

COUNCIL OF DELEGATES
OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS
AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Strengthening the resilience of urban communities:
Our way forward

Draft elements of resolution

Document prepared by
the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
in consultation with
Argentina Red Cross, Colombian Red Cross Society, Guatemalan Red Cross, Haiti Red
Cross Society, Jamaica Red Cross, Japanese Red Cross Society, Nepal Red Cross
Society, Pakistan Red Crescent, Philippine Red Cross and Spanish Red Cross

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Background

The draft elements of the proposed resolution “**Strengthening the resilience of urban communities: Our way forward**” seek to provide an outline of the possible substance of individual paragraphs, without providing a definitive draft text. Each paragraph is followed by a rationale explaining why it would be useful to include such a paragraph in the resolution.

This document is being shared for consultation with the members of the Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in order to gather a first round of comments and feedback and to gain an initial understanding of whether the proposed approach would be acceptable and garner consensus.

When providing comments and feedback on this document, please consider the following questions:

- Do you agree with the proposed elements for the preambular and operative paragraphs of the proposed resolution?
- Are there any elements that are missing or should be included in the resolution?

Detailed comments on the wording of the draft elements of this resolution are not expected at this stage. There will be an opportunity to comment on specific wording at a later stage, once the draft zero of the resolution is available.

Introduction

Throughout history, the opportunities and connections that cities offer have attracted people, and urbanization continues to shape how societies function and organize themselves. However, the pace and nature of urbanization today is radically different from past trends. Urban populations grow by roughly 1.4 million people every week and will constitute two-thirds of the world’s population by 2050.¹ This rapid urban growth forces the poor and marginalized communities to settle in the most hazardous areas, where they face multiple risks. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the urban poor and marginalized communities hardest and has also served as a precursor to what humanitarians may expect to be the “new normal”. In addition to suffering from lack of access to health care, safe and adequate water and sanitation services, the urban poor have been affected by widespread lockdown measures, which put unprecedented pressure on them and on National Society capacities.

Megacities and cities of different scales and sizes are more exposed to disasters and crises and to increasing risks and vulnerabilities. Urban areas are often characterized by limited social cohesion and isolation that can increase people’s vulnerability on the one hand and decrease the effectiveness of the enabling environment to promote volunteerism in communities on the other. Our classic volunteerism may not work as dynamically in urban settings as it does in rural ones. The landscape featuring the private sector, the mass media and local and national authorities plus a significantly high number of stakeholders operating in urban contexts demands greater preparedness from National Societies to enable them to be trusted partners of choice.

Operating in urban settings is not new to the Movement. National Societies have thousands of branches and millions of volunteers in cities, respond to urban disasters and contribute to recovery efforts in a significant way, as recently evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) (2018), *World Urbanization Prospects*, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html>.

The IFRC Plan & Budget 2021–2025, drawing on Strategy 2030, sets out specific commitments to build the capabilities needed to respond to disasters and crises in urban contexts. This includes supporting 50 cities in adapting to longer-term impacts of climate change, including sea level rise, and protecting 250 million people from heat by 2025. Another significant target that has been set is for at least 50 National Societies to have context-specific urban strategies in place to enable them to respond effectively to disasters and crises.

The Summary Report from Commission II “Shifting Vulnerabilities” of the 33rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent identified key issues and next steps: *“There was also the realization that urban vulnerabilities require long-term coordinated action and that partnerships are essential to achieve such action, especially with local governments. The scale, density and complexity of urban areas is enormous, and the many issues that render people vulnerable need to be addressed simultaneously if this action is to be effective. This requires the involvement of many partners. The Movement can use not only its formal assets (National Societies’ auxiliary role and international humanitarian law), but also the trust bestowed on it by communities and public authorities to be a convening partner in these contexts.”*

A total of 82 National Societies discussed needs and agreed on commitments to address urban risk and vulnerabilities at the Regional Conferences held in the Americas (Frameworks for Action adopted at the 19th Conference in Haiti, the 20th Conference in Houston and the 21st Conference in Argentina) and Asia Pacific (Calls for Action made at the 9th Conference in Beijing and the 10th Conference in Manila).

The 2022 Council of Delegates presents a timely opportunity for the Movement as a whole to declare its commitment to scaling up efforts in building the resilience of urban communities to disasters, climate crises and pandemics, with a strong emphasis on leveraging the role of National Societies as auxiliaries to local governments and partners of choice to strengthen local actors.

A call for action would be a critical and valuable contribution to the Council’s decisions on “how we work”. By adapting our operations and procedures so that the Movement can anticipate and mitigate the risks of extreme events, we can contribute greatly to reducing the suffering and losses of vulnerable populations.

Preambular paragraphs (PP)

PP1: A preambular paragraph could express deep concern about the specific vulnerabilities of the urban poor and marginalized communities and how the impacts of rapid and unplanned urbanization, compounded by climate change, will increase these vulnerabilities unless action is taken.

Rationale: The multiple risks stemming from lack of access to basic services, exclusion from governance and protection systems and insecurity due to lack of property rights and sustainable livelihoods are what are driving our determination to increase our engagement with local governments and humanitarian actors and extend coverage of current global partnerships to contribute to anticipating and reducing climate-induced disaster risks, such as heatwaves, floods and storm surges.

National Societies are well and uniquely positioned to conduct critical context analysis, convene partners around urban resilience and enable a greater level of multi-stakeholder problem-solving

and local investment in community and household resilience. National Societies, as auxiliaries to their governments, have a unique opportunity and mandate to connect the most vulnerable and often invisible people and communities with city authorities, planners and decision makers while still maintaining our Fundamental Principles of neutrality and impartiality.

PP2: A preambular paragraph could recognize that not only disasters and crises, but also violence and the everyday struggle of living in a city, are threatening the safety and well-being of urban communities and their future prospects.

Rationale: Urban residents are under enormous and persistent stress, and often their everyday needs are prioritized over long-term disaster risks.²

Urban violence, in all its forms, is a source of growing concern and fear,³ often compounded by high levels of poverty, discrimination, economic disparity, social inequality, sexual exploitation, drug abuse and drug trafficking.⁴ Being exposed to extremely distressing experiences also causes an increase in mental health and psychosocial needs. Cohesive social structures providing support at individual, household and local community level are an integral part of community and city resilience.

National Societies are well placed to help urban communities strengthen social dimensions of resilience – connectedness, inclusion and social cohesion – ease tensions between host and migrant communities and prevent violence in urban areas, promoting community mobilization and facilitating dialogue and interaction between different community groups, city authorities and other stakeholders. National Societies are also best placed to anchor communities through sustainable livelihood programmes and wider social safety nets.

PP3: A preambular paragraph could stress that the COVID-19 pandemic has shown the importance of strengthening local actors and, in particular, the capacity of National Society branches in cities and towns to respond to future crises effectively.

Rationale: The strong local response to COVID-19 has highlighted the vital role of National Societies and their branches – who are always there – not only in response to emergency needs, but also in support of longer-term green recovery, resilient development and the attainment of durable solutions. As a Movement, we need to improve our efforts to strengthen the ability of urban National Society branches to understand urban contexts so that they can operate effectively in them. This includes collection, aggregation and analysis of city-level data, working effectively with local governments and the private sector, forming partnerships and coalitions, identifying, engaging with and mobilizing diverse urban communities, harnessing the technical skills of urban professionals and innovative volunteer management.

PP4: A preambular paragraph could reaffirm the commitment of the components of the Movement to building the resilience of urban communities.

Rationale: To stress the Movement's commitment at local, regional and global levels. The IFRC network has undertaken multiple initiatives, including publications, dialogues and declarations, specifically related to urban environments since 2010.

² IFRC (2010), *World Disasters Report*, <https://www.ifrc.org/en/publications-and-reports/world-disasters-report/wdr2010/>.

³ ICRC, *War in Cities*, <https://www.icrc.org/en/war-in-cities>.

⁴ ICRC (2010), "Urban Violence", <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/international-review/review-878-urban-violence/review-878-all.pdf>

As co-lead of the Global Shelter Cluster,⁵ the IFRC has been promoting equitable land and housing rights and leading area-based approaches in urban recovery efforts. The ICRC has been working in urban conflict zones, including in Iraq, Gaza, Ukraine, Syria and Yemen, for 30 years, maintaining essential infrastructure and delivering humanitarian services.

Operative paragraphs (OP)

OP1: An operative paragraph could call for an action plan to tackle the growing risk at scale.

Rationale: To clearly demonstrate the added value brought to urban resilience by National Societies and their urban branches.⁶

To highlight the specific commitment expressed in the IFRC Plan and Budget 2021–2025 to building the capabilities needed to respond to disasters and crises in urban contexts, by supporting 50 cities in adapting to longer-term impacts of climate change and protecting 250 million people from heat by 2025.

To scale up the multi-stakeholder (coalition building) approach and fully integrate it into National Society programmes on health, disaster risk reduction, response and recovery in urban contexts in order to realize these commitments. Another target that has been set is for at least 50 National Societies to have contextualized urban strategies in place by 2025 to enable them to respond effectively to disasters and crises in urban areas.

To ensure the commitment of all components of the Movement and support for the development of an action plan on urban resilience that could build on past successes and the lessons learned from decades of experience.

OP2: An operative paragraph could highlight the value of connecting National Societies with global efforts and strengthening relations with local governments and municipal authorities.

Rationale: To reduce the exposure of vulnerable urban populations to disasters, climate and health crises, violence and conflict, by addressing underlying risk drivers.

To scale up and increase the visibility and value added of the RCRC in cities and towns. Building on the groundwork laid by the global localization agenda,⁷ which promotes local leadership, National Societies can leverage their auxiliary role at the local level and lead community-based solutions.

To strengthen capabilities for partnering with urban actors, especially with local governments and municipal authorities, with a view to leveraging the auxiliary role of National Societies.

⁵ www.sheltercluster.org.

⁶ The IFRC, along with the American Red Cross Global Disaster Preparedness Center (GDPC) and partner National Societies, has developed the [Urban Resilience Toolkit](#), including the City-wide Resilience Assessment tool, Guidance for Building Coalitions for Urban Resilience, and Designing Solutions for Urban Community Resilience. The RCRC Climate Centre developed the [Urban Action Kit](#) for National Society staff and volunteers and for community leaders as a quick-start, low-cost, do-it-yourself guide in 12 languages. The Kit aims to support local climate action in cities to build social cohesion, improve livelihoods and make cities more liveable. To further these efforts and develop a more intimate knowledge of urban systems, stakeholders and information, the German Red Cross, with support from the German government, has started a large-scale “Humanitarian Action in Urban Context” initiative integrating the tools and approach.

⁷ The Grand Bargain, <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>.

OP3: An operative paragraph could request National Societies and the IFRC to advocate with governments for increased investment in urban disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation for the benefit of vulnerable communities.

Rationale: To enhance the ability of National Societies to advocate for an increase in urban disaster risk reduction investments, the adoption of climate change adaptation measures and the strengthening of disaster management capacities, including subnational governance and disaster law,⁸ in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030.⁹ The IFRC is a member of the Steering Committee of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Making Cities Resilient 2030 ([MCR 2030](#)) and the Global Alliance for Urban Crises ([GAUC](#)), a role that can be leveraged to support National Societies in contributing to city-level risk reduction and resilience efforts.

To maintain the momentum of strong global commitment among national governments and local government alliances, such as [ICLEI](#), [C40](#) and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), to addressing climate crises, moving towards a green recovery from COVID-19 and further engaging in the UN-Habitat [#ClimateAction4Cities Campaign](#) to build resilience to climate change.

To be the voice of the most vulnerable, advocating for increased investment in urban disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation for the benefit of vulnerable communities.

OP4: An operative paragraph could reinforce the Movement’s commitment to “leave no one behind” in order to contribute to building inclusive and sustainable cities.

Rationale: To further strengthen the IFRC’s commitment to “leave no one behind”, which is the fundamental concept behind the inclusive cities commitment stipulated in the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDG 11](#): Sustainable Cities and Communities) and the New Urban Agenda, which has been endorsed by over 165 governments.

⁸ IFRC (2019), The Checklist on Law and Disaster Preparedness and Response, https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/11/DPR_Checklist_Final_EN_Screen.pdf.

⁹ The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 stresses the need for more dedicated action on tackling underlying disaster risk drivers and strengthening good governance at all levels, including at the city level.