress made by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) and States in implementing the 32nd International Conference's Resolution 5 on the safety and security of humanitarian volunteers.¹ The report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 17 of that resolution.

Local and national humanitarian volunteers need better protection to ensure their safety and security so that they can better serve communities in need. As funding and risk are often transferred from international actors to national and local humanitarian organizations, they all have a basic duty of care to the local volunteers implementing their projects. Concretely, this means keeping these volunteers safe, including by ensuring that they have in place policies, systems, training, human resources, information, equipment, security management and safety nets to support volunteers in the event of death or injury.

While some progress has been made since 2015 by States and National Societies in addressing the safety and security of humanitarian volunteers, serious concerns remain that many humanitarian volunteers still lack access to proper insurance or other safety nets, training and psychosocial support.

Since 2018, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Global Volunteering Alliance Working Group on Volunteering in Dangerous Situations has led the global innovation work driving the resolution's ambition and intention. The members of the Working Group have contributed to this report with their diverse experience of implementing the resolution at the national and global level.²

The progress made on the four themes set out in the 17 operational paragraphs of Resolution 5 on the safety and security of humanitarian volunteers can be summarized as follows:

Determination to protect: Notable progress has been made in providing humanitarian volunteers with psychosocial support, although the problems affecting the wellbeing of volunteers often still go unnoticed and unattended. Some National Societies have been successfully working with States to put in place legislation on volunteering.

Enhancing knowledge: Increased efforts and progress have been made in advancing research, deepening knowledge and creating an evidence base to inform current and future activities related to the safety, security and wellbeing of volunteers.

Enhancing understanding: An alliance of National Societies focused on volunteering development was launched in 2017 with the aim of identifying, sharing and replicating promising volunteering practices and ensuring the safety and wellbeing of volunteers.

Promoting insurance or equivalent protection: While some National Societies have managed to put in place local solutions to compensate their volunteers in the event of injury or death, sadly, most National Societies operating in insecure environments continue to struggle to provide safety nets for their volunteers.

Recommendations: To facilitate the successful implementation of the resolution on the safety and security of humanitarian volunteers, it is recommended to:

- develop core standards and implement them in accordance with the local context, particularly by promoting cross-National Society dialogues, encouraging joint resource

¹ The resolution was adopted in December 2015 by all 169 attending governments who committed to taking actionable steps to improve the safety and security of humanitarian volunteers.

² The team is composed of representatives from the Burundi Red Cross, the Egyptian Red Crescent Society, the Honduran Red Cross, the Italian Red Cross, the Kenya Red Cross Society, the Swedish Red Cross and the Centre for International Development at Northumbria University in the United Kingdom, a globally recognized academic centre on volunteering in humanitarian and development settings.

mobilization and knowledge sharing and building a marketplace of approaches, ideas and resources

- establish and support a formal hub of experts drawn from National Societies, the IFRC, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), other volunteer-involving organizations and the academic sector to develop and share new ideas, research and expertise on volunteering in conflicts and emergencies
- commit more human and financial resources to improving the safety, security and wellbeing of volunteers, including but not limited to security management, protection, training, equipment, insurance or solidarity fund coverage and psychosocial support.

1) INTRODUCTION

Complex emergencies, including health emergencies, and natural disasters are increasing in frequency and very often also in severity, requiring a growing number of local humanitarian volunteers and their mass mobilization in risky environments where access is often restricted to just a few organizations. Of the more than 13 million people who volunteer for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, one million work in contexts where there is armed conflict and violence. Most of these volunteers are themselves from affected communities.

While international attention to the dangers faced by humanitarian volunteers has grown in recent years, there has been little focus on the risks facing local volunteers, even though they deliver most of the aid and face the greatest dangers. In dangerous and complex humanitarian settings when many humanitarian actors withdraw, local volunteers stay and are often the only ones who can access vulnerable people, providing first aid, food, water, medical care and comfort.

Hundreds of humanitarian workers are killed, wounded and kidnapped every year. According to the Aid Worker Security Database, there was a 30% rise in fatalities in 2017 as compared to the previous year. The data shows that 139 aid workers were killed and 174 were kidnapped or injured in serious attacks in 2017 (see figure below). With regard to the Movement, more than 500 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Society staff and volunteers have been killed in the line of duty since 1994. From 2016 to 2018, a reported 60 National Society staff and volunteers were killed while on duty. The vast majority of these incidents occurred in conflict-related settings.³



Research by the IFRC has shed light on some of the particular risks faced by humanitarian volunteers, which include stigma and danger from the communities they are operating in; lack of access to the equipment and training required to perform their role; challenges in accessing affected populations; psychological distress; and an overall lack of insurance and other safety nets. The tendency to regard volunteers solely as “givers” leads to their needs being neglected even though they are often comparable to those of the people they are assisting. Data from the Swedish Red Cross-led initiative on Volunteering in Conflicts and

³ <https://aidworkersecurity.org/>

Emergencies (ViCE) has shown that local volunteers often come from vulnerable and affected communities and that volunteering may place them in riskier situations than they would otherwise be in.

This resolution reinforces the importance of National Societies and States investing in training, insurance, psychosocial support, personal and protective equipment and legislation to support volunteers in their service to communities.

2) ANALYSIS/PROGRESS

Resolution 5 on the safety and security of humanitarian volunteers has raised the profile of the risks facing humanitarian volunteers, particularly local actors operating in complex situations, and built significant momentum on this global concern. More concrete mapping would be required to fully report on overall progress as responses to the 2019 questionnaire are not statistically significant.

In addition to the above-mentioned responses, this report draws upon the work that has been carried out by the Global Volunteering Alliance's technical team on Volunteering in Dangerous Situations, the ViCE Initiative, the recent publication of United Nations Volunteers (UNV) *State of the World's Volunteerism Report: The thread that binds – Volunteerism and community resilience* and the National Situation Analysis on the scale, scope and impact of volunteerism for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development led by UNV in collaboration with the IFRC.

2.1) DETERMINATION TO PROTECT

Several National Societies have taken crucial action to provide their volunteers with psychosocial support (PSS). In the different responses to Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, efforts and progress have been made in providing volunteers with access to psychological first aid and PSS. Different National Societies such as the Swedish Red Cross have established phased training for volunteers, combining e-learning, physical learning opportunities, external referral mechanisms and internal follow-up to systemize and institutionalize PSS for volunteers. The Sudanese Red Crescent established a PSS system with the support of the IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support and the National Societies of Denmark and Sweden.

However, institutionalizing systematic PSS for volunteers remains a challenge for many National Societies. To further explore and understand the underlying reasons behind this, a pop-up innovation lab on psychosocial support for volunteers was organized by the ViCE Initiative and hosted by the IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support in 2018.⁴ The lab explored the issue and discussed how National Societies could put best practices in place and establish systems that provide volunteers with PSS. The participants developed solutions to issues related to the access of volunteers to PSS and created increased understanding and awareness of the issue.

The lab concluded that, despite existing and emerging resources and practices relating to PSS for volunteers, the overarching impediment to the provision of PSS for volunteers by National Societies is a failure to prioritize this issue. This is due to a lack of understanding of the importance of PSS and attitudes at both the organizational and community level. Therefore, advocacy and sensitization are needed both internally within the Movement and externally with stakeholders and communities.

It is the primary responsibility of all National Societies to ensure the safety and security of their own volunteers, but this remains a challenge for many of them, mainly due to capacity constraints and imminent risks when operating in highly sensitive conflict-affected contexts.

⁴ Participants were drawn from the National Societies of Canada, Lebanon, Mali, the Philippines, Sweden and Ukraine and from Northumbria University (UK) and Trinity College (Ireland).

The Safer Access Framework (SAF) elements “Context and Risk Assessment” and “Operational Security Risk Management” consistently emerge as weaknesses in all National Societies that have conducted SAF assessments and planning workshops. Consequently, National Societies are constantly seeking guidance, tools and templates related to these elements. Although some tools (developed by the ICRC, IFRC or National Societies) do exist, they are not widely available and/or accessible to National Societies. More work and investment is therefore required to ensure that host National Societies (HNSs) have readily available tools and guidelines.

Since the launch of the SAF guide for National Societies at the 2013 Council of Delegates, much has been accomplished both at ICRC headquarters and in the field:

- over 50 awareness, assessment and planning workshops have been conducted and the resulting plans of action developed for National Societies
- messages on “safer behaviour” have been continuously passed on to host National Society staff and volunteers during the awareness and planning workshops, highlighting how individual behaviour impacts acceptance of the organization and the way it is perceived
- various approaches and activities have been devised to engage National Societies and encourage them to integrate Safer Access into their programmes⁵
- a pool of more than 30 SAF workshop facilitators from the different Movement components has been created
- peer-to-peer National Society exchange platforms have been established, involving round-table discussions, webinars and peer exchange visits
- a dedicated website for sharing experiences (public access) has been created, and tools developed by National Societies have been shared on FedNet (restricted access).

In order to strengthen and extend more tangible support to National Societies for their Safer Access ambitions, the ICRC provided clearly defined key orientations for 2018–2020, one of which is closely focused on the safety and security of volunteers and staff. As a result, National Societies, particularly those operating in sensitive and insecure contexts, receive the support they need to apply the relevant actions and measures under the Safer Access Framework that will underpin their ability to provide the required humanitarian services safely.⁶

Collectively, within the Movement, there is a need to closely coordinate, support and follow up on HNS codes of conduct for staff and volunteers as well as codes of behaviour. It is important to strengthen compliance with and implementation of codes of conduct. Similarly, support is needed to strengthen HNS operational communication guidelines which would further improve the acceptance and perception of HNS staff and volunteers and operational access to affected communities.

In 2018, the UN Secretary-General stated in his report to the UN General Assembly⁷ that the protection, security and wellbeing of volunteers must be of the highest priority. Governments

⁵ These included simulations, operational briefings and debriefings, dedicated security management in the case of Syria, a small-grants initiative, a greater focus on disaster management, etc.

⁶ In 2019, priority contexts were identified in close collaboration with the ICRC SCMS (Security and Crisis Management Support Unit – Geneva), based on operational needs and risks for both partners, the overall situation and the type of partnership. Priority is given to contexts in which the ICRC has an operational partnership in “remote management mode” where the ICRC transfers the risk to HNSs or in highly sensitive and insecure contexts featuring joint operations. Some support has already been provided in 2019 in Afghanistan, Mali and the Central African Republic, particularly on SAF element 1 (Context and Risk Assessment) with the aim of training HNSs in risk assessment tools to enable National Societies to prepare a comprehensive risk assessment and security guidelines. This support is subject to the readiness and willingness of HNS leadership and operational staff to take full ownership of the security risk management system, the process and implementation.

⁷ Resolution A/RES/73/140 Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

should put in place policies that safeguard both the physical and mental protection of volunteers and guarantee that adequate medical, disability and death benefits are universally provided.

Several National Societies have been instrumental in their countries in facilitating the emergence of legal, social, economic and cultural environments conducive to safe and secure volunteering experiences. The Kenya Red Cross Society has recently worked with UNV and other volunteer-involving organizations in Kenya, and together they founded the Volunteer Involving Organizations (VIO) Society.⁸

2.2) ENHANCING KNOWLEDGE

Volunteers are key humanitarian actors in conflicts and emergencies. However, as the 2015 *Global Review on Volunteering Report* emphasized, “if volunteerism ... is to continue to grow and to drive change in communities around the world and to provide an avenue for people to have a voice and active role in development processes, then it will need resourcing, research and a strong policy framework”. Among its main conclusions, the review highlighted an urgent need to prioritize research and practical measures to ensure the safety and security of local volunteers and psychosocial support for them, especially in conflict settings. There is limited understanding about the experiences and needs of local volunteers, the challenges they face and what can be done to support them.

Since 2015, important progress has been made in developing research on humanitarian volunteers. The ViCE Initiative, led by the Swedish Red Cross and the Centre for International Development at Northumbria University (UK), worked with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Afghanistan, Honduras, Myanmar, South Sudan, Sudan and Ukraine to gather data on the experiences of local volunteers in conflicts and humanitarian crises. By emphasizing volunteers’ voices and listening to their concerns, the research has helped address gaps in understanding that prevent volunteers in conflicts and emergencies from being protected, promoted and recognized. The report of the UN Secretary-General to the 73rd session of the General Assembly in 2018 on the plan of action to integrate volunteering into the 2030 Agenda states that “research continues to document the nature of volunteering, including motivation, barriers and best practices”. In this report, the ViCE Initiative is cited as an example of good practice.

New research initiatives have started to respond to the gaps in understanding. For example, Refugee Youth Volunteering Uganda is a major research project launched in mid-2019.⁹ Working in partnership with Ugandan academics and civil society organizations including the Uganda Red Cross Society as well as the IFRC, the project uses participatory methods to investigate the forms of volunteering undertaken by young refugees in Uganda and their impact on their skills, employability and livelihoods.

Despite the growing number of studies and calls to prioritize local voices, the need remains to facilitate research about volunteering in countries that face complex humanitarian challenges whilst overcoming internal risks.¹⁰ Partnerships that focus on evidence-based

⁸ As a government-recognized organization, it has worked to influence government policy and laws with a view to developing a system of volunteerism in the country that is well managed as the current laws do not recognize and accommodate volunteerism. The VIO Society successfully lobbied the government to put a national volunteering policy in place. Starting in 2016, it worked with the parliamentary labour committee and the ministry responsible to draft a national volunteerism bill. Once it is passed by parliament and becomes law, the country will have specific legislation governing volunteering. This will bring dignity and respect to volunteers and their volunteering initiatives and avoid their misuse and misconceptions about them. This will be a huge milestone because volunteers have in the past suffered harassment by authorities and volunteer-involving organizations.

⁹ Led by Professor Matt Baillie Smith at the Centre for International Development at Northumbria University and funded by the UK government’s Global Challenges Research Fund administered through the Economic and Social Research Council.

¹⁰ However, as acknowledged by the International Institute of Social Studies in its 2016 *Security guidelines for field researchers in complex, remote and hazardous places*, “[f]ield research always carries a degree of risk” and

policy-making must be strengthened. With the necessary support from States, research institutions and volunteers can work together and bridge the existing gaps between the perspectives of academics and practitioners. As the 2015 Global Review on Volunteering underlined, in this process volunteers need to be “genuine partners with an equal voice, and drivers of change for vulnerable people rather than deliverers of services”.

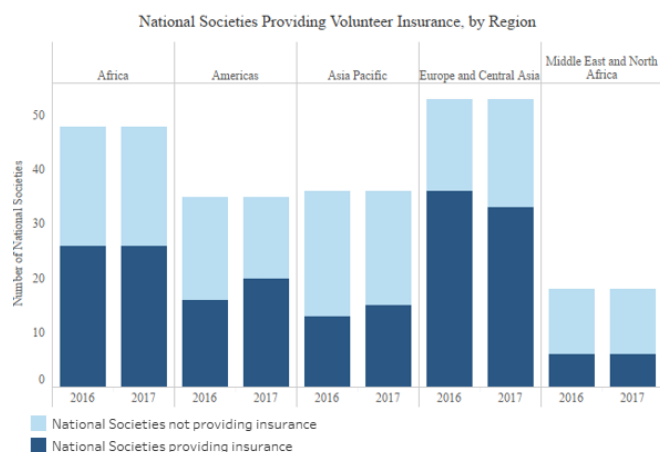
2.3) ENHANCING UNDERSTANDING

To respond to the challenges of ensuring the safety and wellbeing of volunteers, the IFRC developed a Volunteering Plan of Action to be driven by an alliance of National Societies across all five regions. The Plan of Action is facilitating mechanisms to ensure the safety and wellbeing of volunteers. A significant element of the plan was the development of a Federation-wide Volunteer Charter¹¹ which was adopted at the General Assembly in 2017.

During the reporting period, the IFRC security unit provided various types of support to National Societies in an effort to strengthen their security management capacity and support to volunteers. Around 150,000 staff and volunteers from more than 150 National Societies have registered for/completed the “Stay safe” volunteer security e-learning course in the last few years. A new and updated version of the course will be launched at the beginning of 2020. More than 6,000 USB memory sticks and security manuals have been distributed to National Societies where internet access might be challenging.

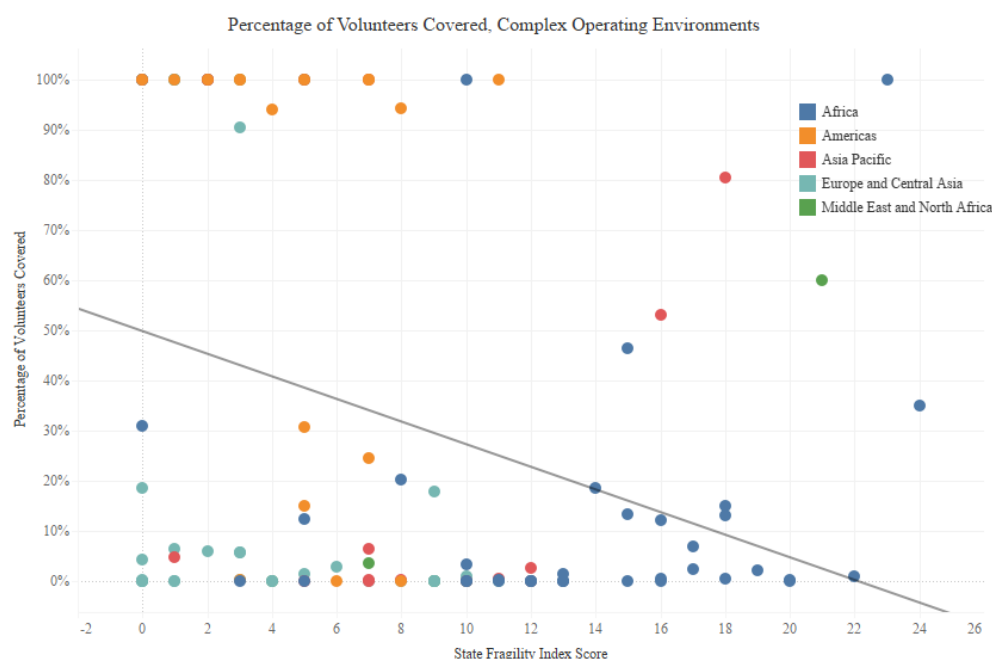
2.4) PROMOTING INSURANCE OR EQUIVALENT PROTECTION

Many humanitarian volunteers still lack proper insurance or other safety nets. The number of National Societies providing some level of insurance coverage to volunteers differs from one region to another (see figure on the right). IFRC data shows that the number of National Societies providing volunteer coverage increased from 2016 to 2017 in both the Americas and the Asia Pacific regions but decreased in Europe and Central Asia, while remaining unchanged in Africa and in the Middle East and North Africa region.



“security related decisions can have an influence not just on the security of the researcher and the research outcomes, but also on the security of the respondents, local assistants and interpreters, the home and host organizations, and research sponsors”. Volunteers are not immune to these risks in their work and when conducting research tasks, especially in a context of weakened institutional support systems.

¹¹ The charter is a means to improve volunteering practices in all National Societies and the safety and wellbeing of volunteers, by formalizing and operationalizing the accountability of National Societies to their volunteers. Written from the perspective of volunteers, it aims to clarify volunteers’ rights and responsibilities, including the right to a safe working environment, the right to protection, the right to information about the risks they face, the right to participate, to be heard and to be recognized for their contribution and the right to insurance. It inspires National Societies and guides them in drafting, revising and implementing their policies and management systems in support of volunteer rights and responsibilities.



Volunteers working in insecure environments (see figure), who are most in need of insurance coverage, are the least likely to have it. The environment in which a National Society operates is a significant factor in determining rates for insurance and access to solutions. National Societies in countries with higher Human Development Index (HDI)¹² scores are more likely to provide insurance coverage to volunteers. On the other hand, the National Societies of countries with low HDI scores, particularly those ranking high on the State Fragility Index (SFI)¹³, show lower figures, there being a significantly negative relationship between these scores and insurance provision. It is important to understand these influencing factors because the environment can present challenges or barriers to insurance provision. Factors such as inequality and the unfair distribution of resources, measured by the HDI, and weak State, governance and institutional structures, shown in the SFI, both appear to have a direct effect on a National Society's ability to provide insurance coverage to volunteers and staff. Therefore, National Societies may not be able to overcome this problem on their own and might require support from Movement partners.

Providing appropriate insurance and other safety net solutions for volunteers is challenging for some National Societies. One example is the Honduran Red Cross which found the global IFRC insurance unsuited to its needs due to difficulties faced by volunteers and branches: (1) inability to produce the documentation required for insurance claims, (2) costly and bureaucratic claim processes, and (3) inability to access immediate funds to cover upfront costs for quality health care. Through a pop-up lab in 2016, the National Society, with the support of the ViCE Initiative, explored possible solutions that were technically and practically feasible and also respectful of the needs and concerns of volunteers. To ensure acceptance, ownership and sustainability, these solutions have to be locally sourced to the extent possible and volunteers must be involved in their development. The ViCE team explored several solutions and finally developed the concept of a national volunteer emergency fund, which would allow for immediate coverage of medical expenses. It was designed as a solidarity fund to guarantee sustainability and spread the risks and coverage amongst the National Society headquarters and branch offices. This model sought to encourage comprehensive care for volunteers by ensuring their participation and oversight

¹² United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2019. Human Development Reports. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>. Accessed April 2019.

¹³ Center for Systemic Peace 2019. State Fragility Index and Matrix database. <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html>. Accessed November 2018.

throughout the actions planned and carried out by every branch, including planning, context evaluation and the implementation and evaluation of actions in the field.

A similar model with local or national solidarity and emergency funds has been explored by the National Societies of Burundi and Yemen.

In addition, the French Fund Maurice de Madre (FFMM) can grant a one-off pay-out in the event of an accident or illness affecting Movement volunteers and staff who are not otherwise covered by insurance or social welfare benefits. The injury or illness must be related to their work for the Movement. The grant can be used to pay for medical expenses, physical rehabilitation or professional reintegration. In the case of the death of a volunteer or staff member while carrying out humanitarian duties, the FFMM can award financial or material assistance to the family of the deceased. The FFMM was created in 1975 and is administered independently by a Board of five members appointed by the ICRC. The ICRC is also responsible for the Fund's administration, accounts and secretariat.

3) CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Movement, with the complementary roles of its different components, can work in exceptional ways and on significant scales. If the Movement is to achieve maximum impact, it must decisively and collectively strengthen the safety, security and wellbeing of all its volunteers. This is crucial to ensuring that National Societies have the capacity to mobilize, organize, protect and sustain a volunteer base able to assist vulnerable people in their own countries while complying with the Fundamental Principles.

Some National Societies have shown growing interest in the safety and security of volunteers, and there has been an increase in cooperation with and by governments to address the needs of humanitarian volunteers. However, in spite of increased efforts by National Societies, further improvements and more innovative approaches to protecting humanitarian volunteers are needed, especially in those States that do not provide adequate protection to humanitarian volunteers and particularly when they are in conflict.

As a leading humanitarian organization, globally and locally, the Movement has a responsibility to lead research and innovation and share good practice on volunteering with other humanitarian volunteer-involving organizations.

Global standards are currently under development to promote and facilitate the work of National Societies and eventually other humanitarian volunteer-involving organizations aimed at improving the safety, security and wellbeing of their volunteers. The standards originating from the resolution are intended to cover issues identified by volunteers, their National Societies and the IFRC. They aim to ensure that the safety, security and wellbeing of volunteers is promoted, that their rights are upheld and that they are supported so that they can carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively.

To facilitate the successful implementation of the resolution on the safety and security of humanitarian volunteers, it is recommended to:

- develop core standards and implement them in accordance with the local context, particularly by promoting cross-National Society dialogues, encouraging joint resource mobilization and knowledge sharing and building a marketplace of approaches, ideas and resources
- establish and support a formal hub of experts drawn from National Societies, the IFRC, the ICRC, other volunteer-involving organizations and the academic sector to develop and share new ideas, research and expertise on volunteering in conflicts and emergencies
- commit more human and financial resources to improving the safety, security and wellbeing of volunteers, including but not limited to security management, protection, training, equipment, insurance or solidarity fund coverage and psychosocial support.