



Power of humanity

Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross
and Red Crescent Movement

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Towards a Movement strategy on migration

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

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the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the
Red Cross in cooperation with the other members of the Migration Leadership Group (23 National Red Cross and
Red Crescent Societies) and in consultation with the Global Migration Task Force (including 43 National Red Cross
and Red Crescent Societies)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While the migration trend is expected to continue to accelerate, recent years have witnessed a hardening of migration-related laws and policies, growing xenophobia and the politicization of the public discourse. This is posing significant challenges to the protection of the rights, safety, dignity and well-being of migrants while also reducing the space for principled humanitarian action in the field of migration. In this challenging context, further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the need has emerged for a stronger and more sustained engagement of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) as a whole to contribute in an effective manner to preventing and responding to the most acute humanitarian concerns affecting migrants. The adoption of the proposed resolution “Towards a Movement Strategy on Migration” is an important step in this direction. The resolution endorses the project to develop a strategy to enhance the Movement’s strategic engagement and coordinated and coherent action in support of migrants in vulnerable situations, for adoption by the Council of Delegates in 2023. The resolution recognizes the role played by the Migration Leadership Group, with the support of the Global Migration Task Force and the Migration Lab and the involvement of National Societies, including through regional migration networks, in developing the strategy and grants the Migration Leadership Group a formal mandate to continue its work in this regard.

1) INTRODUCTION

Migration is a complex global phenomenon that often offers important opportunities for empowerment and well-being for migrants and communities in countries of origin, transit and destination. Although many migrants arrive safely in their country of destination and integrate successfully into new communities, others – whether they left their countries due to armed conflicts or other violence, persecution, human rights violations, poverty, disasters, the effects of climate change or the desire to be reunited with family members abroad – endure great hardship and face countless risks, harm, discrimination and vulnerability, including when travelling along land- and sea-based migratory routes. The Movement has long been active in responding to the humanitarian needs of migrants in vulnerable situations.¹ Its approach to migration – as it has evolved throughout the years and been consolidated in the 2009 International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Policy on Migration² – is purely humanitarian; it does not seek to encourage, discourage or prevent migration. In line with its Fundamental Principles, the Movement uses a deliberately broad description of “migrants” that includes all people who leave or flee their habitual residence to go to new places to seek opportunities or safer and better prospects, usually abroad.³ The Policy recognizes that migration can be voluntary or involuntary but that most of the time a combination of choices and constraints are involved. This inclusive description⁴ reflects the Movement’s focus on people’s needs and vulnerabilities, irrespective of their legal status or category. It recognizes that vulnerabilities may not only be influenced by the reasons for migrating, but may evolve along the journey, according to the circumstances in which migrants find themselves, in countries of transit or destination or upon return.⁵

¹ The Movement has made a deliberate choice to develop two distinct approaches to highlight the specific vulnerabilities and risks faced by internally displaced people and migrants and address their respective protection and assistance needs and to underline the fact that different legal frameworks may apply. While there are links between migration and internal displacement, requiring a holistic and coordinated response, it is important not to systematically infer a nexus between the two and not to consider internal displacement exclusively through the prism of migration. Together, the [2009 IFRC Policy on Migration](#) and the [Movement Policy on Internal Displacement](#) (adopted by Resolution 5 of the 2009 Council of Delegates) ensure the necessary conceptual and strategic clarity for the Movement to deal with the challenges that are specific to internal displacement and migration (including cross-border displacement) and also with possible connections between them.

² The Policy was welcomed by [Resolution 4 of the Council of Delegates \(2009\)](#).

³ The Policy on Migration also mentions the Movement’s efforts to address needs connected to migration within one country. Specifically, the Introduction mentions that in certain situations – for example where such migrants are subject to discrimination – the Policy can provide useful guidance. In other circumstances, where migration within one country is part of general labour mobility, the Movement’s efforts will be considered part of its general humanitarian action.

⁴ It includes, among others, labour migrants, stateless migrants, migrants deemed irregular by public authorities, refugees and asylum seekers.

⁵ The Movement does, however, recognize and promote the special protection afforded by international, regional and domestic law to specific categories of individuals, such as refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons.

Although it is within the sovereign prerogative of States to regulate the presence of non-nationals within their territory and to decide on their admission and expulsion, this is not absolute and must comply with international obligations and commitments. States bear the primary responsibility to ensure the safety and respect and protect the human rights and dignity of everyone under their jurisdiction, including migrants.⁶ However, whether due to inability or reluctance, States have often failed to protect migrants and respond to their most essential needs at different stages of their journey. Thanks to its vulnerability-based, people-centred and principled humanitarian approach and its local to global presence along migratory routes, the Movement is in a unique position to bridge protection and assistance gaps affecting migrants while at the same time seeking to engage the public authorities in addressing them. The different Movement components seek to work in a complementary and coordinated manner, based on their respective mandates, roles and responsibilities, to ensure that all migrants receive the protection they are entitled to under different legal frameworks – in particular, international human rights law and, where applicable, international refugee law and international humanitarian law – and have safe and effective access to humanitarian assistance and essential services, irrespective of status.

Addressing the needs of migrants in vulnerable situations has been a long-standing practice and commitment of the Movement. This is reflected by the fact that the topic is a regular item on the agenda of the International Conference⁷ and the Council of Delegates.⁸ Migration has also been addressed through key policy and strategy documents, including the [2009 IFRC Policy on Migration](#) and the [IFRC Global Strategy on Migration 2018–2022](#).⁹ While the Movement's important role in the field of migration has often been stressed and successful practices have been developed by National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies), the IFRC and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), there are still gaps in its response, including in the operationalization of our route-based approach. The [Movement's Strategy on Restoring Family Links \(RFL\) 2020–2025](#), which includes a specific focus on separated and missing migrants, acknowledges the need to strengthen the provision of RFL services along migratory routes and efforts to help clarify the fate of missing migrants. The [IFRC Strategy 2030](#) identifies migration as one of five global humanitarian challenges the Red Cross and Red Crescent network must address over the next decade and recognizes the importance of expanding support to migrants along migratory routes and improving how we work across borders.

By developing the first ever Movement strategy on migration, we will be able to address existing gaps and position ourselves more strongly and coherently on key migration-related challenges, especially on topics where divergence exists. The strategy will ensure shared commitment, stronger engagement and a clear focus across the Movement to address the most pressing priorities in the field of migration, further enhancing the added value of the Movement's principled humanitarian approach and capitalizing on the cooperation and complementarity of the different Movement components.

The proposed resolution is also linked to important initiatives outside the Movement, including the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). It is to be noted that paragraph 44 of the GCM recognizes the Movement's role in supporting States in the implementation of the Compact's humanitarian objectives.

2) BACKGROUND

Migration has been a central topic at previous Councils of Delegates and International Conferences. In 2007, through the [Declaration "Together for Humanity"](#), the Movement recognized migration as one of

⁶ Attention should be paid to groups that are exposed to particular vulnerabilities, such as children, women, victims of trafficking, persons with disabilities and persons in need of international protection.

⁷ Resolution 21, 24th International Conference, Manila, 1981; Resolution 17, 25th International Conference, Geneva, 1986; Resolution 4, 26th International Conference, Geneva, 1995; Resolution 1, Annex, Declaration "Together for Humanity", 30th International Conference, Geneva, 2007; Resolution 3, 31st International Conference, Geneva, 2011; and, most recently, Resolution 4, 33rd International Conference, Geneva, 2019.

⁸ Resolution 9, Budapest, 1991; Resolution 7, Birmingham, 1993; Resolution 4, Geneva, 2001; Resolution 10, Geneva, 2003; Resolution 5, Geneva, 2007; Resolution 4, Nairobi, 2009; and, in particular, the "Movement Call for Action on the Humanitarian Needs of Vulnerable Migrants", adopted by Resolution 3, Antalya, 2017, and the "Movement Statement on Migrants and our Common Humanity", adopted by Resolution 8, Geneva, 2019.

⁹ Adopted by the IFRC General Assembly in 2017.

the main global challenges for the years to come.¹⁰ The commitment and added value of the Movement in the field of migration has been repeatedly affirmed through resolutions and high-level dialogues at past Statutory Meetings.¹¹

The Movement's concerns about the importance of treating all migrants, irrespective of status, with humanity and promoting a climate of tolerance were brought to the attention of States at the International Conference in 2011, with Resolution 3 "[Migration: Ensuring Access, Dignity, Respect for Diversity and Social Inclusion](#)". Since its adoption, the Movement has called for implementation of this resolution but also noted limited progress and the hardening of laws, policies and attitudes affecting both migrants and humanitarian actors seeking to support them. Some National Societies have experienced increasing challenges in maintaining a principled approach and avoiding being instrumentalized into containment and forced return policies.

Coming together under a Movement strategy on migration will reinforce the Movement's ability to advocate for and support States' efforts to fulfil their responsibility to assist and protect migrants in vulnerable situations. The implementation of the commitments from previous Statutory Meetings must continue, and we must ensure that migration remains a critical area of our work in order to reinforce our dedication to addressing migrants' needs and to strengthen and adapt our response as required.

3) ANALYSIS

A) EXTERNAL CHALLENGES IN THE FIELD OF MIGRATION

While the number of migrants is expected to continue to increase,¹² recent years have witnessed a hardening of migration policies. This has not deterred people from migrating but has had detrimental consequences for the protection of migrants. Indeed, when migration is perceived as the only option to find safety and/or better opportunities but legal pathways for asylum and regular migration are limited, migrants may resort to irregular pathways and take increasing risks.¹³ This makes them more vulnerable to extortion, exploitation, abuse, trafficking, getting separated from relatives, going missing and/or losing their lives along the way, being detained, being returned to harm or becoming stranded, including in situations of armed conflict or other violence.¹⁴

In the last ten years, the securitization of migration has significantly expanded, leading to the hardening of measures, laws and policies that have been presented as a legitimate way to address difficulties in managing large-scale migration or security concerns. This creates hardship for migrants and can, in some cases, result in violations by the States concerned of their international obligations and a failure to comply with their commitments.¹⁵ The COVID-19 pandemic has shown once again that migrants are among those in the most vulnerable situations, as obstacles hindering their access to essential services, humanitarian assistance and international protection have dramatically increased.¹⁶ Climate change affects human mobility too, not only by directly increasing drivers of

¹⁰ S. Moretti and T. Bonzon (2017), "Some reflections on the IFRC's approach to migration and displacement", *International Review of the Red Cross*, 99 (1), 153–178. Accessible at: <https://international-review.icrc.org/articles/some-reflections-ifrcs-approach-migration-and-displacement>.

¹¹ Including the Movement Call for Action on the Humanitarian Needs of Vulnerable Migrants (2017), the Movement Statement on Migration: Ensuring Collective Action to Protect and Respond to the Needs and Vulnerabilities of Migrants (2015) and, most recently, the Movement Statement on Migrants and our Common Humanity (2019).

¹² United Nations, Intergovernmental Conference on the Global Compact for Migration. Accessible at: <https://www.un.org/en/conf/migration/global-compact-for-safe-orderly-regular-migration.shtml>.

¹³ S. Le Bihan (2017), "Addressing the protection and assistance needs of migrants: The ICRC approach to migration", *International Review of the Red Cross*, 99 (1), 99–119. Accessible at: <https://international-review.icrc.org/articles/addressing-protection-and-assistance-needs-migrants-icrc-approach-migration>.

¹⁴ A. Triandafyllidou, L. Bartolini and C.F. Guidi (2019), *Exploring the Links Between Enhancing Regular Pathways and Discouraging Irregular Migration*, International Organization for Migration, Geneva. Accessible at: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/exploring_the_links_2019.pdf.

¹⁵ Mixed Migration Centre (2019), The ever-rising securitisation of mixed migration. Accessible at: https://mixedmigration.org/articles/the-ever-rising-securitisation-of-mixed-migration/#_ftn44.

¹⁶ Red Cross Red Crescent Global Migration Lab (2021), *Locked down and left out? Why access to basic services for migrants is critical to our COVID-19 response and recovery*. Accessible at: <https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/EN-RCRC-Global-Migration-Lab-Locked-down-left-out-COVID19.pdf>.

migration, but also by forcing many into an irregular situation. Containment policies and narratives criminalizing irregular migration have contributed to anti-migrant sentiment, stigma and discrimination. These trends and policies are severely restricting the humanitarian space in the field of migration: access to migrants is increasingly hampered and humanitarian assistance to them criminalized under the legislation of some States; the capacity of humanitarian actors to ensure the protection of personal data and abide by the do no (digital) harm principle is often challenged; and humanitarian actors are increasingly at risk of being instrumentalized to contain migration. This jeopardizes the impartiality, neutrality and independence of humanitarian aid and the trust of migrants in humanitarian actors.¹⁷

B) STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS AND ESTABLISHMENT OF A MIGRATION LEADERSHIP MODEL

The Movement plays a unique role in the context of migration thanks to its needs-based approach underpinned by the Fundamental Principles and the complementary mandates, roles and responsibilities of its components. Our auxiliary status and/or trusted relationship with authorities, our reputation among local communities and migrants, the global reach of National Societies embedded in host communities and present in 192 countries along almost all borders and our ability to understand and provide insights on priority humanitarian needs and the views of migrants from local to global level enable the Movement to be a neutral, impartial and independent voice that can be trusted by all actors.

To be able to continue playing an effective part in supporting migrants themselves, host communities and those staying behind and to strengthen the Movement's future strategic action, it is essential to ensure effective and inclusive leadership, long-term commitment and coordinated engagement, informed by a solid analysis of evolving trends and risks related to migration from the local to the global level. In 2020, a system to facilitate these objectives was established in the form of a new Migration Leadership Model. The proposed model drew on successful experiences and lessons learned from the Global Migration Task Force, regional migration networks (APMN, Sahel+, PERCO and the MENA Migration Network),¹⁸ IFRC and ICRC regional advisor and coordinator networks, the RFL Leadership Platform and the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre. The Migration Leadership Model comprises the Migration Leadership Group, the pre-existing Global Migration Task Force¹⁹ and the Global Migration Lab.²⁰ The model has a three-fold aim, reflecting its tripartite structure: ensuring effective and inclusive leadership, continued engagement and long-term commitment on migration within the Movement; facilitating technical expertise and operational support to National Societies; and providing migration-related analysis and research to inform the Movement's positioning and programming.

Migration survey and findings

To inform the decision to establish the new Migration Leadership Model, a survey was conducted in early 2020 to capture National Society perspectives on migration and preliminarily identify National Societies that would be interested in becoming involved in the model. In total, 51 National Societies responded to the survey, including 18 from Europe, 14 from Asia Pacific, 9 from the Americas, 8 from Africa and 2 from MENA.²¹ The results confirmed the need to invest in a complementary and coordinated approach and in promoting stronger engagement of the Movement as a whole in the field

¹⁷ Red Cross EU Office (2021), Protecting the humanitarian space to access and support migrants. Available at: <https://redcross.eu/positions-publications/protecting-the-humanitarian-space-to-access-and-support-migrants>.

¹⁸ Asia Pacific National Society Migration Network, Sahel+ Migration Network, Platform for European Red Cross Cooperation on Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants, and Middle East and North Africa Migration Network.

¹⁹ The Global Migration Task Force is represented by National Societies across all regions and acts as the leading technical reference group on migration. Its work focuses on providing guidance and technical support to continuously strengthen and scale up the capacity of National Societies to address the evolving risks and threats faced by migrants. The Task Force supports the implementation of the [IFRC Strategy on Migration 2018–2022](#) and will play a key role in supporting the Leadership Group in developing the future Movement strategy on migration.

²⁰ The Migration Lab is physically hosted at a specific location (currently by the Australian Red Cross) and, through partnerships and research, develops insights into migration trends, policies and good practices at the local, regional and global levels, ensuring that the Movement has the information required to work where it is needed most and in the way that best addresses the strengths of individuals, communities and the Movement across borders and that our humanitarian diplomacy efforts are based on sound evidence and expertise. The first report of the Migration Lab, [Locked down and left out? Why access to basic services for migrants is critical to our COVID-19 response and recovery](#), was published in March 2021.

²¹ The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected National Society participation in the survey.

of migration. Among the priorities proposed in the survey, “conflict and violence” and “climate change” scored the highest, while “access to services for migrants irrespective of status” was identified as the most significant challenge. Having a Movement strategy on migration reflecting the perspectives, complementary roles and added value of all the different Movement components was recognized as the most important area where we should invest.

Migration Leadership Group

The Migration Leadership Group is made up of the IFRC, the ICRC and 23 National Societies representing a variety of geographical and migration contexts.²² It provides leadership and influences the relevant executive bodies of the Movement by offering strategic advice on migration and ensures that the Movement’s work and advocacy on migration are fit for purpose. Members of the Group have committed to acting as champions at the global and regional level, both within the Movement and externally, and to fostering partnerships and cooperation. Addressing a key priority of its workplan, the Migration Leadership Group has started to lay the foundations for developing a Movement strategy on migration, which will highlight the Movement’s most pressing priorities and significant challenges in the field of migration and focus on the areas where we need to invest for the future.

4) RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The development of a Movement strategy on migration will be guided by the Migration Leadership Group and its Co-Chair Group,²³ with support from the Global Migration Task Force and the Global Migration Lab. The process will involve National Societies, including through existing regional migration networks, to ensure that their varied perspectives and experiences inform the contents of the future strategy. Efforts will also be made to foster the needed coordination and synergies with other relevant thematic workstreams within the Movement, including RFL, Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) and Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA).

The implementation of the proposed resolution will mostly rely on existing human resources. A consultancy is envisaged to consolidate the results of the collective reflection and prepare a first draft of the strategy, under the Migration Leadership Group’s guidance. Additional financial implications are anticipated for the research that the Global Migration Lab may be requested to carry out to inform the development of the strategy.

5) IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

The development of a Movement strategy on migration by 2023, which is the object of the proposed resolution, already featured in the workplan of both the Migration Leadership Group and the Global Migration Task Force for 2021 and will continue to be a priority for them in 2022–2023. Capitalizing on the momentum created by the proposed resolution, the Movement strategy on migration will also be included in the agenda of relevant annual meetings of regional and thematic networks and platforms. The 2023 Council of Delegates will provide an opportune moment to submit the finalized strategy for adoption.

Conclusion and recommendations

In view of the foregoing, it is recommended that the Council of Delegates adopt the proposed resolution “Towards a Movement Strategy on Migration”. The development of such a strategy will ensure strong,

²² Periodic reporting and consultations by the Migration Leadership Group with other National Societies is also envisaged to ensure inclusiveness and participation.

²³ The Co-Chair Group currently comprises the IFRC, the ICRC, the Australian Red Cross, the Maldivian Red Crescent and the Swedish Red Cross.

coordinated and coherent Movement action in support of migrants in vulnerable situations. It will make it possible to capitalize on the respective and complementary mandates, roles and responsibilities of the components of the Movement, including the role of National Societies as auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field, the IFRC's humanitarian mission to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, and the ICRC's key areas of activity in the field of migration which include protecting and assisting migrants, primarily in contexts of armed conflict and internal strife, and its role as coordinator, technical adviser and provider of support to National Societies in restoring family links and in detention and other protection matters.²⁴

The resolution provides for the following actions:

- Agree on the need for and importance of a Movement strategy on migration that focuses on the most pressing migration-related challenges, while considering the link with internal displacement where relevant;
- Endorse the Migration Leadership Group's role of developing a Movement strategy on migration as the centrepiece of their workplan and the work it has undertaken so far in this regard and welcome the supporting role of the Global Migration Task Force and the Global Migration Lab, the involvement of National Societies, including through regional migration networks, in supporting the development of the future strategy, and cooperation with other Movement-led initiatives, such as the RFL Leadership Platform, to establish synergies at the leadership level;
- Mandate the Migration Leadership Group to continue its work and to submit the Movement strategy on migration for adoption at the 2023 Council of Delegates;
- Recommend that the development of the future Movement strategy on migration be informed by the broad participation, experience and expertise of National Societies, including through regional migration networks, and by migrants' priorities and lived experience and draw on learning from the IFRC Global Strategy on Migration 2018–2022 and other similar Movement-led processes, and highlight the need to ensure complementarity and synergies between the future strategy and the Movement's Restoring Family Links Strategy 2020–2025;
- Call upon all components of the Movement to further strengthen the implementation of existing commitments in this area, including the IFRC Global Strategy on Migration 2018–2022 and Strategy 2030, while the Movement strategy on migration is being developed, and to dedicate adequate human, financial and technical resources to that end.

²⁴ The respective roles and activities of the different components of the Movement for the benefit of migrants will be further clarified in the future Movement Strategy on Migration, the development of which is entrusted to the Migration Leadership Group under this resolution.