SAFER ACCESS SAVING LIVES

SAFER ACCESS

A GUIDE FOR ALL NATIONAL SOCIETIES

PRACTICAL RESOURCE PACK

Produced in cooperation with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

ICRC

REFERENCE

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The contents of this guide and its companion resources, which together make up the Safer Access Practical Resource Pack, are based on the contributions of more than 50 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. For over a decade, they have worked closely with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the development and application of the Safer Access Framework (SAF), which is the foundation on which these resources have been built.

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The Safer Access Project Advisory Team comprises representatives of the Canadian Red Cross Society, Colombian Red Cross Society, Nepal Red Cross Society, Palestine Red Crescent Society, Uganda Red Cross Society, the International Federation Secretariat and the ICRC. The Canadian Red Cross also kindly seconded a staff member to the ICRC as head of project to work with National Societies in developing the Practical Resource Pack.

We invite all National Societies to continue to contribute to the Practical Resource Pack over the coming years by sharing their experiences of applying the SAF. We look forward to working with them in its implementation.

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SETTING THE SCENE

FOREWORD

Humanitarian ideals, hope and solace are for many the hallmarks of our global Movement – inspiration for those who have benefited from its service, for those who work with it and for those who watch it in action on their television or computer screens. Many are thankful not to have needed its support but somehow feel that the world is a better place simply because of its existence.

Behind the uplifting, emotive power of the red cross, red crescent and red crystal symbols, the worldwide response to our Movement is largely attributable to the devotion and courage of National Society staff and volunteers, many of whom willingly risk their own psychological and physical well-being for the sake of helping others.

For their own **security** 🕮, and in order to be accepted by all and to act neutrally, impartially and independently when carrying out what they see as their humanitarian responsibility, staff and volunteers must rise above their own political opinions, their sectarian or religious beliefs, and at times their very identities. At the same time, National Societies must adopt practices that support and protect them while endeavouring to increase their own acceptance among **stakeholders** 🕮. The relevant practices can be learned over time as experience is gained. If experienced National Societies share their best practices with others and if all adopt a structured approach to increasing acceptance, security and access, the individual and institutional learning curve will be drastically reduced.

🕮 **Security** refers to freedom from risk or harm from such intentional acts as can occur in sensitive and insecure contexts, including armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions.

🕮 **Stakeholders** is the term used to refer to anyone concerned with, involved in or affected by the actions of the National Society, such as the people it aims to serve and assist, representatives of communities and civil society, the public authorities, Movement components, non-State actors, armed actors, donors, the media, other organizations and businesses. Gatekeepers are a subset of stakeholders.

It is with this in mind that the ICRC, together with the Safer Access Project Advisory Team comprising representatives of National Societies and the International Federation, has produced the Safer Access Practical Resource Pack, of which this guide is a core component. In providing guidance and tools to enhance the protection of National Society staff and volunteers, we recognize their commitment to helping those with humanitarian needs and seek to strengthen the National Societies' ability to carry out their much needed humanitarian mandate and roles.

By working more effectively and more safely, our global Movement can extend its reach to more people in order to provide them with the help that they may so desperately need.

Dr Philip Spoerri
Director for International Law and Cooperation
ICRC

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

📖 The term **sensitive and insecure contexts**, as used in this guide, covers a broad range of situations, from those which involve no violence but which nonetheless present National Societies with perception or acceptance issues to violent demonstrations, riots or spontaneous acts of revolt (also referred to as internal disturbances or internal tensions) and to outright armed conflict, as well as many situations combining characteristics of several different contexts. Security and access issues can also arise following a natural disaster or in situations where banditry, gang violence or other forms of criminality prevail.

This guide is the core component of the Safer Access Practical Resource Pack, which is designed to support National Societies in fulfilling their humanitarian mandate and roles, particularly when working in **sensitive and insecure contexts** 📖. Produced at the request of a number of National Societies at the 2009 Council of Delegates, the Practical Resource Pack aims to familiarize National Societies with the Safer Access Framework (SAF) and to provide practical guidance and tools to support its application and implementation.

The core guide is intended primarily for National Society staff and volunteers in leadership and management positions at headquarters, regional and branch levels. This includes secretaries-general, governance members, operational response managers and team leaders, and heads of programmes and support services. Their ownership and commitment is essential to ensure that the SAF is fully integrated into National Society policies, structures, systems, programmes and practice at every level.

The guide is structured to give maximum information and guidance, building from the basics to a full understanding of the SAF and its implementation. However, the content is of a general nature and must always be adapted to the context concerned, taking all relevant circumstances into account.

FIGURE 1: THE FOUR PARTS OF THE SAFER ACCESS GUIDE

PART ONE	PART TWO	PART THREE	PART FOUR
THE ESSENTIALS	**THE FOUNDATIONS**	**THE SPECIFICS**	**THE APPLICATION**
Part One of the guide provides a quick overview of the Safer Access Framework, its benefits to National Societies, and where, when and how to apply it.	Part Two looks at the characteristics and common challenges of the different operational contexts in which National Societies may find themselves and discusses the legal and regulatory bases for their humanitarian actions in those contexts.	Part Three goes deeper into the substance of the SAF, explaining how perception, acceptance and security both derive from and contribute to access. It describes the eight "elements" of the SAF and their associated actions and measures and its interdependence with the Fundamental Principles. The eight elements and their corresponding actions and measures are set out in detail in the Safer Access Framework chart.	Part Four explains the SAF assessment and planning process, introduces the tools available to support this process and describes how to use them.

Key to symbols used in this guide:

📖 **Definition of terms**

🌐 **Reference to online resource**

Underlining link to another page or external resource

◀ **Return to previous page**

A supplementary section on each SAF element is available online 🌐 at www.icrc.org/saferaccess. It includes practical "how to" advice, tools and relevant examples. The SAF application tools associated with this guide, National Society selected experiences, more extensive case studies and a video – all illustrating Safer Access in action – form an integral part of the Practical Resource Pack and can also be accessed online 🌐 at the above internet address.

HOW IT ALL STARTED

As early as 2001, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies began working with the ICRC to document lessons learned while preparing for and responding in sensitive and insecure contexts, including **armed conflict** 🕮, **internal disturbances** 🕮 and **internal tensions** 🕮. This successful collaborative effort enabled actions and measures to be identified that had been shown to contribute to greater security and access to people and communities with humanitarian needs.

This rich knowledge and good practice have been captured in the form of the Safer Access Framework (SAF), which was first introduced in 2003 and has been applied over the past decade by many National Societies. Based on further input collected from National Societies, the International Federation and the ICRC during numerous formal and informal meetings, consultations and lessons learned processes, the SAF was updated in 2013 to ensure that it adequately reflected the challenges faced by National Societies in today's complicated humanitarian environments.

The experience of many National Societies in applying the SAF in a range of different contexts has led to the observation that although the SAF is particularly relevant to their work in sensitive and insecure contexts, the proposed actions and measures are also of benefit for their day-to-day activities. Moreover, experience has shown that applying the SAF in a structured manner is more effective than an ad hoc approach.

There is never a complete guarantee of safety or security when providing humanitarian assistance and protection in inherently difficult and dangerous contexts. However, the actions and measures proposed by the SAF will help National Societies earn the trust and acceptance of affected communities and of those who control or influence access to them, thus reducing or mitigating the risks they may face.

"We never thought that conflict would affect our entire country. We have a fairly good system of disaster response within the Nepal Red Cross and thought we would be prepared for anything. However, it has become dangerously apparent that working in a conflict environment is very different from dealing with a disaster. We therefore made drastic changes in our approaches so as to be acceptable in all kinds of hostile situations."

Dev Ratna Dhakhwa, Secretary General,
Nepal Red Cross Society

🕮 An **armed conflict** exists whenever recourse is made to armed force between States or protracted armed confrontation between governmental armed forces and organized armed groups or between such groups arising on the territory of a State (party to the Geneva Conventions). International humanitarian law distinguishes between two types of armed conflicts, namely: international armed conflicts, involving two or more opposing States, and non-international armed conflicts between government forces and non-government armed groups, or between such groups only.

🕮 **Internal disturbances** involve situations which are characterized by a certain seriousness or duration and which involve acts of violence. These latter can assume various forms, all the way from the spontaneous generation of acts of revolt to the struggle between more or less organized groups and the authorities in power. In these situations, which do not necessarily degenerate into open struggle, the authorities in power call upon extensive police forces, or even armed forces, to restore internal order. The high number of victims has made necessary the application of a minimum of humanitarian rules. Over the years, it has become clear that the above definition does not refer exclusively to situations involving State authorities, but also includes those confrontations between different groups of individuals, none of which are in power.

🕮 **Internal tensions** could be said to include in particular situations of serious tension (political, religious, racial, social, economic, etc.), but also the sequels of armed conflict or of internal disturbances. Such situations have one or more of the following characteristics, if not all at the same time: large-scale arrests; a large number of "political" prisoners; the probable existence of ill-treatment or inhumane conditions of detention; the suspension of fundamental judicial guarantees, either as part of the promulgation of a state of emergency or simply as a matter of fact; and allegations of disappearances.

The key to successful application of the SAF is for members of National Societies' governance and management to commit to the challenge as a permanent task which engages all programmes and support services, as well as staff and volunteers in leadership and management positions.

It is hoped that all National Societies will be inspired to incorporate the actions and measures contained in the SAF into their organizational development and capacity-building approach, including in the way they prepare for and respond in all situations requiring humanitarian assistance, both in peacetime and in more challenging circumstances.

PART ONE

THE ESSENTIALS

I. THE SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK AT A GLANCE

This section describes the basic concepts behind the Safer Access Framework, provides a quick overview of how, when and where to apply it, and explains its importance and relevance for all National Societies. The points are further elaborated in subsequent sections of the guide.

What it is

The Safer Access Framework (SAF) contains a set of actions and measures that can be taken by a National Society to prepare for and respond to context-specific challenges and priorities to reduce and mitigate the risks that it may face in sensitive and insecure contexts and to earn the trust and acceptance of people and communities with humanitarian needs and of those who control or influence access to them.

The proposed actions and measures are divided into eight "elements," each focusing on a key area (see Table 1). Together they provide a comprehensive reference for National Societies when preparing for and undertaking a humanitarian response.

The Safer Access Framework contains a set of actions and measures, which when applied in a context-specific and structured approach in tandem with the Fundamental Principles, have been shown to increase National Societies' acceptance, security and access to people and communities in need.

TABLE 1: THE EIGHT ELEMENTS OF THE SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK

I		**Context and risk assessment**	National Societies have a clear understanding of the interlinked political, social, cultural and economic aspects of the evolving operational environment and the inherent risks, which forms the basis for preventing and managing those risks.
II		**Legal and policy base**	National Societies have sound legal and statutory instruments and develop policies that provide a basis from which to carry out their humanitarian mandate and roles in conformity with Movement policies, international humanitarian law and domestic legislation.
III		**Acceptance of the organization**	National Societies have attained a high degree of acceptance among key stakeholders by providing relevant, context-sensitive humanitarian assistance and protection for people and communities in a manner consistent with the Fundamental Principles and other Movement policies.
IV		**Acceptance of the individual**	Staff and volunteers have attained a high degree of acceptance among key stakeholders by working in a manner consistent with the Fundamental Principles and other Movement policies.
V		**Identification**	National Societies take all necessary steps to protect and promote the organization's visual identity and that of its staff and volunteers.
VI		**Internal communication and coordination**	National Societies implement well-developed internal communication and coordination strategies and mechanisms, which enhance coordination with other Movement components.
VII		**External communication and coordination**	National Societies implement well-developed external communication and coordination strategies and mechanisms, which enhance coordination with external actors.
VIII		**Operational security risk management**	National Societies assume responsibility and accountability for the safety and security of staff and volunteers by developing and implementing an operational security risk management system and structure.

Most of the concepts underpinning the SAF are not new to National Societies as they concern various familiar organizational development and capacity-building actions. Indeed, many of the actions are already clear requirements and commitments for National Societies as established in policies and decisions adopted by the Movement and should therefore already be standard procedure.

The SAF nonetheless contains a number of **supplementary preparedness actions** 🕮 and **positioning or active acceptance measures** 🕮. These are best taken well in advance of an operational response and involve building and maintaining good relations with local communities, armed actors and other relevant stakeholders as part of an **operational security risk management** 🕮 strategy, and obtaining their acceptance and consent for the National Society's presence and its work.

Whether new or familiar, the way the actions and measures are portrayed and organized within the SAF provides a particular perspective from which a National Society can assess itself and its operational environment and take action accordingly.

The seven Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (see Figure 6) are integral to the successful application of the SAF, especially the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Strict operational adherence to these principles is crucial to how a National Society is perceived and therefore accepted by all stakeholders.

🕮 **Supplementary preparedness actions** are those taken over and above a National Society's usual emergency preparedness for response activities and are aimed at increasing its security in a given situation.

🕮 **Positioning or active acceptance measures** involve building and maintaining good relations with local communities, armed actors and other relevant stakeholders as part of an operational security risk management strategy, and obtaining their acceptance and consent for the National Society's presence and its work.

🕮 **Operational security risk management** consists of assessing an operational context, identifying and analysing risks to staff and volunteers, assets and operations and implementing mitigating strategies and measures to reduce the likelihood and impact of an undesirable event.

"Through its 'Saving Lives, Changing Lives' strategy the British Red Cross Society has committed to focus its resources progressively on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. In the Northern Ireland context, the most vulnerable citizens are often to be found in the communities that suffered the worst impact of 'The Troubles' and which continue to experience high levels of sectarian tension and the threat or reality of violence.

The Northern Ireland team is working to overcome the barriers vulnerable people face in accessing humanitarian services, while upholding the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, particularly in relation to neutrality and impartiality.

In preparing to extend our reach safely, we have found the Safer Access Framework an extremely useful lens through which to examine ourselves, the external environment and the work we need to undertake to make good on this aspiration."

Sharon Sinclair, Operations Director, Northern Ireland,
British Red Cross Society

Who it is for and why

The intention of the Safer Access Framework (SAF) is to help all National Societies enhance the effectiveness of their humanitarian services in their own specific contexts and particularly in situations where security and access may be compromised.

The mission of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, common to all its components, is "to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found."[1] In sensitive and insecure contexts, when needs are often at their greatest, National Societies may face challenges in fulfilling this mission and their humanitarian mandate because of the inherent risks to staff and volunteers and restrictions on access.

When a National Society is able to work safely and unhindered in such contexts, this benefits not only the people and communities it is serving, but also the staff and volunteers carrying out the Society's humanitarian mandate and activities and all Movement components working with it in this endeavour.

Figure 2 explains why the SAF is important for all National Societies.

The Safer Access Framework was developed to support all National Societies in enhancing their ability to provide effective humanitarian services for all those who need them, but particularly in situations where security and access may be compromised.

FIGURE 2: FIVE REASONS TO APPLY THE SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK

1. Increase your ability to address the humanitarian needs of more people

For National Societies, the ability to fulfil the mandate to respond to humanitarian needs "wherever they may be found" is enhanced through greater acceptance by all stakeholders, including the communities they serve and the **gatekeepers** 🕮 who control or influence access to them. Taking the actions and measures specified in the SAF, including rigorously applying the Fundamental Principles and adopting a more robust approach to operational security risk management, can help them achieve this acceptance, enabling them to assist more people more safely and effectively.

🕮 **Gatekeepers** are all those who are in a position to control, restrict or grant access to people adversely affected by events. They may include national and local authorities, security forces, armed actors, non-State actors, religious and community leaders, community members and people in need. Gatekeepers are one of the larger group of stakeholders that a National Society needs to consider when carrying out its operations.

[1] *Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*, adopted by the 25th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent at Geneva in 1986 and amended in 1995 and 2006, Preamble, p. 5.

2. Prevent, reduce and avoid security incidents which cause harm to your staff and volunteers

Protecting the health, security and well-being of staff and volunteers as well as the National Society's assets (including its reputation) is a must in today's challenging environments. Aside from the moral and ethical reasons, in most countries National Societies, like any other employer, have a legal requirement of duty of care towards their personnel.[2] Failure to take all possible measures to prevent harm to its staff and volunteers in the course of their duties can place a National Society at risk of legal action or liability.

3. Better meet the challenges of today's complicated and evolving humanitarian environments

Providing humanitarian services in today's complicated and evolving environments is increasingly challenging. To be able to respond effectively in such contexts, sound foundations for National Society organizational development, capacity building and emergency preparedness for response are essential. These are supported by various approaches and tools developed by the International Federation, such as the Organizational Capacity Assessment and Certification process and the Well-Prepared National Society checklist. The SAF complements these and provides specific guidance on what actions and measures to take to increase acceptance, security and access. The actions and measures are intended to be incorporated into a National Society's overall development efforts.

4. Fulfil your mandate and roles in sensitive and insecure contexts

The SAF supports National Societies in carrying out their legal and statutory duties and responsibilities to organize, in liaison with the public authorities, emergency relief operations and other services to assist people and communities affected by armed conflict, as provided for in the Geneva Conventions, and those affected by natural disasters and other emergencies for whom help is needed.[3] (See Part Two, Section II as well as the online Practical Advice section "Legal and policy base".)

In addition, National Societies are called upon increasingly to work in a variety of sensitive and insecure contexts that require a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian response.

5. Adopt a more structured approach to increasing security and access

Taking a more structured and systematic approach to determining the context-specific preparedness actions and positioning measures required to address gaps, barriers, risks and challenges to security and access in sensitive and insecure contexts has proved to be more effective than an ad hoc, learn-as-you-go method, which can result in access restrictions and injuries to staff and volunteers or even their deaths.

> "Initially, the SAF was seen only as a tool for volunteers who worked in the ambulance service, but following approval of the SAF by the National Society leadership in 2012 it is now applied and promoted across all staff levels."
>
> Our Selected Experience: Mexican Red Cross

[2] International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Legal issues related to volunteering: Toolkit for National Societies*, Geneva, 2011, p. 31.

[3] *Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*, Section II, Article 3(2). It is understood that the term "emergencies" as used in this context includes internal disturbances and tensions.

How it works

The structured approach adopted in applying the Safer Access Framework (SAF) builds on National Societies' experience of working in different operational contexts and is based on an assessment and planning cycle that is already familiar to many National Societies.

The process begins with the identification of gaps, barriers, risks and challenges to the National Society's security and access to people and communities in need, based on past experience, present reality or projected scenarios. This is followed by a planning phase, supported by the SAF planning and assessment process and tool, which includes the establishment of priorities and actions to address the identified gaps, barriers, risks and challenges. The next – crucial – step is to put the plan into practice and includes a variety of specific actions and measures to be taken by various individuals and departments within the National Society (see Safer Access Framework chart, Part Three, Section II, for an idea of the types of actions that may be required).

The outcomes of the actions, depending on the form they take, are then incorporated into the National Society's policies, structures, systems, programmes and practice. Monitoring is an integral part of every stage of the process.

The application process is continual as National Societies need to remain responsive to the evolving context and needs and vigilant regarding the possible implications for its security and access.

This process is discussed in greater depth in Part Four. Additional tools and resources have been and are being developed to support its application.

The Safer Access Framework is best applied by adopting a permanent, structured approach which is grounded in National Societies' experiences and adapted to the context and by using the associated process and tools provided.

TABLE 2: THE SAFER ACCESS APPLICATION PROCESS

Manage	Create a Safer Access steering group (5–8 people) to support the permanent process of implementing the proposed actions and measures in an ever-changing environment. If a similar mechanism or group already exists within the National Society, its mandate could be expanded to include this function.
Assess	Identify the current/likely gaps, barriers, risks and challenges to National Society acceptance, security and access by reflecting on the existing context, recent experience and possible future scenarios. Record the findings in the SAF assessment and planning tool.
Plan	Draw up an action plan using the SAF assessment and planning tool to capture and address the main factors affecting acceptance, compromising access or increasing risks to staff and volunteers.
Take action	Implement the action plan according to the identified priorities.
Integrate	Integrate the outcomes of the actions into National Society policies, structures, systems, programmes and practice; provide appropriate guidance and training for staff and volunteers.
Monitor	Monitor progress and impact using the benchmarking and monitoring process and tool developed for this purpose; repeat the process as the context changes; conduct a full assessment at least once a year.

The Safer Access Framework applies primarily in situations involving violence or the risk of violence, which may impede a National Society's safe delivery of humanitarian assistance. It has also proved useful when applied in peacetime as part of a National Society's day-to-day activities.

Where and when it applies

The Safer Access Framework (SAF) applies primarily in sensitive and insecure contexts, where violence or the threat of violence may impede access to vulnerable populations with humanitarian needs and put the lives of staff and volunteers at risk. It can be applied during an operational response or in anticipation of an imminent response.

However, even in peacetime certain situations may contain sensitivities that need to be prepared for and managed carefully. Operational contexts can change rapidly, and when violence erupts unexpectedly there is not always enough time to adjust procedures sufficiently to ensure that staff and volunteers enjoy the best possible degree of security and access.

For these reasons, all National Societies are encouraged to make the SAF part of their ongoing organizational development and capacity-building approach and to apply it in their day-to-day activities.

A detailed description of the applicable operational contexts, their distinct characteristics and the associated challenges is provided in Part Two, Section I.

"We had been working in a peaceful environment for more than three decades when suddenly conflict erupted. We didn't have much of an idea of how to work in such situations initially. Using the Safer Access Framework, we learned how to increase our access and to increase our risk reduction capacity to work in that kind of situation, which allowed us to reach more people affected by the violence."

Umesh Prasad Dhakal, Executive Director,
Nepal Red Cross Society

KEY POINTS

- The SAF contains a set of actions and measures that a National Society can take to reduce and mitigate the risks it may face when working in sensitive and insecure contexts and to support its overall development.
- The SAF aims to help all National Societies enhance the effectiveness of their humanitarian services in their own specific contexts, especially where security and access may be compromised.
- Morally, ethically and legally, National Societies have a duty of care to prevent harm to their staff and volunteers working in sensitive and insecure contexts.
- The SAF is best applied using a structured assessment and planning approach grounded in National Societies' experiences and adapted to the context concerned.
- The SAF applies primarily in situations involving violence or the risk of violence. It has also proved useful when applied in peacetime.

PART TWO

THE FOUNDATIONS

I. UNDERSTANDING THE OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

This section examines the different operational contexts in which the Safer Access Framework is most relevant, their characteristics and some of the common challenges they pose for National Societies.

In order to understand the purpose that the Safer Access Framework (SAF) fills in National Society development, it is helpful to understand the distinctive characteristics found in today's sensitive and insecure contexts.

At one time or another many National Societies will find themselves responding to humanitarian needs in a sensitive or insecure context. Some of those contexts will involve violence or the threat of violence, which requires specific preparedness measures and the adaptation of operational practices in order to increase security and access to affected people and communities.

IN FOCUS: CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE IN SYRIA

After more than two years of violence in Syria, humanitarian needs reached unprecedented levels in 2013, with millions of people internally displaced or crossing borders to seek safety. At the time of writing, nearly 2 million people have been receiving monthly aid from the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, which it manages to deliver despite the high degree of risk. However, this has not been achieved without a human toll: 32 staff and volunteers have lost their lives in the line of duty and numerous others have been injured or detained.

"There are many places where the National Society can deliver humanitarian assistance to those in need regardless of the political affiliations of the people being assisted," said Dr Abdul Attar, President of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. "Where we are successful at this, we are only able to do so owing to the strong commitment of our volunteers who risk their lives every day in the cause of humanity."

Given the permanent task and challenge of trying to maintain the reality and image of being neutral and impartial in order to increase acceptance by all sides and factions in an environment of growing sectarian violence, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent has identified adherence to the Fundamental Principles and ensuring operational communication with all stakeholders as an integral part of its operational strategy.

Most National Societies have experience in preparing for and responding to natural disasters. Sensitive and insecure contexts, meanwhile, each have their own distinct characteristics and challenges (see Table 3). Understanding those characteristics and challenges can help the National Society plan its humanitarian response and operational security risk management strategy accordingly. However, it must first conduct a thorough and ongoing context and **risk assessment** 📖 to determine the barriers to access and challenges to security that are specific to its own context. (See the online 🌐 Practical Advice section "Context and risk assessment" for more specific information on how to do this.)

📖 **Risk assessment** is the overall process of risk identification, risk analysis and risk evaluation.

Some basic concepts

Certain key concepts are foundational to an understanding of the operational context. Particular attention is drawn here to three such concepts. The Glossary (Annex 1) contains definitions of other key terms.

The term **sensitive and insecure contexts** covers a broad range of situations, from those involving no violence but which nonetheless present National Societies with perception or acceptance issues to violent demonstrations, riots or spontaneous acts of revolt (also referred to as "internal disturbances and tensions") and to outright "armed conflict," as well as many situations combining characteristics of several different contexts. Security and access issues can also arise following a natural disaster or in situations where banditry, gang violence or other forms of criminality prevail.

An **armed conflict** is a situation in which recourse is made to armed force between two or more States (international armed conflict) or to protracted armed violence between government authorities and organized armed groups within a State (non-international armed conflict). Whether or not a situation is classified as an armed conflict is important because if it is and particularly if the ICRC infoms the parties to the conflict of its classification, the application of **international humanitarian law** 🕮, which outlines the rights and obligations of the government authority and armed opposition groups, is triggered. (See the Glossary, Annex 1, for a more detailed definition.)

🕮 **International humanitarian law** (IHL) is a branch of public international law. It comprises the rules which, in times of armed conflict, seek – for humanitarian reasons – to protect persons who are not or are no longer participating in the hostilities, and to restrict the means and methods of warfare. More precisely, international humanitarian law refers to international treaty or customary rules which have been specially developed to resolve humanitarian issues arising directly from armed conflicts, whether of an international or non-international character.

Internal disturbances and **internal tensions** are the terms used to refer to serious acts of violence that fall short of the classification of armed conflict and in which international humanitarian law does not therefore apply. These situations may be of political, religious, racial, social, economic or other origin and may include serious acts of violence affecting a large number of people. Such situations may be characterized by one or more of the following: the spontaneous generation of acts of revolt or struggles between groups or between them and the authority in power, the extensive involvement of police and security or armed forces to restore internal order, large-scale arrests, a large number of "security prisoners," the probable occurrence of ill-treatment or of inhumane conditions of detention, the suspension of fundamental judicial guarantees, and allegations of disappearances. (See the Glossary, Annex 1, for more detailed definitions.)

While all sensitive and insecure contexts will not necessarily involve violence, some of the challenges they pose to a National Society's acceptance and access are often similar to those encountered in environments involving violence.

Characteristics and challenges of sensitive and insecure contexts

Each context, regardless of how it is characterized or defined, is distinct. It must therefore be analysed thoroughly and responded to as such. However, understanding some general trends and challenges of such contexts can be helpful. This section deals, in particular, with armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions, where violence is almost always involved.

IN FOCUS: AN UNEXPECTED RESPONSE IN CANADA

Some years ago, the Canadian Red Cross was called upon unexpectedly to respond to an armed stand-off between the Aboriginal Mohawk people, the Quebec police and the Canadian army in Kanehsetake, a Mohawk village near the town of Oka, 70 km west of Montreal. The situation arose over a land dispute that dated back to the 1930s. The event resulted in demonstrations and rioting, with some people being caught behind barricades. Restrictions on movement meant that the Mohawk people and some residents of the surrounding communities were unable to meet their basic needs in terms of food and health care.

It was the Canadian Red Cross's first experience of dealing with an armed confrontation within its own borders. The National Society therefore decided to conduct a thorough assessment, including of the needs. It furthermore sought assurances from all concerned that humanitarian assistance was welcome and that the National Society's impartiality and neutrality would be respected. It also emphasized that it would be acting independently from the government. As a result, although not all challenges were removed, it was eventually able to cross the barricades and provide neutral and impartial humanitarian assistance to those caught behind them.

Despite its effective response to the situation, its actions raised questions from within the National Society, from the Canadian people and from the government concerning the Canadian Red Cross's mandate and role in such circumstances. The Canadian Red Cross learned that it was important to maintain a dialogue with the government during peacetime to clarify its mandate and role and to explore the circumstances in which it would work in partnership with the public authorities and those in which it would work more independently. It also learned that it needed to ensure that its own staff, as well as its volunteers, including members of the National Society's governance, understood the particular role it could play in this type of situation.

Canadian Red Cross Society, adapted from a video interview, 2012[4]

Root causes

The underlying reasons for resorting to violence in a given context can be numerous, diverse and complex and may relate to power, politics and/or access to resources, including financial, natural and land. They may have additional dimensions such as ethnicity or religion.

Understanding the history and root causes as well as the methods, weaponry and geographical implications is important as those factors influence the entire operational environment. In particular, they will determine which populations are the most vulnerable, their assistance and protection needs, and how the National Society responds. Gaining this understanding will form a key part of a context and risk assessment (see online Practical Advice section "Context and risk assessment").

Gatekeepers

The presence of gatekeepers, including armed actors, may contribute to an overall environment of insecurity and restricted access, which is the most significant factor requiring substantial adjustment on the part of a National Society responding in sensitive and insecure contexts. Armed actors may have differing goals or reasons for fighting, as well as methods and weaponry, and may at times intentionally restrict access.

National Societies must negotiate access from all gatekeepers, giving due care to context sensitivities and legislation which may prevent contact. This is often an extremely sensitive and risky task for the National Society to undertake and many have consequently found it useful to work in close cooperation with the ICRC.

[4] For more information on this situation, see http://westcoastnativenews.com/oka-1990/.

National Societies may have to deal with a number of different groups, often armed and with varying allegiances. It may be extremely difficult to identify and establish contact with the often evolving leadership of such groups.

Access may be eased if the National Society has earned acceptance through the consistent delivery of relevant humanitarian services in accordance with the Fundamental Principles and through regular communication which builds trust and respect.

Armed actors need to be convinced that the presence of the National Society and its actions will not negatively influence their aims and aspirations. In fact, quite often, armed or political groups seek to obtain support for their goals through humanitarian action. In such cases, it is essential to be aware of that possibility and to factor it into operational decision-making to avoid unintentionally giving one side or other an advantage and thus compromising perceptions of neutrality and impartiality.

📖 **Non-State actors** can include opposition or pro-government groups, demonstrators, insurgents, territorial gangs, communal groups, criminal groups or private military and security companies. They may or may not be armed.

Proliferation of non-State actors 📖

A particular challenge in sensitive and insecure contexts today is the increase in the number of different groups, often armed and with varying allegiances. Those groups are not easily identifiable and may frequently change their composition, alliances and location. Their motivations are diverse and may be vague. They may include a criminal dimension, which poses additional problems and risks. In many situations the lines between insurgents, warlords, paramilitary forces, militias, gangs, drug traffickers and criminals may be blurred.

> "The National Society needs to have more contact with the authorities and other influential stakeholders in peacetime, so as to raise awareness and improve its access in times of future crisis."
>
> Our Selected Experience: Red Cross Society of Côte d'Ivoire

It is extremely difficult to keep on top of a rapidly changing context and to identify and establish contact with the often evolving leadership of such groups in order to advocate on behalf of the humanitarian needs of affected people and communities and to negotiate safer humanitarian access. The task can be made even more difficult by anti-terrorist legislation which may criminalize all those, including humanitarian organizations, who make contact with opposition groups. In such circumstances, National Societies have found it useful to work in close coordination with the ICRC in this area.

The human dimension

People generally rally together immediately after a major natural disaster. Neighbours and community members are normally first on the scene to carry out search and rescue and to assist one another. In contexts where armed violence is prevalent, that is less frequently the case. Violence is perpetrated by humans against other humans and is intentional and targeted, although unintended "collateral" damage can also occur.

Armed conflicts or internal disturbances or tensions can pit a government against its citizens, neighbours against neighbours or even family members against each other. Torture and rape and other forms of brutality and intimidation are often used to instil fear or to take control while making people feel powerless.

Families and communities can be torn apart by this violence and its consequences and may find themselves either by chance or by choice on "opposite sides." Being separated from one's family and community erodes normal coping systems and disrupts formal and informal support structures, leaving people isolated and more vulnerable.

Just as a natural disaster may directly affect the National Society and its staff and volunteers, so too can the factors present in sensitive and insecure contexts – but in a different way. At times a National Society's unity can be challenged by the often divisive events, and special initiatives will need to be taken to minimize the risk of fracturing due to context-specific pressures. Individuals – including those working or volunteering for the National Society – whose ethnicity, social class, religion or political affiliation are associated with the causes driving the violence are constantly at risk.

Individuals – including those working or volunteering for the National Society – whose ethnicity, social class, religion and political affiliation are associated with the causes driving the violence are constantly at risk.

Staff and volunteers may find it extremely difficult not to be drawn into the situation emotionally or otherwise. For instance, they may experience feelings of shock, betrayal, anger or fear or they, along with their families and friends, may be directly targeted or affected by the violence. This may put them at significant risk or lead to them becoming displaced or even refugees, also preventing them from safely joining in the National Society's response efforts. Their emotions can also cause extreme stress and affect their judgement and behaviour. This can be mitigated through specific measures taken by the individuals and by the National Society.

> "Working under fire and responding to major incidents of violence requires not only looking after the physical well-being of the staff and volunteers but also their emotional well-being. This is done through specific exercises incorporated into overall training programmes, as well as systematic debriefing and follow-up after an incident."
>
> Our Selected Experience: Magen David Adom

These factors highlight the advantages of a National Society and its people being perceived, already in peacetime, as neutral, impartial and independent and as providing relevant quality humanitarian services. Significant benefits are also to be derived from the National Society and its staff and volunteers being an actual part of the community they serve. Having staff and volunteers who either live within the communities or are from them may enhance the National Society's level of acceptance by gatekeepers, which in turn will increase its ability to respond to the needs of people and communities safely. Conversely, in certain circumstances, this may also elevate their personal risk, highlighting the importance of carefully managing their deployments in order to mitigate the risks they may face.

All key stakeholders must be acquainted with the National Society's mandate, working methods and possible roles, as well as its commitment to work at all times in conformity with the Fundamental Principles (see Part Three, Section III). While this does not guarantee security and access, as other factors outside the National Society's control may come into play, experience has shown that it can go a long way to reducing risk.

Table 3 highlights some of the possible characteristics and challenges of sensitive and insecure contexts, including some of those discussed above, and gives a rundown of some typical National Society responses in such contexts.

TABLE 3: CHARACTERISTICS AND CHALLENGES OF WORKING IN SENSITIVE AND INSECURE CONTEXTS

Context	▶ The presence of armed actors – humans fighting humans – results in intentional physical and psychological harm, restricted access to people in need and a high degree of insecurity, with its associated emotional impact (denial, suspicion, fear and panic). ▶ The government, to which the National Society is auxiliary in the humanitarian field, can be an active participant, posing a challenge to the National Society's ability to maintain its real and perceived neutrality and to deliver its services impartially and independently. ▶ The context is in a perpetual state of change, full of unpredictable events and risk, resulting in increased and changing needs and response requirements. ▶ The people/groups creating the needs can also become gatekeepers who control the operational environment and many of the access restrictions and risks facing the National Society. ▶ Stakeholders and gatekeepers, including armed actors and demonstrators, present security risks for the affected people and security risks for the personnel and assets of humanitarian organizations.
Needs	▶ Divisive factors within and between families and communities often become more pronounced, fuelling suspicions and eroding access to informal and formal support networks, thus increasing vulnerability. ▶ In addition to the customary categories of "most" vulnerable people (elderly, disabled, children, women), those who are vulnerable in sensitive and insecure contexts include individuals who may be targeted because of their links with the origins of the context. These might include factors such as ethnicity, political affiliation, economic status, social class, and clan or religious affiliations and often include groups such as young men of fighting age. ▶ Sensitive and insecure contexts often result in people moving beyond the border of their country of origin for protection. ▶ The need for protection is increased among people who are not or no longer taking part in the fighting. ▶ Rape and torture often become physiological and psychological weapons. ▶ As the violence escalates and becomes protracted, the availability of public social services and of life-preserving resources and the presence of other humanitarian actors diminish, while humanitarian needs increase. This may place significant additional pressure on the National Society and its Movement partners to expand their ability to provide assistance and protection for more people in an increasingly challenging security environment fraught with risks.
Response[5]	▶ There is a heightened need to consider protection of the people and communities assisted. ▶ Divisive factors can affect the unity of the National Society and the security of staff and volunteers. ▶ Assistance must be delivered using a context-sensitive "do no harm"[6] approach and should attempt to connect communities rather than divide them unintentionally, while building on existing self-protection and assistance mechanisms. ▶ The context analysis is combined with an evolving "conflict" analysis, which means identifying all actors involved in the situation, their ambitions, the underlying causes of their tension and disagreements and their locations and methods of fighting.

[5] The actions under this heading are elaborated in the Safer Access Framework chart (see Part Three, Section II).

[6] Mary Anderson's "do no harm" approach focuses on the premise that when aid agencies provide assistance in sensitive and insecure contexts, special attention should be given to reducing or eliminating the possibility of this aid contributing towards the tension and violence, and an attempt should be made to build on community connectors. Mary B. Anderson, *"Do no harm," How aid can support peace – or war,* Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 1999.

- Contact with all stakeholders is required in order to arrange access and to provide information for operational security risk management and decision-making. In view of the extremely sensitive and risky nature of this task and the need to tightly coordinate this work, many National Societies have found it useful to work in close collaboration with the ICRC.
- The National Societies will need to take various positioning or active acceptance measures in order to increase safe access to the affected populations. Ideally, the measures that take time have been initiated prior to the event.
- Owing to the challenge of maintaining the reality and perception of operating neutrally, impartially and independently, entering into relationships or partnerships, taking on certain roles or participating within some coordination mechanisms may become problematic. A certain distancing from other actors may be required while still ensuring coordination.
- If the public authorities – to which the National Society is auxiliary in the humanitarian field – are taking part in the "conflict," the National Society must strengthen its ability to provide humanitarian assistance and protection independently and transparently, demonstrating neutrality and impartiality at all times. This may mean re-examining its proximity to the government-controlled coordination mechanisms and modifying the role it might normally play.
- Acceptance must be earned and access negotiated, which affects the way humanitarian services are delivered and perhaps by whom.
- National Society personnel may be understandably deeply affected by the consequences of the conflict, causing them to react emotionally, which may have implications for their security and access and the need for stress-management support. They or their families may also be physically affected, compromising their ability to be actively engaged in response efforts.
- The organization's acceptance may be influenced by the fact that staff and volunteers may portray multiple identities (both perceived and self-identifed) and affiliations (ethnic, political, economic, class, clan or religious), which can compromise their acceptance and security or add to it. This factor must be managed carefully.
- Although the Fundamental Principles are important to all National Societies at all times, they become indispensable as an operational guide to thought processes, communication, decision-making and actions.
- The purpose of external communication in sensitive and insecure contexts is to ensure the assistance and protection of those affected by the events, safeguard the National Society's staff and volunteers and position the National Society for acceptance by key stakeholders. All communication in a "conflict" is extremely sensitive and can be easily misconstrued and it is for this reason that at times it can be extremely low key, while at other times strong messages need to be communicated.
- Operational security risk management is important for National Societies at all times. However, an intensified and specialized approach is necessary in sensitive and insecure contexts as it can mean the difference between life and death for those the National Society is assisting and for its staff and volunteers.
- Balancing the humanitarian imperative to respond with the duty of care to manage the security of staff and volunteers is a constant challenge for National Society leadership. It can be partially met through strengthening operational security risk management practices.

KEY POINTS

- Contexts in which violence or the threat of violence is present pose specific challenges for National Societies, particularly in terms of its security and access.
- Each context, regardless of how it is characterized or defined, is distinct and must be analysed thoroughly and responded to appropriately.
- A National Society's response in sensitive and insecure contexts differs in many respects from its response in natural disasters, requiring it to adapt its usual preparedness and operational practices in order to increase its safe access to affected people and communities.
- The presence of gatekeepers, including armed actors, and their reasons for and methods of fighting have a major influence on the entire operational environment, the most vulnerable people and communities and their humanitarian needs, and on how the National Society responds.

II. THE MANDATE AND ROLES OF NATIONAL SOCIETIES

This section looks at the legal and regulatory bases for the mandate and roles of National Societies in armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions and how they have evolved over time to include a much broader range of situations in which a National Society may be called upon to respond.

From Solferino to the present

The roots of the mandate of National Societies to respond in armed conflict can be traced back to the Movement's founding by Henry Dunant and to his proposal, formulated in the aftermath of his experiences during the Battle of Solferino in 1859, that voluntary aid societies be established in every country for the purpose of providing care for the wounded and sick in wartime.

The earliest defined role of National Societies was as auxiliaries to the medical services of their national armed forces during international armed conflict, an idea first put forward by Henry Dunant in 1863 and today enshrined in the First Geneva Convention of 1949.

In Henri Dunant's vision, as described in his book "A Memory of Solferino,"[7] the voluntary aid societies would remain inactive in peacetime but would be organized and prepared to provide assistance during armed conflict whenever needed. They would not only have to secure the goodwill of the authorities of the countries in which they had been formed, but also to be able to work effectively during armed conflicts, to solicit their authorization and facilities. This created the premise for a National Society's auxiliary role to national armed forces' medical services during international armed conflict, which was later formalized in the 1906 Geneva Convention.

The mandate and roles of National Societies have evolved considerably over time. Today, they cover a wide range of tasks and responsibilities in all situations requiring a humanitarian response, from sensitive and insecure contexts, including armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions, to natural and technological disasters.

Legal and statutory bases

While the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977 confer on the ICRC the specific mandate to act in situations of armed conflict, more than 40 articles of those same Conventions and Protocols make reference to the roles of National Societies in providing humanitarian assistance for people and communities affected by armed conflict.

The first formal reference to the humanitarian roles of National Societies in internal disturbances and tensions can be found in Resolution XIV adopted by the 10th International Conference in 1921, which affirmed their right and duty to afford relief not only in case of civil war but also "in social and revolutionary disturbances."[8]

[7] Henry Dunant, *A Memory of Solferino*, ICRC, Geneva, 1986, http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/publication/p0361.htm.

[8] 10th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, 1921, Resolution XIV General Principles, Articles 1–3.

The Movement's international bodies

The **International Committee of the Red Cross** (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance.

The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles.

Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

The **International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies** is the world's largest volunteer-based humanitarian network, reaching 150 million people each year through its 189 member National Societies. It acts before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. it does so with impartiality as to nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs, class and political opinions.

Furthermore, according to the Movement's Statutes, National Societies enjoy a mandate and operational role to:

> "organize, in liaison with the public authorities, emergency relief operations and other services to assist the victims of armed conflicts as provided in the Geneva Conventions, and the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies for whom help is needed."[9]

Today, the list of legal provisions and regulatory frameworks[10] pertaining to the mandate and roles of a National Society in armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions is extensive. It expands the scope of a National Society's responsibilities beyond that originally foreseen nearly a century and a half ago at a time when international conflicts prevailed and when National Societies were being established and their status and mandates defined.

These extended roles reflect the commitment of National Societies to serve and contribute to the Movement's mission to "prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found, to protect life and health, and ensure respect for the human being, in particular in times of armed conflict and other emergencies."[11]

While the State and its public authorities retain at all times the primary responsibility of providing assistance for vulnerable people and communities in their national territories,[12] a National Society's activities stem from its mandate – set forth in the previously mentioned provisions of international humanitarian law and found in the Movement's statutory and regulatory framework – to organize emergency relief operations "in liaison with the public authorities" for all those "for whom help is needed."

In addition, these various instruments commit National Societies to strengthen their ability and capacities to respond effectively in armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions and to undertake the necessary preparatory and positioning measures in peacetime.[13] To this end, National Societies engage with the concerned public authorities in order to ensure that the national legislation, policies and agreements required to enable them to provide effective assistance and protection in sensitive and insecure contexts are in place. A National Society also ensures that its own statutory instruments adequately reflect its mandate and roles in those situations as defined in the Statutes of the Movement and in other rules and policies adopted by the Movement's statutory meetings.[14]

Article 4 of the Statutes of the Movement, which describes the conditions for recognition of a National Society, also requires a National Society "[to be] so organized as to be able to fulfil the tasks defined in its own statutes, including

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[9] *Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*, Article 3(2). It is understood that the term "emergencies" as used in this context includes internal disturbances and tensions.

[10] When used in this document, the term "legal provisions" refers to international law and domestic legislation, while "regulatory framework" refers to resolutions of the Movement's statutory meetings, which may contain decisions, rules, policies or guidance.

[11] *Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement*, Preamble.

[12] The primary responsibility of States and their public authorities to provide humanitarian assistance for vulnerable people on their respective territories and the *supplementary role of National Societies* in the exercise of their auxiliary role in the humanitarian field was reaffirmed in operative paragraph 1 of Resolution 2 adopted by the 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 2007.

[13] Guidance on these activities is given in the Safer Access Framework (SAF). Numerous other International Federation tools and products such as the Well-Prepared National Society checklist provide disaster preparedness for response guidance.

[14] See in particular Decisions 4 and 5 of Resolution 7 of the 2011 Council of Delegates, which encourage National Societies to further define their mandates, roles and responsibilities in armed conflict and other situations of violence within their statutory and legal base instruments and invites the ICRC and the International Federation to work closely with, and to advise, National Societies in this respect.

the preparation in peace time for its statutory tasks in case of armed conflict" (Condition 6).

The statutory and regulatory framework adopted within the Movement is clear in providing for a shared commitment of Movement components to support the development of National Societies' response capacities in armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions.[15]

IN FOCUS: WHEN ASSISTANCE AND PROTECTION ARE NEEDED

Assistance

The assistance activities of a National Society can be as broad ranging as the humanitarian needs of the affected people and communities. Meeting those needs will therefore remain dependent on the Society's respective capacities, its negotiated role within its country, and the capacities and roles of others. Activities can include the provision of emergency food and shelter, water and sanitation, first aid and medical services, clothing, personal services that meet needs specific to the beneficiary or situation, and the management of human remains and family messages (also linked to protection activities).

Humanitarian assistance for vulnerable people and communities is primarily the duty of the State or other relevant authorities, such as a party to a conflict that controls or occupies a territory. Such authorities hold formal, legal responsibility for the welfare of people within their territory or control and, more generally, for the security of civilians in armed conflict. The key role of humanitarian organizations, including National Societies, is to encourage and persuade such authorities to assume their responsibilities towards the affected populations, and to step in to assist and protect those populations when the authorities and others are unable – or unwilling – to do so.

Protection

While the broad range of possible activities under the heading of "assistance" and how to carry them out is often clear to National Societies and represents a more traditional field of their engagement, their role in the protection of affected people and communities may be less distinctly perceived. The ICRC publication entitled "Professional Standards for Protection Work" provides helpful guidance, and defines protection as encompassing:

> "all activities aimed at ensuring full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of the relevant bodies of law, i.e. human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law. Human rights and humanitarian organizations must conduct these activities in an impartial manner (not on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, language or gender)."[16]

The Sphere Project, a voluntary initiative bringing together a number of different agencies around a common aim of improving the quality of humanitarian assistance and accountability, highlights four basic "Protection Principles" that should inform all humanitarian action.[17]

Carrying out protection activities for affected people and communities is a sensitive task and requires expertise. Therefore, National Societies must consider appropriate training of their personnel and support this work with suitable organizational systems. Further information on the role of National Societies in the area of protection and how they might carry out this role in tandem with their assistance activities is highlighted in the online Practical Advice section "Legal and policy base." The ICRC can advise National Societies wishing to explore ways to increase their effectiveness in this area. Owing to the sensitivities involved, a coordinated Movement approach is highly recommended.

[15] Pursuant to Article 5(4)(a) of the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the role of the ICRC is "to cooperate [with National Societies] in matters of common concern, such as their preparation for action in times of armed conflict." This complements the primary responsibilities of National Societies (under Article 4(3)(2)) and of the International Federation to contribute to the development of National Societies.

[16] ICRC, *Professional Standards for Protection Work carried out by humanitarian and human rights actors in armed conflict and other situations of violence*, Second edition, 2013, http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/publication/p0999.htm.

[17] The Sphere Project, *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response*, 2011 Edition, pp. 29–47, www.sphereproject.org.

The National Society's auxiliary relationship to the public authorities in the humanitarian field

One of the most challenging and often confusing issues for a National Society is to determine how it can fulfil its "auxiliary role to the public authorities in the humanitarian field" while carrying out its humanitarian mandate to provide independent, neutral and impartial assistance and protection for all those in need.

This challenge is heightened when the State is involved in a non-international armed conflict or in a law enforcement operation during internal disturbances or tensions. Being auxiliary to the public authorities in such cases appears at first glance to be incompatible or irreconcilable with the absolute requirement that a National Society be at all times able to act, and be perceived to act, in compliance with the Fundamental Principles, in particular independence, impartiality and neutrality.

To help resolve this challenge, the specific areas in which a National Society acts as an auxiliary to its public authorities in the humanitarian field need to be clarified together with the State and the right balance struck between the auxiliary role and the duty of the Society to preserve its autonomy of action and decision-making in all circumstances, and in particular in sensitive and insecure contexts.[18] If not, during non-international armed conflict or internal disturbances or tensions, if the State is involved, a National Society and its staff and volunteers may run the risk of being associated with the State, thus compromising the National Society's image as neutral, impartial and independent and jeopardizing its acceptance, security and access to those in need.

There is considerable value for public authorities in allowing a neutral, independent and impartial organization such as the National Society to act and operate in sensitive and insecure contexts occurring on the national territory. This is especially the case in situations of armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions, in which the State may no longer have access to certain people and communities affected by the violence in order to carry out its primary responsibility to assist and protect its population.

One such example is in Lebanon, where several years ago the government acknowledged that the Lebanese Red Cross emergency medical services was the only public service that could cross confessional lines freely in order to provide universal services throughout the country. This was largely because of its operational capacity and its high degree of acceptance among the 18 confessional groups (see the following "In Focus" box).

[18] See in particular operative paragraph 2 of Resolution 2 of the 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent 2007, which defines the auxiliary relationship between public authorities and National Societies.

IN FOCUS: ACCESSING ALL AREAS IN LEBANON

Representatives of the Lebanese Armed Forces, the Civil Defence and the Ministry of Health all reported the importance of having an independent, neutral humanitarian actor that could provide services for people residing in all areas and communities. Given this high level of coordination and the need for trust, it is important for the Lebanese Red Cross to retain autonomy over operational decision-making and to maintain an organizational distance from all stakeholders, both in reality and perception. Examples of this approach in action include: challenging a government request to open a station in a particular location; safeguarding perceptions of neutrality by refusing to be on standby for the Civil Defence during demonstrations, preferring to be on call for specific emergencies through the national hotline; and transferring patients to treatment locations where it was believed that they would feel safe instead of following advice from the authorities to deliver them to an alternative location.

Safer Access in Action Case Study: Lebanon

The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief states:

> "If NGHAs [non-governmental humanitarian agencies] are to act in full compliance with their humanitarian principles, they should be granted rapid and impartial access to disaster victims, for the purpose of delivering humanitarian assistance. It is the duty of the host government, as part of the exercising of sovereign responsibility, not to block such assistance, and to accept the impartial and apolitical action of NGHAs."[19]

Guiding questions

Given the specific context, will the National Society's reputation as being neutral, impartial and independent from the State be compromised, limiting its access to those in need or jeopardizing the security of staff and volunteers, if:

- it participates in a particular government coordination mechanism or takes on a leadership role to coordinate others whose approach may not conform to the Fundamental Principles (as may be the norm in the case of a natural disaster)?
- it agrees to a specific request by the government to perform a particular task or to provide assistance for a particular group if such a role is not deemed to be in conformity with the National Society's general objectives as defined in its statutory or legal base instruments or with the Fundamental Principles or if it is beyond its capacity to do so?
- its sole or major funding source is the government?
- its governance or management structures at national, regional or local level include representatives of public authorities, or if a number of seats are reserved on such bodies to represent governmental departments and if the total number of such public officers would be likely to constitute a controlling majority or minority?
- a member of its senior governance and management bodies at national, regional or local level occupies, obtains or is elected to a high-ranking position in the public service or of a political party or a religious organization, which would be liable to create or to give rise to a conflict of interest?

[19] *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*, developed by the International Federation and the ICRC in 1994, Annex I, "Recommendations to the governments of disaster affected countries," http://www.ifrc.org/en/publications-and-reports/code-of-conduct/

IN FOCUS: THE NATIONAL SOCIETY'S AUXILIARY ROLE IN A NUTSHELL

National Societies first and foremost carry out their humanitarian activities on their own initiative and on the basis of international humanitarian law, the Movement's statutory and regulatory framework, national legislation and their own statutes.

National Societies also undertake certain roles and activities either to supplement or to substitute the humanitarian work of the public authorities. A National Society is then said to act as an auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field.[20]

Even when a National Society acts in this capacity, it must continue to uphold the Fundamental Principles, including those of independence, neutrality and impartiality, and must at all times maintain its autonomy and remain clearly distinguishable from military and other governmental bodies.[21]

The National Society has a duty to give careful consideration to the requests of the State to support or substitute its humanitarian work and to respond favourably as far as possible. However, it is entitled to decline the request from the State should this be determined to undermine the ability of the National Society to adhere at all times to the Fundamental Principles, to maintain its independence, neutrality and impartiality or to fulfil its statutory and regulatory commitments towards other components of the Movement.

The National Society's auxiliary role "in the humanitarian field" could, if defined too generally, place the Society at risk of being called upon to act outside of its humanitarian purpose and roles.

No matter what the circumstances, a National Society as a humanitarian organization is never subordinated to its public authorities: its auxiliary role never transforms a National Society into an organ of the State.

KEY POINTS

- The body of existing norms clearly provides that National Societies enjoy not only the right but also the duty to engage in and to develop humanitarian activities in situations of international or non-international armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions.
- Over time, the scope of a National Society's mandate and roles has expanded to include all situations requiring a humanitarian response to unmet needs.
- There is considerable value for public authorities in allowing a neutral organization such as the National Society to act independently and impartially in sensitive and insecure contexts. This is particularly relevant where public authorities no longer have access to certain people and communities affected by violence and insecurity.
- The specific areas in which a National Society acts as an auxiliary to its public authorities in the humanitarian field need to be clarified together with the State and a balance struck between the auxiliary status and the need for a National Society to preserve its independence and autonomy at all times.

[20] Such a role is foreseen in Article 3(1) of the Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which states that "the National Societies support the public authorities in their humanitarian tasks, according to the needs of the people of their respective countries." The auxiliary role of National Societies in the humanitarian field has been further detailed in successive resolutions adopted by the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

[21] Reference should be made in this context to the particular situation in which a National Society acts as an auxiliary to the medical services of its armed forces in accordance with Article 26 of the First Geneva Convention. While this may be considered a clear-cut case of subordination of the National Society, it should be kept in mind that it is only the personnel of the National Society placed at the disposal of the armed forces medical services who are subject to military laws and regulations and not the National Society itself.

PART THREE

THE SPECIFICS

I. THE CYCLE UNDERPINNING THE SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK

This section explains how perception, acceptance and appropriate management of operational security risks are crucial to safer access. It also highlights how certain actions taken in peacetime and the delivery of relevant quality humanitarian services at all times in accordance with the Fundamental Principles contribute to greater and safer access in times of crisis.

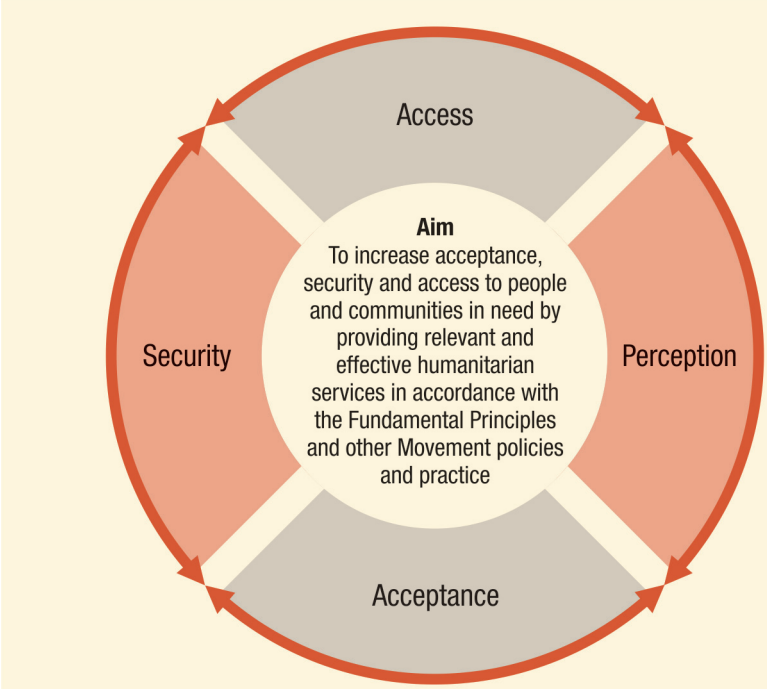
Achieving safer access can be seen as a perpetual cycle. When access already exists or is allowed, the delivery of effective and relevant community-based humanitarian services, carried out in accordance with the Fundamental Principles and other relevant Movement policies, will influence perceptions of the National Society and help build strong relationships with community members. These will in turn increase the National Society's acceptance by the community, gatekeepers and other stakeholders and ultimately its security and further access, especially in contexts where insecurity is heightened and access may be restricted (see Figure 3).

The importance of managing perceptions and acceptance by stakeholders is especially apparent at the outbreak of hostilities when escalating tensions heighten insecurity and may create barriers to access.

Managing perceptions and acceptance is a permanent task of a National Society and the actions and measures set out in the Safer Access Framework (SAF) are designed to support National Societies in doing so. Many of those actions and measures are best taken in advance of a response, but even in the midst of an operation, misunderstandings may arise that may compromise access and put staff and volunteers at risk. At that point, some of the recommended actions and measures can still be taken to address short-term and immediate issues and, indeed, become highly relevant. If the misunderstanding is resolved, the National Society may be able to continue its work. If not, operational decisions may need to be revisited in the best interests of the staff and volunteers and of the affected people or communities.

The outbreak of hostilities is often a moment when National Societies understand with clarity their level of acceptance and security as heightened tensions may mean that what were previously relatively minor challenges become more significant difficulties or barriers. It is essential that National Societies do not ignore these issues when they arise; swift and effective action can make the difference between access and obstruction, both in the immediate and in the future.

FIGURE 3: THE SAFER ACCESS CYCLE



Access

Access is both the starting point and the end result of the actions and measures proposed in the SAF. When National Society staff and volunteers are already working – or in some cases living – within communities during relatively peaceful times, they will have already built relationships of trust and acceptance and a positive perception of their humanitarian mandate and roles, especially if relevant and effective services are carried out in conformity with the Fundamental Principles and other Movement policies. However, because of the particular characteristics of sensitive and insecure contexts, additional actions and measures may need to be taken to strengthen perception, acceptance and security if a National Society is to increase its access to affected people and communities in those contexts.

Guiding questions

- Is the National Society already widely known for the provision of relevant neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian activities?
- Is the National Society present throughout the territory and able to access all people and communities through its staff and volunteers?

Perception

The way in which an organization and its personnel are perceived by key stakeholders, particularly those controlling or influencing security and access to affected people and communities (gatekeepers), has a direct impact on its acceptance by those same stakeholders and therefore on its ability to deliver humanitarian assistance safely.

Perceptions can be accurate – based on an actual occurrence – or they can be inaccurate – based on assumptions, rumours or misinformation. Whatever

the case, where negative perceptions appear to block access to those in need or affect the security of staff and volunteers, timely action must be taken to address the problem. Key stakeholders' perceptions of the organization and its people must be known by the National Society and not merely assumed (see the 'In focus' box below).

Where negative perceptions appear to block the National Society's access to those in need or affect the security of its staff and volunteers, timely corrective action must be taken.

It should be kept in mind that the Movement's shared visual identity and other reputational factors may mean that the actions or statements of one component will have an impact – be it positive or negative – on stakeholders' perceptions of the others, including the National Society.

Guiding questions

- Does the National Society have mechanisms in place to continually gauge how key stakeholders, including gatekeepers, perceive it and its staff and volunteers in relation to neutrality, impartiality and independence and how its services are valued?
- Does the National Society have a systematic approach, and the tools and procedures in place, to clarify perception issues and to address misperceptions or adjust its programming or the behaviour of its staff and volunteers as required in a timely way?

IN FOCUS: PROMOTING POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS IN NEPAL

The Nepal Red Cross Society has established a mechanism called "perception round-tables." Whenever it experiences difficulties within a community, or its access or security is compromised, the National Society, often in conjunction with the ICRC, invites key stakeholders and community representatives to a round-table discussion, where problems and concerns can be aired and responded to. These events are also an opportunity for the National Society to enhance the participants' awareness of its mandate, activities and way of working, particularly in relation to its need to work in accordance with the Fundamental Principles.

Sometimes the problem is just a misperception that can be cleared up immediately, while at other times some action is needed by the National Society to address the concerns. If that is the case, the National Society will go back to the stakeholders or community members to inform them what actions have been taken and to continue the trust-building dialogue. All efforts are made to keep communication channels open.

Acceptance

In an operational environment that is restricted and controlled by armed actors or other gatekeepers, it is vital for a humanitarian organization to have the acceptance of those stakeholders, as well as of the community it aims to serve. It is therefore beneficial if a National Society:

- already has extensive pre-existing relationships of trust, transparency and mutual respect with the community and all other stakeholders, is known to be reliable in its provision of relevant services and is accountable to the people and communities it serves throughout the country;

Planning ahead

Positioning or active acceptance measures must be taken at all times and not just in the midst of a crisis because they are mainly based on relationships or reputation and require time and consistent effort to achieve. They include:

- ensuring that humanitarian actions are relevant to the needs of the affected people and communities and are carried out in a way that does not increase tensions and insecurity (context-sensitive programming) or risk to the affected people;
- tightening up emblem and logo use and increasing protection and promotion, thereby strengthening the National Society's unique identity;
- engaging in dialogue with national and local authorities, armed actors where possible, and other key stakeholders to promote the mandate and roles of the National Society, stressing the importance of it being able to act in conformity with the Fundamental Principles at all times;
- managing human resources, including volunteers, in a way that ensures that they represent the values of the National Society and respect the Fundamental Principles and preserve its reputation as a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian organization;
- reinforcing respect for the Movement's agreed rules and policy framework and the application of the Fundamental Principles to ensure that they guide thought processes, communication, decision-making and actions.

- provides its services in a way that is context-sensitive and builds on existing community strengths and priorities;
- is already perceived as neutral, impartial and independent, adhering at all times to the Fundamental Principles and other Movement policies, whether working alone or in partnership with others;
- is engaged in dissemination and/or communication activities among key stakeholders and within the community in order to explain its roles and working methods, as well as to spread knowledge of the importance of its application of the Fundamental Principles and the proper use of the emblems;
- takes active trust and acceptance-building measures during its response in sensitive and insecure contexts to address and further increase positive perceptions of itself as an organization and of its people.

Generally, the more active and attentive the National Society is in its efforts to gain acceptance and the greater its capacity to contact, communicate and negotiate with all gatekeepers, the better its security and access will be.

However, liaising with demonstrators or opposition group leaders can be an extremely sensitive undertaking for National Societies and may be viewed with suspicion. Some States have enacted legislation banning contact with entities designated as "terrorist," making it difficult for humanitarian actors to negotiate access to affected people and communities.

In some highly violent or volatile contexts, active acceptance measures have their limits. Therefore, such measures must *at all times* be complemented by sound operational security risk management practices (see the online Practical Advice section "Operational security risk management").

When armed conflict or other crises erupt even the most positive perceptions can change as new factors come into play (see Table 3). Therefore, active acceptance efforts should be a permanent activity of a National Society, as it may need to build or rebuild trust with the community or with gatekeepers in such circumstances.

Guiding questions

- Do community members and leaders and other stakeholders view the humanitarian programmes and services delivered by the National Society as relevant to meeting the community's needs?
- Is the National Society known, valued and viewed as impartial and able to act autonomously?
- Does the National Society have a process for screening its partners in order to maintain its impartiality, neutrality and independence?
- Does the National Society invest in building solid relationships of trust and credibility with the people and communities it serves, involving them in decision-making and in other ways throughout all phases of programme design and delivery?
- Are programmes delivered in a way that brings communities together and does not create divisions?
- Is there any domestic legislation criminalizing activities carried out in support of terrorist activities? What are/could be the consequences or impact of such legislation on the activities of the National Society?

IN FOCUS: SENDING OUT THE WRONG SIGNALS

The Movement's common mission and the effects of globalization and real-time communication mean that the news of one action or word or perceived action or word can spread in minutes, making it more important than ever to act in accordance with the Fundamental Principles, Movement Statutes and other Movement policies and to safeguard the image and reputation of each component of the Movement. Not to do so can have serious, life-threatening consequences for National Society and Movement staff and volunteers at home and around the globe and restrict their ability to reach those in need.

Perceptions and acceptance can be negatively influenced, for example, through:

- the use of a particular word or phrase that is not perceived by all as neutral or accepted language;
- personal behaviour or associations that may not be viewed by all as neutral, ethical or professional;
- the formation of relationships or external partnerships with individuals or organizations that are not viewed as neutral or impartial;
- too close an association with the State, which itself may not be perceived by all as neutral and impartial.

Security

Positive perceptions and a high degree of acceptance by stakeholders normally contribute to greater security for field teams. However, positioning or active acceptance measures are not enough on their own. A thorough and professional operational security risk management system is required to complement these measures, whereby operational risk is identified, prevented, mitigated and managed appropriately and effectively.

Possible measures include:

- informing personnel of the evolving operational risks they may face;
- routine briefing and debriefing of personnel before and after a field trip;
- instituting communication procedures between headquarters and field teams and ensuring contact is maintained in insecure situations;
- adequate training, mentoring, guidance and protection for personnel, including in personal preparedness, use of the Fundamental Principles as an operational tool to guide communication, decisions and actions, context/conflict-sensitive programming practices, safety and security measures, emergency first aid, management of human remains (as necessary), operational communication and proper use of the emblem/logo;
- providing personnel with psychological support and advice on how to manage stress;
- ensuring staff and volunteers have adequate insurance coverage that will compensate them or their families in the event of injury, whether physical or psychological, disability or death occurring in the course of their duties.

> "It is important for our volunteers and staff to understand the importance of the Fundamental Principles and their applicability in the Canadian context but also their impact on the entire Movement. An action in Canada can have a ripple affect across the Movement and vice versa."
>
> Louise Geoffrion, Deputy Director Disaster Management, Canadian Red Cross

Balancing the humanitarian imperative to respond to needs with the duty to protect the security and well-being of staff and volunteers is a constant challenge for management. While every effort can be made to ensure the highest degree of security, there is no such thing as zero risk. Nonetheless, the better the security risk management practices the broader access is likely to be and the greater the protection of personnel and of the people and communities they serve. For more in-depth support, see the online Practical Advice section "Operational security risk management".

"Magen David Adom has taken the stand that in order to save others' lives, our staff and volunteers will take the risk of entering the site of an explosion in order to rescue victims (according to parameters set with bomb disposal experts), even when the site has not yet been declared 'safe.' ... We have adopted this approach because the lengthy time it takes to declare a large site of an explosion 'safe' may mean the loss of lives that could have been saved if they had been evacuated sooner. This ethical decision is being put into practice with every single incident involving indiscriminate acts of violence or terror to which we respond."

Our Selected Experience: Magen David Adom

Guiding questions

- Do the people, communities, key stakeholders and gatekeepers in the areas where the people are most in need have a positive perception of the National Society and its staff and volunteers and is this demonstrated by a high degree of acceptance, access and security?
- Is the National Society able to contact key stakeholders to negotiate assurances from them for safe passage for its staff, volunteers and vehicles? Is there legislation in place that might prevent it from doing so?
- Does the National Society have a systematic and professional approach to operational security risk management (including proper identification of the National Society's staff and volunteers, facilities and transports with the Society's logo or the protective emblem) and are its people adequately trained and insured?

"The lesson that we learned in that situation [the uprising in Libya in 2011] is that we needed to have a system in place for better volunteer management. We had been dealing with volunteers in a very traditional way. Now we realize that we need to go with a proper volunteer management system — better training on the code of conduct and providing insurance, protection and security."

Interview with Muftah Etwilb, Director of International Relations, Libyan Red Crescent

KEY POINTS

- Achieving safer access to people and communities in need is the goal of a perpetual cycle that begins with the delivery of effective and relevant humanitarian services, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles and other Movement policies.

- The way in which an organization and its personnel are perceived has a direct impact on its acceptance and therefore on its ability to deliver humanitarian assistance safely.

- In sensitive and insecure contexts, fear and suspicion may adversely affect previous good relations and positive perceptions requiring specific actions and measures to rebuild trust and acceptance.

- Sound operational security risk management practices complement measures taken to improve perceptions and increase acceptance by ensuring that risks to staff, volunteers and beneficiaries are identified, mitigated and managed appropriately.

II. THE EIGHT ELEMENTS OF THE SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK

This section takes a closer look at the contents of the Safer Access Framework. It describes how its eight "elements" interconnect and how each one contributes to the overall aim of increasing acceptance, security and access. The section culminates in a comprehensive chart detailing the eight elements and their proposed actions and measures.

The Safer Access Framework (SAF) comprises eight elements, each focusing on a key area (see Table 4). Each area brings together a number of preparedness actions and positioning or active acceptance measures that have been shown to help National Societies increase their acceptance, security and access to people and communities with humanitarian needs in sensitive and insecure contexts.

TABLE 4: THE EIGHT ELEMENTS

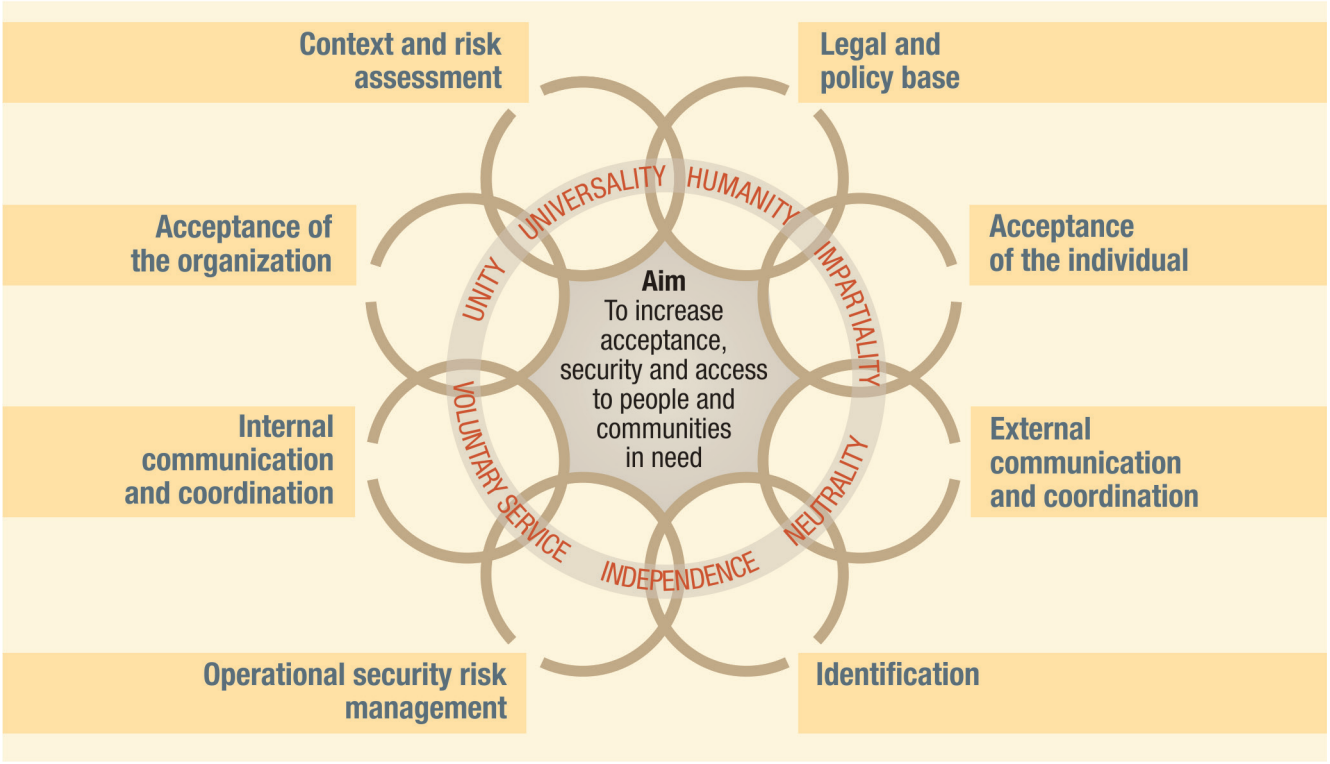
I		Context and risk assessment	V		Identification
II		Legal and policy base	VI		Internal communication and coordination
III		Acceptance of the organization	VII		External communication and coordination
IV		Acceptance of the individual	VIII		Operational security risk management

Interlinkages between the Safer Access Framework elements

Each of the eight elements of the SAF are like parts of a chain: interlinked and interdependent. Actions taken or not taken in connection with one element may therefore often have an impact on the others. A chain is only as strong as each link in it; should one link be weak or break, it would have a negative effect on the chain as a whole. (See Figure 4.)

For instance, an ongoing **context and risk assessment** process and appropriate **internal communication** systems and technology are crucial to developing an effective **operational security risk management** system. An **external communication** plan to increase **acceptance of the organization** depends on a prior understanding of how the National Society is already perceived and its existing level of acceptance. Preparing personnel to respond in a sensitive or insecure context requires, among other things, their knowing how to conduct a thorough **context and risk assessment**, being familiar with the National Society's **legal and policy base** to guide actions, and being trained in the code of conduct and security guidelines, as well as protective and other measures, all of which will enhance the **acceptance of the individual**. The elements are underpinned by the Safer Access Cycle – access, perception, acceptance and security – and grounded in the application of the Fundamental Principles, which guide thought processes, communication, decision-making and practice.

FIGURE 4: CHAIN REACTION



Relationship between the elements and the Safer Access Cycle

Each of the SAF elements has a particular relationship with one or other of the concepts of perception, acceptance, security and access (see Part Three, Section I). However, since all the SAF elements are interconnected, their relationship is not exclusive to that particular concept, as shown in Figure 5 and further explained below. It is simply that the link is stronger than to the other concepts.

Access

A National Society's **legal and policy base** is generally the starting point for access. The existence of national legislation describing its humanitarian mandate and roles to respond, including in sensitive and insecure contexts, provides an invaluable operational tool when seeking to increase access to affected people and communities. Moreover, having a clearly described legal mandate helps to secure written authorization from authorities to carry out humanitarian activities in certain restricted locations and may be the deciding factor in whether the National Society is able or unable to act.

Furthermore, respect for the National Society is enhanced by clearly defined and effective programmes and services underpinned by the National Society's legal base, delivered in a manner that involves the community and takes account of their capacities.

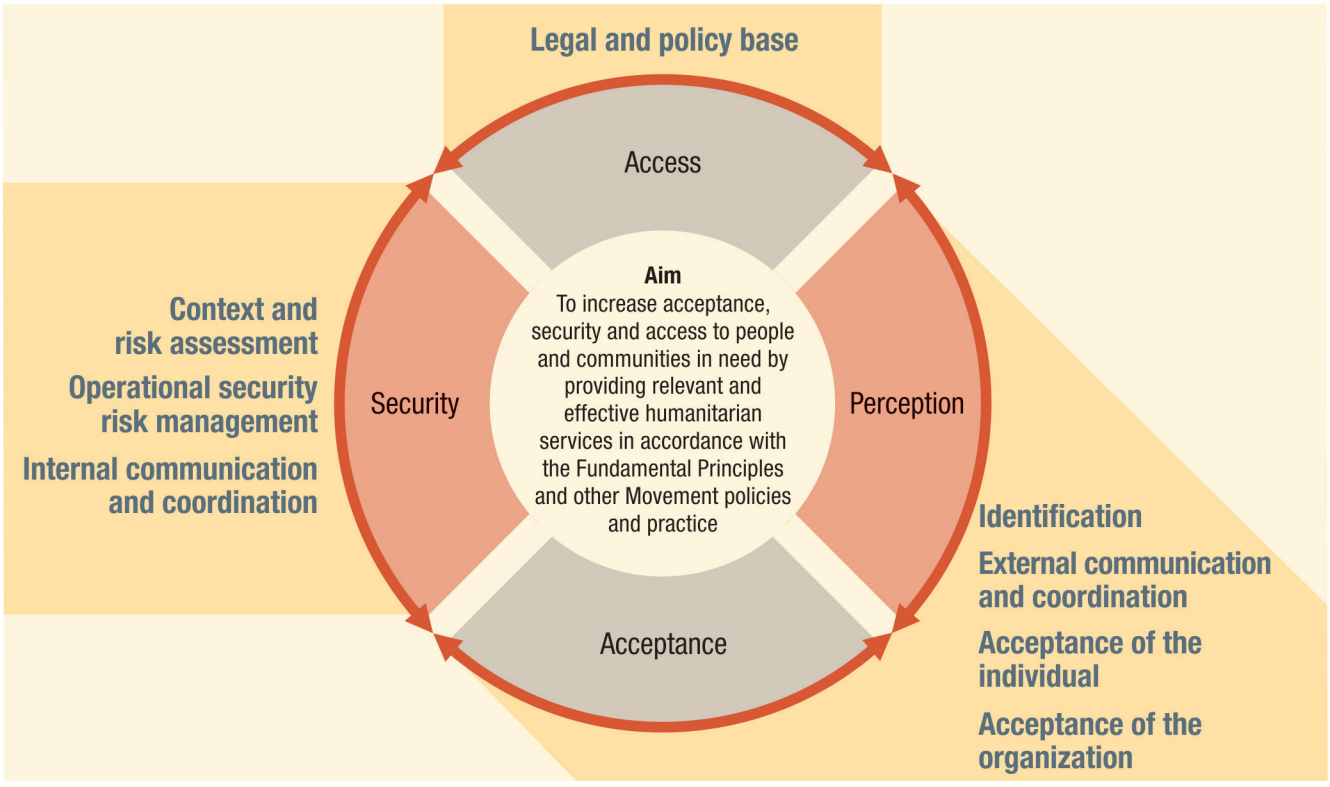
Perception and acceptance

Consistent use and display of the emblem and the National Society's own logo (**identification**) promotes better recognition of the National Society and its personnel as neutral, impartial and independent providers of humanitarian assistance and protection. This will be more readily achievable if the National Society has successfully projected that image through its **external communication** and its actions on the ground. The National Society must also take actions to support the State's responsibility to prevent and repress misuse of the emblem and logo by others, which in turn will strengthen its unique visible identity.

A sound **external communication** strategy and plan grounded in an understanding of the context and consisting of actions and key messages targeting, on the one hand, certain stakeholders and the issues important to them and, on the other hand, the wider public, influences perceptions and contributes to increased acceptance. Any such strategy and plan must be designed to promote both **acceptance of the individual** (staff and volunteers) and **acceptance of the organization** as a whole. As part of this process, tangible measures are needed to ensure that staff and volunteers and the organization as a whole conduct themselves at all times in accordance with the National Society's code of conduct, the Fundamental Principles and other Movement and National Society policies and regulations.

These actions are also linked to the desired outcome of increasing security.

FIGURE 5: HOW THE SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK ELEMENTS LINK INTO THE CYCLE



Security

The safety and security of the National Society can be greatly improved by conducting a thorough and ongoing **context and risk assessment** that informs the development, adjustment and application of a sound **operational security risk management** approach. To some extent each of the SAF elements are linked to security. However, of particular importance is the establishment of a strong two-way **internal communication and coordination** system and structure to ensure an adequate exchange of operational information and the ability to coordinate actions to increase the safety and security of people and communities and of National Society personnel.

See the SAF chart for a full list of the recommended actions and measures. Additional information and practical guidance on each of the elements is available in the online Practical Advice sections.

KEY POINTS

- The SAF proposes actions and measures that have been tried and tested by National Societies as a means of enhancing acceptance, security and access in sensitive and insecure contexts.
- The recommended actions and measures are grouped under eight "elements" (i.e. key areas) in the SAF.
- The eight elements of the SAF are interlinked and interdependent: actions taken or not taken in connection with one element may often have an impact on the others.
- The SAF is inextricably linked to the Fundamental Principles and focuses on achieving the aim of increasing acceptance, security and access to people and communities in need.
- Some actions and measures have stronger links to one or more concepts of the Safer Access Cycle, but the proposed actions and measures all contribute to the overall goal.

SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK CHART

Safer Access elements	Actions and measures
The underlying purpose of each element is to increase acceptance and security in order to increase access to those in need in sensitive and insecure contexts, including armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions.	*For each Safer Access element, areas have been identified where action may be required to address the gaps, barriers, risks and challenges to acceptance, security and access.* *If other Movement components are present in a given context, the National Society closely coordinates its preparedness and response activities with them in accordance with Movement coordination policies and other mechanisms in order to maximize the humanitarian impact and to ensure complementarity.*
I. Context and risk assessment *National Societies have a clear understanding of the interlinked political, social, cultural and economic aspects of the evolving operational environment and the inherent risks, which forms the basis for preventing and managing those risks.*	1.1 The similarities and differences between preparing for and responding in disasters and in sensitive and insecure contexts, including armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions, are understood in relation to: (1) the evolving operational environment; (2) humanitarian needs; and (3) the nature of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement response; this knowledge is used to update preparedness and response measures. 1.2 Emerging political, social, cultural and economic trends and challenges that may affect humanitarian action are explored and analysed and this knowledge is used to guide preparedness and response. 1.3 A permanently evolving context assessment is developed and maintained so as to ensure a thorough understanding of the operational context as well as of the stakeholders and the affected people and communities with their specific assistance and protection needs. *(See also VI. and VII. Internal and external communication and coordination)* 1.4 In accordance with the evolving context assessment and the National Society's legal base, an ongoing risk assessment, which includes the communities' preparedness and self-protection strategies, is conducted in order to establish a standard operational security risk management system and approach. *(See also VIII. Operational security risk management)* 1.5 The National Society's capacity and ability to manage the risks identified in sensitive and insecure contexts is assessed and developed. *(See also II. Legal and policy base and VIII. Operational security risk management)* 1.6 A contingency plan which builds on community preparedness measures and takes account of specific scenarios is developed and refined in order to enhance the rapid provision of effective assistance and protection for people and communities.
II. Legal and policy base *National Societies have sound legal and statutory instruments and develop policies that provide a basis from which to carry out their humanitarian mandate and roles in conformity with Movement policies, international humanitarian law (IHL) and domestic legislation.*	2.1 The relevant legal frameworks in which a National Society's mandate and roles are rooted and which stem from international humanitarian law (IHL), domestic legislation and the Movement's regulatory framework are known by and disseminated to the National Society's membership, staff and volunteers and guide its action. 2.2 Domestic legislation on the National Society, statutory or constitutional base instruments, policies, agreements and plans which clearly reflect the National Society's mandate to respond in sensitive and insecure contexts, including international and non-international armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions, are developed and strengthened. *(See also VI. and VII. Internal and external communication and coordination)* 2.3 The National Society's humanitarian mandate, its commitment to act at all times in accordance with the Fundamental Principles, its status as a component of the Movement and its auxiliary role to the public authorities in the humanitarian field are known, commonly understood and supported by key stakeholders. 2.4 The legal base and mandates of other Movement components are known and respected and a strong Movement coordination framework has been established to ensure complementarity. 2.5 Domestic legislation governing the use of the emblem and the National Society logo and name exists, is known to the National Society's membership, staff and volunteers and to key stakeholders, including the public authorities and the community, and is both respected and enforced. *(See also V. Identification and VII. External communication and coordination)* 2.6 Movement policies governing response activities in sensitive and insecure contexts, including armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions, are known and have been incorporated into National Society policies, strategies, programmes, operations and security risk management systems, tools, training and practice.

Safer Access elements	Actions and measures
III. Acceptance of the organization *National Societies have attained a high degree of acceptance among key stakeholders by providing relevant, context-sensitive humanitarian assistance and protection for people and communities in a manner consistent with the Fundamental Principles and other Movement policies.*	3.1 The National Society works closely with communities throughout the country to develop and provide relevant and effective humanitarian programmes and activities. 3.2 Recognizing that the behaviour and acceptance of its personnel are crucial to enhancing positive perceptions of the National Society and consequently its reputation and acceptance, the National Society establishes and implements organizational systems, procedures and guidelines, including a code of conduct, and recruits, deploys, trains and guides its staff and volunteers in a manner that increases their acceptance and hence their security and access. *(See also IV. Acceptance of the individual)* 3.3 The National Society engages in an ongoing dialogue with relevant State bodies to ensure that they understand and see value in the National Society's mandate to carry out its auxiliary role in the humanitarian field; such bodies also accept that different modes of operation may be needed in order to ensure compliance with the National Society's requirement for real and perceived neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian action. *(See also II. Legal and policy base)* 3.4 Response activities are developed on the basis of the context and risk assessment and implemented through a context-sensitive approach that attempts to connect communities rather than divide them unintentionally. 3.5 The Fundamental Principles are known, understood and utilized as an operational tool guiding thought processes, communication, decision-making and practice. 3.6 Stakeholders who have an influence on safe access to the affected people and communities must be identified, mapped and analysed so that specific initiatives to increase acceptance by them can be launched. 3.7 Trust, respect and accountability are fostered at all times through transparent and consistent contact, the reliable and predictable provision of services, and relationship-building strategies which promote acceptance by all stakeholders including the State, non-State actors, other responding organizations, the media and community/religious leaders. 3.8 Mechanisms must be established to guide careful consideration of whether or not to engage in partnerships with external actors to avoid compromising acceptance, security and access. Such relationships and partnerships with actors such as the United Nations (UN), non-government organizations (NGOs), media and private companies will be formed and maintained in a manner that is consistent with Movement policy and preserves the National Society's unique status and reputation as a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian organization. 3.9 A reputation risk management system that includes media tracking, stakeholder perception assessments and action to address inaccurate or negative misperceptions or realities has been established and implemented. *(See also VII. External communication and coordination)* 3.10 A system to prevent and manage integrity problems has been established and is used effectively to prevent and address issues that could have a negative impact on effective functioning, safe access and the National Society's image and reputation. 3.11 The National Society has a distinct and recognized visual identity which is associated positively with its humanitarian nature, its mandate and its operational approach. *(See also V. Identification and VII. External communication and coordination)*
IV. Acceptance of the individual *Staff and volunteers have attained a high degree of acceptance among key stakeholders by working in a manner consistent with the Fundamental Principles and other Movement policies.*	4.1 Care is taken to screen and select all personnel and to take affirmative action to ensure that the composition of the staff and volunteer base (including governance members) reflects the diversity of the communities that they serve and that those concerned do not have strong political affiliations or connections with any armed groups and are able to operate at all times in accordance with the Fundamental Principles, code of conduct and other Movement policies, thus increasing acceptance and security for themselves and for the National Society among stakeholders and the communities that they serve. 4.2 Staff and volunteers (including governance members) conduct themselves in a manner that shows respect for all those encountered and adheres to the Fundamental Principles and integrity policies as well as to the Movement's/National Society's code of conduct, thus contributing to their own positive reputation and to that of the National Society and the Movement. 4.3 Staff and volunteers are given adequate training, mentoring, guidance and protection in preparation for the challenges of working in sensitive and insecure contexts, including armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions; aspects addressed include personal preparedness, how to use the Fundamental Principles as an operational tool to guide communication, decisions and actions, context/conflict-sensitive programming practices, safety and security measures, emergency first aid, the management of human remains (as necessary), psycho-social support and stress management, protective legal and administrative support, including the code of conduct and insurance, operational communication and the use of the emblem/logo.

Safer Access elements	Actions and measures
	4.4 Staff and volunteers understand their individual responsibility to assess their own acceptance level within the operational environment; if they have concerns about their security or their ability to access the people or communities, they will take or suggest appropriate action in coordination with the relevant department at the National Society. 4.5 Working conditions, systems and procedures for staff and volunteers have been established to ensure that they benefit from good support, guidance, protection, remuneration and management during response activities. 4.6 Systems have been established to monitor and address compliance with policies, guidelines, standard operating procedures (SOPs) and practice. 4.7 Staff and volunteers have access to a stress management (psycho-social) support system. 4.8 Staff and volunteers know how to monitor their own level of stress and those of their team members and are able to maintain a healthy lifestyle in difficult situations; they also know how to access the National Society's stress management (psycho-social) support system.
V. Identification *National Societies take all necessary steps to protect and promote the organization's visual identity and that of its staff and volunteers.*	5.1 The extent to which the emblem and the National Society logo and name are misused in the country needs to be monitored and active support provided to the public authorities so that they are able to fulfil their legal responsibilities to establish and implement effective rules and procedures to enforce protection. *(See also II. Legal and policy base)* 5.2 Knowledge of the emblems, their respective functions and the conditions of their display is promoted among key stakeholders, including armed forces and groups, among medical professionals and more broadly within the community. 5.3 Measures have been undertaken to ensure that the National Society's visual identity is distinct from that of the armed actors and of their medical services. *(See also II. Legal and policy base)* 5.4 Internal National Society guidelines and systems have been established and implemented to support the consistent and correct use of the emblem and of the National Society's logo on clothing, personal identification documents, products, premises, equipment and means of transport. Visual identification practices (high vs low visibility) that comply with Movement regulations and enhance acceptance, security and access have also been adopted. Consideration should be given to the implementation of a control system such as serial numbers that tracks work clothing and identification in order to prevent its misuse by non-Movement entities. 5.5 In conformity with established mechanisms to guide the formation of partnerships *(see 3.8)*, any joint display of visual identification should remain exceptional and discreet and should not create confusion. Such considerations are paramount in sensitive and insecure contexts.
VI. Internal communication and coordination *National Societies implement well-developed internal communication and coordination strategies and mechanisms, which enhance coordination with other Movement components.*	6.1 An internal communication strategy, including an action plan, templates, tools, equipment and training to support the implementation of the plan, has been established and implemented. 6.2 Appropriate internal communication systems, equipment and technology have been established to ensure reliable and secure communication with field teams operating in sensitive and insecure environments. 6.3 An information management system has been established to facilitate the efficient collection, analysis, flow and storage/retrieval of key information on the operational environment and associated risks. It includes: ▶ Systematic operational briefing/debriefing of field teams and a system to review and incorporate their observations and recommendations into operations; ▶ Guidelines on the use of neutral language and terminology; ▶ Confidentiality and transparency guidelines and an accountability framework; ▶ A system to ensure that reliable, credible sources of information have been determined, information is cross-checked (triangulation), fact is distinguished from assumptions, and misinformation is identified. 6.4 An operational management and coordination structure, system and processes (at various levels) are developed and used and include a crisis management unit with clear activation and deactivation protocols, standard operating procedures (SOPs), including those used to expedite rapid validation of communication products, and roles and responsibilities. National Society team members are recruited and trained and team leaders have been appointed to ensure a sound mechanism for communication and coordination with the field level. *(See also VIII. Operational security risk management)* 6.5 A framework for strategic and operational communication by the Movement and operational coordination has been established and includes clear communication and coordination mechanisms, roles and responsibilities, including the clear identification of and preparation of spokespersons.

Safer Access elements	Actions and measures
VII. External communication and coordination *National Societies implement well-developed external communication and coordination strategies and mechanisms, which enhance coordination with external actors.*	7.1 An external communication strategy, including a positioning strategy, an action plan, templates, tools, equipment and training to support the implementation of the plan, has been established and implemented. 7.2 Key stakeholders know and accept domestic legislation, statutes, policies, agreements and plans, which clearly reflect the National Society's mandate to respond in sensitive and insecure contexts, including international and non-international armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions, in order to establish the framework for an effective response. *(See also II. Legal and policy base)* 7.3 National Societies support the public authorities in the promotion, dissemination and national implementation of IHL, including provisions for the protection of the emblems. 7.4 As part of its humanitarian advocacy and diplomacy strategy and in close coordination with the ICRC, the National Society promotes compliance with international humanitarian law by parties to the conflict and by weapon bearers, advocating for the respect and protection of affected people and communities. *(See also II. Legal and policy base)* 7.5 A policy and related guidelines on the use of social networking sites by staff and volunteers have been established and communicated; monitoring and compliance mechanisms have been established to enforce them. 7.6 Based on the mapping of all key stakeholders, the National Society conducts regular, targeted and timely operational communication (who we are, what we do and how we work; the emblem) and holds discussions with stakeholders to better understand their perceptions of the National Society, the aim being to enable it to carry out its mandate in sensitive and insecure contexts. *(See also I. Context and risk assessment and III. Acceptance of the organization)* 7.7 The National Society uses its online and electronic media in a manner that is sensitive to the context, facilitates the assistance and protection of people and communities and thus preserves their dignity, and prevents adverse effects on them as well as on its own staff and volunteers; the online and electronic media are harmonized with other Movement websites and approaches. 7.8 Based on participation in operational coordination mechanisms with external actors, response activities and information exchanged comply with National Society confidentiality guidelines while fulfilling the need to take independent operational decisions and to be closely associated with the operational response coordinated by the Movement. 7.9 Mechanisms to ensure two-way communication with the affected people and communities have been established and implemented.
VIII. Operational security risk management *National Societies assume responsibility and accountability for the safety and security of staff and volunteers by developing and implementing an operational security risk management system and structure.*	8.1 A safety and security policy has been established and implemented. 8.2 The National Society learns about and builds on existing self-protection practices of communities that could have a positive impact on the security of the communities and of the National Society. 8.3 An integrated operational security risk management system and structure have been established to protect the safety and security of staff and volunteers, facilities, equipment and vehicles; the system operates in accordance with duty of care provisions and responsibilities and the application of the Fundamental Principles and other Movement policies. *(See also all elements, in particular I. Context and risk assessment)* 8.4 Training in operational security risk management, which includes risk assessment tools and processes, guidelines, codes of conduct and active acceptance and protective measures, is provided for all who are responsible for managing operations or who are exposed to risk while carrying out their duties. *(See also I. Context and risk assessment and IV. Acceptance of the individual)* 8.5 A security culture is fostered within the National Society and all staff and volunteers are aware of and equipped to bear personal responsibility for managing their own safety and security and for adhering to the National Society's guidelines and procedures in this regard. 8.6 Adequate insurance coverage for staff and volunteers working in crises has been established to compensate them for possible injury, including psychological trauma/stress, or death in the course of duty.

III. THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND THE SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK

In order to increase acceptance, security and access to those in need in sensitive and insecure contexts, the Fundamental Principles must permeate and guide all the National Society's thought processes, communication, decisions and actions. This section explains how and why.

The Fundamental Principles are often perceived first and foremost as an expression of values and ideals. As such, their importance as an operational and decision-making tool is often underestimated.

The work of the Movement is underpinned by the seven Fundamental Principles – humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality – which inspire and influence its activities (see Figure 6). They are linked to international humanitarian law and were agreed in 1965 as a framework to guide the actions and organization of the Movement. They are an indispensable operational tool to be applied at all times, and are particularly helpful in securing access and in enhancing the effectiveness of assistance to people and communities in need in sensitive and insecure contexts.

> "How to use the Fundamental Principles is to live them."
>
> Dr Bildard Baguma, Under Secretary General, Programmes and Projects, Uganda Red Cross Society

Humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence are vitally important principles from an operational perspective. Humanity, impartiality and independence are referred to in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief,[22] which has been adopted by more than 490 aid organizations. Voluntary service, unity and universality are also of great value to a National Society's functioning as well as to its image and reputation, highlighting the mutually reinforcing interplay between all the Fundamental Principles.

Despite the distinct operational relevance of the Fundamental Principles, within and outside the Movement they are often perceived first and foremost as an expression of values and ideals. As such, their importance as an operational and decision-making tool is often underestimated.

> "It is clear that, in the context of Lebanon, the Fundamental Principles are more than an abstract code or ideological commitment. They serve as a framework for action and an operational tool to guide decision-making in very difficult circumstances. They are of particular relevance to a National Society which needs to balance its role as a formal auxiliary to the public authorities with the ability to provide, and to be trusted to provide, neutral and independent humanitarian assistance for all those who need it most. One of the most important lessons from Lebanon is that this does not come about by accident or without considerable and consistent effort."
>
> Safer Access in Action Case Study: Lebanon

[22] *Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*, developed by the International Federation and the ICRC in 1994, http://www.ifrc.org/en/publications-and-reports/code-of-conduct/.

FIGURE 6: THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT

HUMANITY	IMPARTIALITY	NEUTRALITY	INDEPENDENCE	VOLUNTARY SERVICE	UNITY	UNIVERSALITY
The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.	It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.	In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.	The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.	The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.	There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout the territory.	The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

How applying the Fundamental Principles enhances perceptions, acceptance, security and access

Preserving its actual and perceived neutrality and its ability to deliver services impartially and to act independently at all times, but particularly in sensitive and insecure contexts, is a necessary precondition for a National Society's effective response.

Adherence to the Fundamental Principles combined with the National Society's proximity to those in need through their day-to-day service delivery and the reputation of the whole Movement are primary factors governing a National Society's ability to gain wider acceptance and thus greater access to affected people and communities.

There is no doubt that it may be difficult for all Movement components and their personnel to be perceived to be adhering to the Principles in all situations. For example, when the State to which it is auxiliary is itself involved in a non-international armed conflict or in a law enforcement operation during internal disturbances or tensions, the National Society's neutrality and independence may be questioned. Despite these challenges, many National Societies have earned a reputation as neutral, impartial and independent by permanently and consistently demonstrating the Fundamental Principles in their daily work. This has allowed them to carry out their humanitarian activities in extremely difficult environments where other organizations have been unable to work. The Lebanese Red Cross is a good example of this (see Safer Access in Action Case Study: Lebanon).

Failure to adhere to the Fundamental Principles may have a direct impact on the security and access of a National Society's personnel and may have unintended consequences for the Movement as a whole.

Adherence to or failure to adhere to the Fundamental Principles may have a direct impact on the security and access of a National Society's personnel and may have unintended consequences for the Movement as a whole, including at the regional or global level.

Guiding questions on the application of the Fundamental Principles

- How will this statement or action be perceived by each of the relevant stakeholders in the context and reflect on the neutrality, impartiality and independence of the National Society?
- If an action will negatively influence stakeholder perception of the National Society's neutrality, impartiality or independence, what can be done to alter that perception prior to the action being taken?
- If nothing can be done to alter the negative perception, should the decision or action be adjusted in order to avoid adverse repercussions on those in need and on fellow staff and volunteers?
- Is the National Society able to assess affected areas/communities and decide independently on where to work and who to target based primarily on the degree of humanitarian need?
- Is the National Society truly representative of the communities it aims to serve?
- Are the divisive issues existing within the context negatively affecting the National Society's unity, and if so, what actions can be taken to avoid this?

"Independence is essential. If we are not independent, we are no different from any other charitable organization or from the government itself. The reason why the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement was created was to have that very special independent and unique way of working. In Afghanistan, if we compromise our independence, we are finished."

Fatima Gailani, President, Afghan Red Crescent Society
Safer Access in Action Case Study: Afghanistan

National Societies must rely on their personnel to act in an unbiased and non-judgemental manner at all times and particularly in sensitive and insecure contexts. This can be personally challenging when staff and volunteers may have geographical, social or cultural affiliations with one or the other of the conflicting groups.

Even if National Society personnel work hard to maintain their impartiality, the stakeholders may not perceive them as impartial owing to their real or perceived associations or identities.

Even if National Society personnel work hard to maintain their ability to act impartially, their real or perceived associations or identities may mean that stakeholders do not believe them to be impartial. It is important for the National Society's operational leadership to monitor these factors constantly and to adjust the deployment of individuals as necessary, and for the personnel themselves to objectively assess their own real and perceived acceptance levels within the particular context and community.

Guiding questions for individuals to assess their own ability to apply the Fundamental Principles

- How do I really feel about providing assistance for these persons or this community?
- Will my personal experiences and resulting feelings affect my thoughts, judgement, words or actions in a manner inconsistent with the Fundamental Principles?
- Does my personal experience mean that I understand more fully the experiences of one group over others? Do I need to take action to understand better the needs of groups I know less well?
- Am I able to control my feelings and not allow them to influence negatively my ability to act impartially and neutrally?
- How will those I am helping perceive my involvement? How will the armed actors and other gatekeepers perceive me? Will I be at risk or put others at risk?
- Are there actions that either I or my National Society can take that may support me not only to act neutrally and impartially but also to be perceived to be doing so?

FIGURE 7: THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES INSPIRE AND UNITE THE WHOLE MOVEMENT

In practical terms, how does a National Society use the Fundamental Principles as a tool to guide thought processes, communication, decision-making and action? The scenarios below provide some indications.

External partnerships

Before a National Society enters into a relationship with an organization (for instance, for funding, operational or communication purposes), careful thought must be given as to whether it would still be able to maintain its public perception as neutral, impartial and independent. This is particularly the case if it decides to display its logo or other aspects of its visual identity publicly with other organizations. The agreement first to partner and then to share its visual identity with another organization, through the joint display of logos or another co-branding approach, should only be made in exceptional circumstances and should always be discreet. An argument in its favour would be, for example, if the ability of the National Society to access those in need safely would be strengthened as a result.

At the outbreak of tensions or hostilities, certain existing activities, relationships and partnerships may need to be reviewed and action taken to ensure that trust in the National Society's neutrality, impartiality and independence is not compromised. The specific link here is to the SAF element "Acceptance of the organization"; see the relevant online Practical Advice section.

Relationship with the State

If the State is involved in the armed conflict or a law enforcement operation, the National Society must ensure that it is not perceived to be too closely associated with the State, as this could cause other stakeholders to question its neutrality or undermine the trust of potential beneficiaries in the impartiality of its humanitarian services (see also Part Two, Section II). This could then jeopardize its ability to access the affected people and communities and to ensure the security of its personnel. In such situations, the National Society will need to balance its auxiliary status with the need to preserve, and be perceived to preserve, its independence. The specific link here is to the SAF elements "Legal and policy base" and "Acceptance of the organization"; see the relevant online Practical Advice sections.

Representation of National Society personnel

Although National Society staff and volunteers may feel neutral and impartial, they may not be perceived as such by communities and other stakeholders. This is why it is important to routinely assess such perceptions.

A National Society should proactively ensure a broad cross-section of the population among its staff and volunteers. Being composed primarily of one ethnic group or social class, or if some of its personnel are known to have active political or other sensitive associations, could have implications for its being perceived and accepted as neutral and impartial, thus compromising the security of all its personnel and potentially that of affected people and communities. Personnel must be made aware that although they may feel neutral and impartial, they may not be perceived to be so and should routinely assess such perceptions by communities and other stakeholders. The specific link here is to the SAF elements "Acceptance of the organization" and "Acceptance of the individual"; see the relevant online Practical Advice sections.

> "Overall, the volunteers did a great job sticking to the principles of impartiality and neutrality. But the revolution was a revolution of youth. We tried to give them as much guidance as we could, telling them, 'You need to separate your function as volunteer and wearing a Red Crescent uniform from yourself as a young person excited about this change.'"
>
> Muftah Etwilb, Director of International Relations,
> Libyan Red Crescent

Armed protection

If a National Society carries out its response operation in a highly insecure environment and accepts armed protection from one of the protagonists, its reputation as neutral and independent and able to deliver services impartially will be severely compromised. It also runs the risk of being associated with whichever group provides the armed protection and of jeopardizing the security of other Movement components and others working in the same

context. It is essential to adhere to the Movement policy on "Armed protection of humanitarian assistance."[23] As a basic principle, the components of the Movement do not use armed protection, although exceptional use to protect humanitarian convoys is permitted. Decisions to depart from standard practice would need to be taken together with other Movement components that may be affected by such decisions. The specific link here is to the SAF elements "Legal and policy base" and "Operational security risk management"; see the relevant online Practical Advice sections.

Needs assessment

Unless a National Society has access to areas affected by hostilities or violence and is able to make an independent needs assessment, in coordination with operational Movement partners and others where feasible, it will be difficult for it to ensure that it is prioritizing those most in need and providing impartial, effective and relevant services. Every effort should be made to carry out high-quality assessments and to ensure that decisions on where to work and who to assist are undertaken in an objective manner and independent of undue influence by others who may have hidden or political motivations. The needs of the people must be the primary determinant. The specific link here is to the SAF element "Acceptance of the organization"; see the relevant online Practical Advice section.

The Movement perspective

A shared Movement commitment to the Fundamental Principles and acknowledgement by the components of each other's specific value, uniqueness and complementary mandates and capacities is a tremendous asset when working in challenging situations where acceptance and access may be easily compromised or restricted.

Where acceptance and access are jeopardized, a shared commitment to the Fundamental Principles and an acknowledgement of each other's distinct but complementary mandates and roles can greatly facilitate Movement efforts to deliver effective humanitarian assistance.

For instance, if a National Society finds that its efforts to adhere strictly to the Fundamental Principles are compromised or that important stakeholders do not perceive it to be acting neutrally or impartially and its access or acceptance is diminished as a result, the ICRC – with its vast network of contacts with State and non-State actors – may be able to provide direct support to negotiate safe passage for the National Society, to help it position itself for increased acceptance or to step in and carry out the activity itself.

> "In very sensitive situations, the ICRC's reputation as a neutral and independent organization can be of value in facilitating a National Society's access by obtaining prior guarantees of safe passage to evacuate the wounded."
>
> Our Selected Experience: Red Cross Society of Côte d'Ivoire

The reverse can also be true: in situations where the ICRC may be experiencing access restrictions, the local status and reputation of a National Society may enable it to access people in need and deliver assistance where the ICRC cannot do so. This does not mean that the organizations represent each other or that

[23] Council of Delegates, Resolution 9, "Armed protection of humanitarian assistance," 1995.

they can replace each other in every situation; it is an example of how a flexible operational partnership or joint operation with the common aim of providing humanitarian assistance can help overcome security issues or obstacles to access.

"In Somalia, we recognized that in some locations it would be in the best interests of reaching the beneficiaries if the ICRC and the Somali Red Crescent took some distance from each other as not all of the fighting parties viewed the two organizations in the same way. We saw that at times it would be better to distinguish ourselves from each other in order to be more accepted by certain groups. But we still worked closely together, coordinating our actions and supporting each other."

Abdulkadir Ibrahim Haji (Afi), Director of Communication and Organizational Development, Somali Red Crescent Society

A deep and thorough analysis is vitally important as a prelude to understanding different levels of acceptance in a particular situation in order to determine which component(s) will be the operational face of the Movement and which one(s) will support. In some cases, assistance is most effective when the components work together to provide it.

Regardless of which component may be more operationally accepted by which stakeholder, the need to coordinate closely within the Movement is always present. Additionally, the respective mandates of the National Society, the International Federation and the ICRC must at all times be distinguishable and mutually respected and supported. By recognizing the value of combining skills and assets and taking full advantage of the unique and complementary mandates and positioning of the Movement components in meeting the needs of those affected in sensitive and insecure contexts, more people can be reached and more needs met.

"We must always try to work as one family and improve our access and acceptance – that is important. In Palestine, we have monthly Movement coordination meetings, where we exchange information on activities and programmes. When the situation heats up, the ICRC and the Palestine Red Crescent work together to try to reach areas that are difficult to access. We, as Movement components, work together to enhance and coordinate our humanitarian work, harmonize the support and respond immediately to relieve the suffering of those who are in need."

Dr Khalil Abu Foul, Head of Disaster Management, Palestine Red Crescent Society

The interdependence of the Fundamental Principles and the Safer Access Framework

Application of the Fundamental Principles is integral to the SAF. The SAF contains several direct references to the imperative of applying the Fundamental Principles and the critical role that they play in enhancing National Societies' acceptance, security and access.

National Societies must be mindful and intentional in their application of the Fundamental Principles and challenge themselves to ensure that they are consistently applied at all times.

The Fundamental Principles and the SAF have an interdependent or symbiotic relationship. While the SAF can only be implemented by applying the Fundamental Principles – which embody the Movement's permanent value system – actions and measures undertaken to implement the SAF greatly reinforce and reflect the value of the Fundamental Principles and, with this, the effectiveness of the National Society's and the Movement's humanitarian action.

KEY POINTS

- The work of the Movement is underpinned by the seven Fundamental Principles – humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality – which inspire and influence its activities.
- The Fundamental Principles are more than a set of ideals and values; they are an effective operational tool that, when applied, guides thought processes, communication, decision-making and practice.
- Consistent adherence to the Fundamental Principles is a primary factor governing National Societies' ability to gain wider acceptance and thus greater access to affected people and communities in sensitive and insecure contexts.
- To ensure maximum humanitarian impact and a complementary operational approach, a National Society must closely coordinate its preparedness and response actions with all Movement components working in the same context.
- Application of the Fundamental Principles is integral to the SAF. They enjoy an interdependent or symbiotic relationship, through which they support and reinforce each other.

PART FOUR

THE APPLICATION

I. SOME CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE STARTING

The Safer Access Framework is best applied using a systematic and structured approach. This section discusses some key considerations for a National Society before embarking on the process of application and implementation.

Before formally starting the process of applying the Safer Access Framework (SAF), there are certain matters that a National Society needs to consider or measures to put in place that will contribute to more successful outcomes.

National Society leadership and commitment

The full support and leadership of a National Society's governance and senior management in the application of the SAF within the organization is pivotal to the overall success of mid to long-term initiatives to increase acceptance, security and access.

In the past, the SAF has often been implemented within only one programme or by staff and volunteers at one or more branch, without the commitment of the National Society as whole. While this can result in short-term improvements to security and access, the process of application often involves longer-term organizational development processes that require the engagement of the leadership level of the National Society's headquarters.

> "The Safer Access Framework does not stand alone. It is an integral part of the organization and of all programmes."
>
> Dev Ratna Dhakhwa, Secretary General,
> Nepal Red Cross Society

A branch or programme of a National Society that is facing particular challenges to its operational security and access may undertake its own SAF assessment and planning process. However, as mentioned above, assessment and planning are much more effective and sustainable if governance and management at headquarters level are involved in the establishment of durable policies, structures, systems, programmes and practice with the aim of fully integrating the SAF into the National Society's way of working in all programmes at all levels. There are also benefits to be derived from considering participation by a wide range of key National Society personnel in the process.

Relationship of the Safer Access Framework to overall National Society development

The process associated with the implementation of the SAF, as explained in Part Three, Section II, requires the involvement of several or all organizational levels of a National Society as well as of a number of programmes and support services. Historically in some National Societies, the disaster management or dissemination departments have been tasked with the overall implementation of the SAF although many of the actions and measures required are the

responsibility of the leadership or of other departments. Therefore, in addition to senior leadership involvement, it is essential to sensitize and mobilize a selection of programme and support service managers to commit their time and expertise to the process.

National Societies would benefit from implementing several of the specific actions and measures promoted in the SAF as part of their overall organizational development, capacity-building and emergency preparedness for response tasks, in accordance with context realities and priorities. The outcome of these actions should then be integrated into the individual National Society's broader organizational policies, structure, systems, programmes and practice.

The International Federation's Organizational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC) process,[24] the Well-Prepared National Society checklist and self-assessment tool,[25] other disaster management tools and products, along with those that provide guidance on the broader aspects of strengthening the National Society's organizational development and emergency preparedness, support the successful application of the SAF.

If a National Society has already completed the self-assessment phase of the OCAC process and has identified perception/image and/or security deficits, the application of the SAF and taking action to plug the gaps will help it address them. If it has not undertaken an OCAC process and it undergoes the SAF application process, the results may feed into a subsequent OCAC process.

TABLE 5: TOOLS TO SUPPORT NATIONAL SOCIETY DEVELOPMENT

National Society Development Framework	Guides National Society leaders in taking decisions and actions that affect the development of their organization and accelerates and improves processes critical to the long-term health, image and reputation of the Movement in accordance with development principles. Incorporates a direct reference to the Safer Access Framework.
Organizational Capacity Assessment and Certification process	National Society development process comprising three phases: self-assessment, peer review and certification
Safer Access Framework	Complements organizational development and capacity building for preparedness for emergency response, with a special focus on positioning and preparing to respond in sensitive and insecure contexts
Well-Prepared National Society checklist	A preparedness for emergency response tool that incorporates some of the SAF actions and measures

Unique context-specific application

Each National Society has its own specific capacities and works in a particular context with unique challenges. It is crucial that the SAF application process considers:

- the specific nature of the needs, challenges and risks in the context in question;
- the National Society's existing and desired capacities;
- the National Society's previous experience in terms of acceptance, security and access.

[24] https://fednet.ifrc.org/en/resources/ns-development/national-society-development/organisational-capacity-assessment--certification1/

[25] *Characteristics of a Well Prepared National Society for Situations of Disaster and Conflict*, 2001, checklist updated and adapted to integrate the SAF, http://www.ifrc.org/Global/WPNS-characteristics-en.pdf.

Awareness building within the National Society

Sometimes, the motivation to take the recommended SAF actions or measures stems from an operational security incident or the unexpected outbreak of violence, or in anticipation of an upcoming event, such as elections or pre-arranged demonstrations, where tensions are likely to be high. In such situations the benefits to a National Society of implementing the SAF are clear and motivation to do so is high.

Preferably, a National Society would begin to prepare and position itself for acceptance by key stakeholders well in advance of needing to respond in a crisis. A National Society that thinks ahead in that manner will be able to pre-empt or mitigate challenges that may block operational access or negatively affect the security of staff and volunteers and to build contacts and trustful relationships with key stakeholders. However, at times, a sense of complacency or an "it won't happen here" mindset may prevail or other priorities may distract a National Society from engaging in this important preparatory work.

To address this matter, it may be necessary to raise the awareness of key members of the National Society's governance and management through briefing sessions to persuade them of the benefits of adopting the SAF as part of its organizational development approach. This guide and its companion resources will be helpful in that respect.

TABLE 6: PRECONCEPTIONS THAT MIGHT DISCOURAGE A NATIONAL SOCIETY FROM APPLYING THE SAF

Preconception: Adopting operational security risk management practices will reduce the National Society's ability to meet the needs of people and communities effectively – the conflict between the "humanitarian imperative" and managing risk. **Reality:** Professional operational security risk management practices are designed to facilitate access and enhance security – mitigating risk – resulting in greater reach.
Preconception: Implementing fully the measures and actions proposed in the SAF would entail considerable financial costs (insurance, equipment, training, etc.) **Reality:** Many of the actions and measures contained in the SAF can be implemented at a relatively low cost; others may be financially and technically supported through partnerships or donations.
Preconception: Certain National Societies do not need to take the actions and measures contained in the SAF since they operate in relatively peaceful contexts. **Reality:** Over the years, National Societies have learned that the SAF provisions are relevant to them at all times, even in their day-to-day work. Moreover, even in peaceful contexts obstacles or restrictions may arise, and no context is completely immune from the possibility of unrest, violence or conflict.

Targeted application according to roles

Although a common understanding and awareness of the SAF in its entirety is beneficial for all internal National Society audiences, when it comes to implementation, different audiences require different depths of knowledge on particular areas relevant to their respective responsibilities and accountability.

For instance, governance members may focus more on addressing legal and policy issues that may affect the security and access of National Society personnel and on compliance with its duty of care.

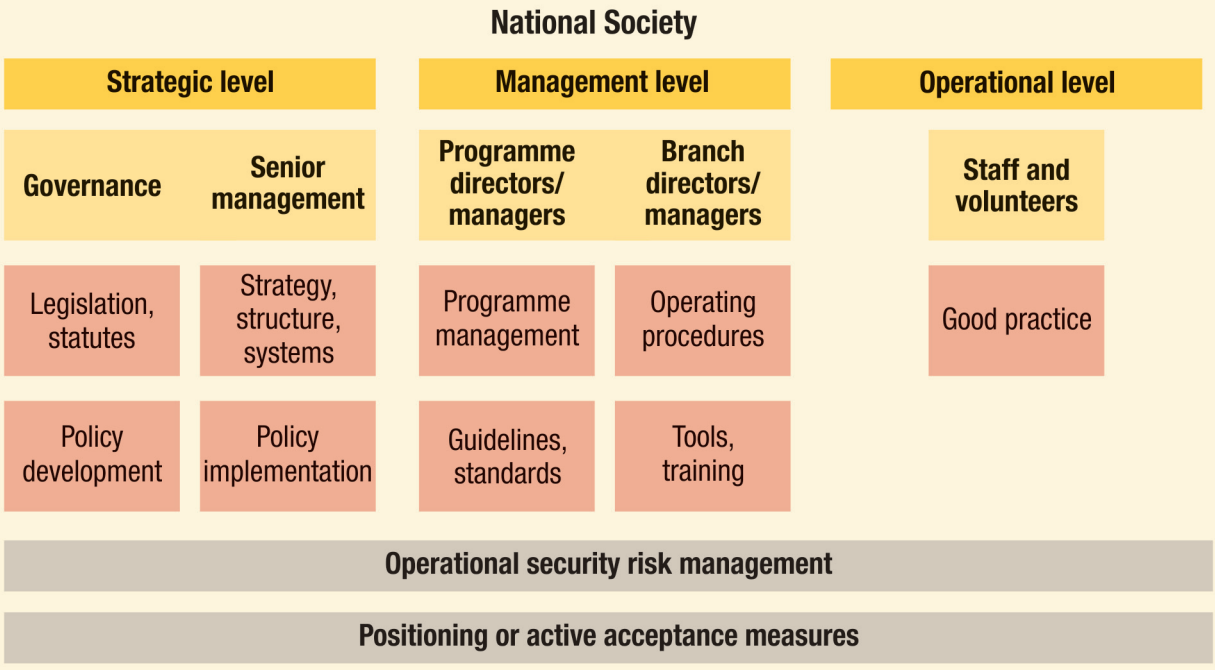
Meanwhile, senior management staff, including in the areas of programmes, support services and branch management, may need to enhance their knowledge of context-sensitive programming practices and operational security risk management. This will also encompass how to conduct context

analysis and risk assessments or how to manage the deployment of their personnel in a way that will reinforce their security practices and the provision of appropriate stress management support mechanisms.

Front-line volunteers and operational managers may need to be familiarized with and trained in: personal preparedness; use of the Fundamental Principles as an operational tool to guide decisions and actions; operational security risk management; first aid in emergencies; management of human remains; psychological support and stress management; protective legal and administrative support, including codes of conduct and insurance coverage; operational dissemination knowledge and skills; and use of the emblem/logo.

Figure 8 suggests which areas of the SAF to emphasize more than others depending on the audience and its role within the National Society structure. As shown in the diagram, operational security risk management and positioning or active acceptance measures are the responsibility of all sectors at all levels.

FIGURE 8: TARGETED APPLICATION ACCORDING TO RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACCOUNTABILITY



KEY POINTS

- Application of the SAF depends on sound National Society organizational development and emergency preparedness for response foundations being in place.
- A National Society would preferably begin to prepare and position itself for acceptance by key stakeholders well in advance of needing to respond in a crisis.
- Before engaging in the SAF application process it is crucial to consider the specific nature of the needs, challenges and risks generated by the context and to take account of the National Society's existing and desired capacities.
- Different groups within a National Society require different depths of knowledge of the various aspects of the SAF depending on their responsibilities and accountability.

II. SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK APPLICATION PROCESS

This section looks at how best to engage in the Safer Access Framework application process taking into account the specific features of the National Society and its operational context.

The process

The Safer Access Framework (SAF) and its application tools are intended to both complement and be part of a National Society's organizational development. They support a structured assessment and planning process within a National Society that is designed to:

- identify gaps, barriers, risks and challenges to the National Society's acceptance, security and access;
- determine the necessary short, mid and long-term actions required to address the gaps, barriers, risks and challenges;
- promote and support the professionalization of the National Society's operational security risk management approach;
- reinforce the application of the Fundamental Principles.

The assessment and planning process is recommended for all National Societies. It is particularly relevant for those that have already had to respond in sensitive and insecure contexts or are likely to find themselves needing to do so in the very near future. Many of the actions and measures take time to implement so are best taken well in advance of a response. Once initiated, however, they should be part of a permanent process within the National Society so that it can remain responsive to the evolving context and address emerging challenges.

The Safer Access Framework …

- can be used by all National Societies well in advance of an operational response to assist them in preparing and positioning themselves for increased acceptance;
- can be used during or following an operational response to provide guidance in increasing the National Society's security and access to people with humanitarian needs;
- can be used by all National Societies, even when operating in a relatively peaceful environment, particularly if the context contains operational sensitivities.

IN FOCUS: USING THE SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK AS A QUICK REFERENCE

It is possible for a National Society to use the Safer Access Framework (SAF) and the tools provided in the midst of an active response, when it may be unable to take the time for a collective effort involving a full assessment and planning exercise. In such a situation, the SAF quick reference chart in Annex 2 is a useful tool. The SAF assessment and planning tool could also be used to support rapid reflection by providing a format to record gaps, actions and priorities to be addressed.

Although it may not be possible to apply this approach immediately to longer-term actions, the information can be noted for future reference. Meanwhile, spontaneous actions can be taken to resolve urgent and important operational issues that would benefit from a rapid solution.

FIGURE 9: THE SAFER ACCESS APPLICATION PROCESS

The process, as illustrated in Figure 9, is as follows:

Manage: Adopt the good practice from National Societies which recommends the establishment of a Safer Access steering group (5–8 people) to support the permanent process of assessing, planning, taking actions and integrating the actions and measures that will contribute to increasing the security and access of staff and volunteers. Should such a mechanism or group already exist at the National Society, it might be worthwhile simply expanding its mandate to avoid setting up another such group. This also has the advantage of integrating the SAF into existing organizational structures.

The group could comprise those in leadership and management positions at headquarters, regional and branch level, including the secretary general, governance members, operational response managers and team leaders, heads of programmes and support services, and response team leaders.

During an active response, it is often beneficial to form a joint operational working group with the ICRC and other Movement components operating in the same context and to involve the designated focal point responsible for National Society security risk management as well as the head of operations.

Combining a broad range of perspectives, knowledge and experience of a diverse group in a collective and integrated process can add considerable value. It can also lead to a more accurate understanding of the context and more comprehensive identification of operational gaps, barriers, risks and challenges as well as the subsequent actions and measures to be taken.

Assess: Identify the current/likely gaps, barriers, risks and challenges to National Society acceptance, security and access by reflecting on the existing context, recent experience and possible future scenarios. Explore the root causes in order to increase the likelihood that the actions decided upon will resolve the issues identified. Record the gaps, barriers, risks and challenges in the SAF assessment and planning tool (see Figure 10).

FIGURE 10: SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING TOOL

The underlying purpose of each element is to increase acceptance and security in order to increase access to those in need in sensitive and insecure contexts, including armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions. This tool is available online at www.icrc.org/saferaccess.

Safer Access elements	Actions and measures	Identified gaps, barriers, risks and challenges	Priority 1–3	Current benchmark level (A–E)	Desired benchmark level (A–E)	Actions required	Responsible	Timeline
I. Context and risk assessment National Societies have a clear understanding of the interlinked political, social, cultural and economic aspects of the evolving operational environment and the inherent risks, which forms the basis for preventing and managing those risks.	1.1 Understand the similarities and differences between preparing for and responding in sensitive and insecure contexts and in disasters							
	1.2 Explore and analyse emerging political, social, cultural and economic trends that could influence humanitarian action and use knowledge to guide preparedness and response							

Plan: Create an action plan using the SAF assessment and planning tool to capture initiatives that will address the gaps, barriers, risks and challenges as identified in the assessment process. Use the SAF benchmarking and monitoring tool (see Figure 12) for reference during this process as doing so will assist in highlighting the National Society's current status and provide guidance on future steps to be considered.

The next stage is to take the following three steps:

Step 1: Record the identified actions in the SAF assessment and planning tool in the "Actions required" column.

Step 2: Prioritize each identified action as follows:

1. Urgent and important – immediate action required
2. Important but not as urgent – mid-term action required
3. Important but not urgent – longer-term action required

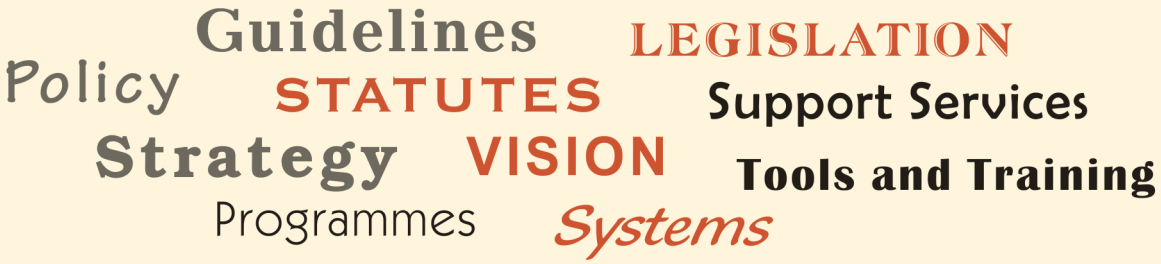
Step 3: Assign responsibility to a person(s) or department and attach a timeline to each action.

After the priority actions have been determined, it would be useful to refer again to the SAF benchmarking and monitoring tool (see Figure 12) to investigate other areas in the SAF that may have been missed in the first process. This is a relevant approach because the SAF elements are interlinked and action taken in one area can trigger the need for action in another area that may not have been noted in the first instance. Add additional actions accordingly, and follow the three steps indicated above to establish the priorities.

Take action: It is extremely important to realize that specific actions are required if security and humanitarian access are to be increased. These actions will result in various outcomes and products (see the Safer Access Framework chart , Part Three, Section II, for examples of the various actions that may be required). The actions can result in various outcomes or products, such as security guidelines, an emblem campaign to enhance National Society identity, or a targeted operational communication campaign to raise public awareness of the programmes and activities of the National Society and how it operates in accordance with the Fundamental Principles. The actions often involve several programmes and service areas within the National Society and would benefit from being coordinated by a focal point and/or the steering group.

Integrate: The actions and their outcomes then need to be integrated into the National Society's policies, structures, systems, programmes and practice and staff and volunteers given appropriate guidance and training.

FIGURE 11: POSSIBLE AREAS FOR THE INTEGRATION OF OUTCOMES



Monitor: It is extremely useful to be able to benchmark the National Society's current status in relation to the actions and measures proposed in the SAF and to determine the next steps required in order to raise that benchmark and to track progress made. The SAF benchmarking and monitoring tool is intended to serve that purpose. This process will also help the National Society keep abreast of the evolving context and risks, enabling actions to be adjusted as required. A full review is recommended once a year.

FIGURE 12: SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK BENCHMARKING AND MONITORING TOOL

The underlying purpose of each element is to increase acceptance and security in order to increase access to those in need in sensitive and insecure contexts, including armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions. This tool is available online (www) at www.icrc.org/saferaccess.

Safer Access elements	Reference SAF chart "actions and measures"	Area of focus (attributes)	Benchmark					A-E
			A	B	C	D	E	
Context and risk assessment National Societies have a clear understanding of the interlinked political, social, cultural and economic aspects of the evolving operational environment and the inherent risks, which forms the basis for preventing and managing those risks.	1.1 1.4 1.5	a. Context and risk assessment capacities		All key operations people at National Society headquarters know how to conduct a context and risk assessment.	The National Society provides training on how to conduct context and risk assessment for operations heads in branches that are experiencing or have experience in responding in sensitive and insecure contexts, including armed conflict.	All key decision-makers at both headquarters and branch levels are trained to conduct context and risk assessments. A standard format for conducting context and risk analysis is developed and used by all operations people at both headquarters and branches.	Operations people at both headquarters and branches conduct context and risk analysis regularly using the standard format. Changes in the context and risk are reported to headquarters and a system of consolidation is in place. Reports are used to feed into the overall National Society context and risk analysis.	

Note: The contents of the benchmark columns are currently being tested and will be modified according to input received.

Measuring outcomes and impact

The SAF's aim is to increase a National Society's security and access, maximizing delivery of humanitarian services while minimizing risk. However, a National Society might take the priority actions it has identified in the assessment and planning process and not significantly achieve the impact desired.

It stands to reason that in order to measure the impact of applying the priority actions and measures identified in the assessment and planning process, a baseline measurement of a National Society's security and access should be recorded and improvements measured.

More work on identifying impact is needed. However, for a start the following questions may help National Societies develop their ability to measure impact:

Guiding questions to measure acceptance and access

- Have the number and quality of contacts and relations with stakeholders increased?
- Over the past year was the National Society able to reach all areas where there were humanitarian needs relatively unhindered?
- Where the National Society did not have access, would better systems, procedures and approaches have made access possible, while keeping risks to a minimum?

Guiding questions to measure risk and security

- Over the past year how many/what incidents/near incidents threatening the security of staff and volunteers have occurred and how does this compare to similar contexts in previous years?
- Were the existing policies and procedures properly applied in those cases?

The tools

The SAF chart is the main reference tool highlighting the actions and measures to be taken to increase acceptance, security and access in sensitive and insecure contexts.

Two further tools support the recommended application process: the SAF assessment and planning tool and the SAF benchmarking and monitoring tool.

A supplementary Facilitator's Guide will support the process of assessment and planning. Although some of these tools are found within this guide, all of them can be found online www.

TABLE 7: THE SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK APPLICATION TOOLS

Tool	Description
Safer Access Framework chart	An essential tool describing the actions and measures relating to each of the eight Safer Access "elements." A SAF quick reference chart is provided in Annex 2.
Safer Access Framework assessment and planning tool	A simple, comprehensive tool to support the assessment and planning process; it is useful as a template for recording the outcomes of the SAF application process.
Safer Access Framework benchmarking and monitoring tool	A tool enabling National Societies to monitor their status and progress in relation to each of the SAF's proposed actions and measures; it provides an indication of the next steps to take to achieve further progress.
Safer Access Facilitator's Guide	Additional support and guidance on the SAF application process, including flexible methodology options.
Safer Access PowerPoint presentation	A tool to build the awareness of key members of the National Society's leadership and gain their buy-in and commitment to apply the SAF in a systematic and structured way.

ICRC support for the National Society application process

When planning to engage in or scale up its application of the SAF, a National Society is encouraged to take advantage of the support offered by the ICRC, which remains the focal point of Movement expertise in this area.

The ICRC stands committed and ready to support National Societies in furthering their understanding and application of the SAF. In accordance with the availability of its own resources, the ICRC will support National Societies in their implementation of the SAF by providing advice and, where requested, by co-facilitating the application process.

In contexts where the ICRC, the International Federation and peer National Societies are present, their personnel can provide technical expertise in the actions and measures described in the SAF chart in accordance with their respective capacities and the priorities identified by the National Society undergoing the process. This technical support would of course be provided in addition to programme support, including the traditional areas of ICRC programme capacity-building support such as restoring family links, weapon-contamination awareness and victim assistance, economic security, water and habitat, health and first aid, and human remains management.

This capacity-building support is intended to be delivered in a partnership approach.

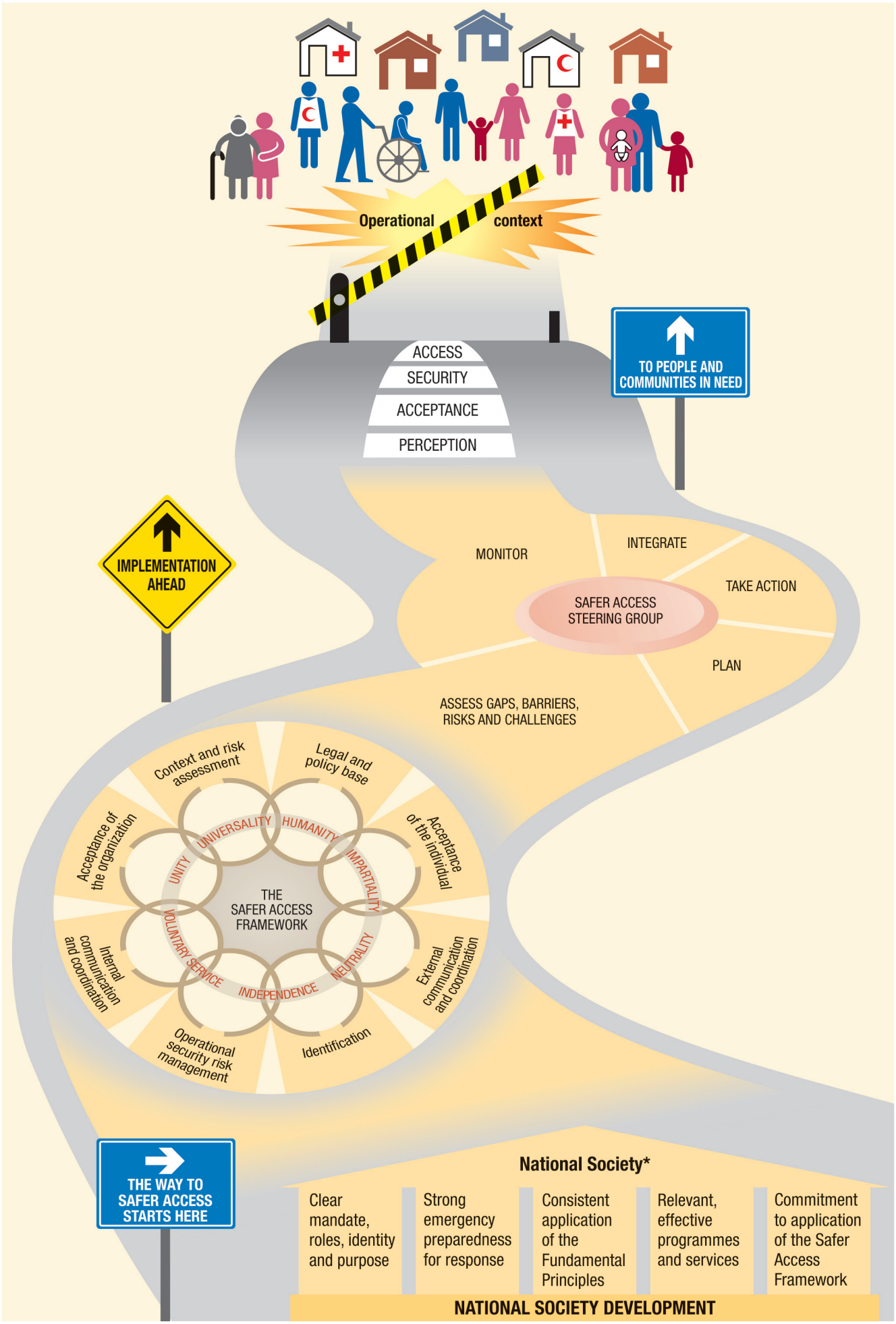
Final word

Achieving safer access does not stop here. There is a wealth of additional information and guidance in the other components of the Practical Resource Pack and in the online Practical Advice sections. Further materials are being developed. National Societies are also invited to continue contributing their selected experiences of applying the SAF so that others may draw inspiration from them in their efforts to increase their acceptance, security and access to people and communities in need.

KEY POINTS

- The ideal application approach consists of a collective assessment and planning process that is based on a sound context analysis (including risks), a reflection on lessons learned and the forecasting of future events.
- The SAF application process should result in short, mid and long-term actions to address the identified gaps, barriers , risks and challenges to safer access and is supported by the SAF assessment and planning tool.
- The process is seen as ongoing and in perpetual motion, responsive to the context and its implications for the National Society's security and access.
- The SAF benchmarking and monitoring process and tool are useful to determine the National Society's current status and to track progress in achieving the actions and measures outlined in the SAF.
- The ICRC is on hand to provide National Societies with advisory and technical support in implementing the actions and measures recommended in the SAF, as may be the International Federation and National Societies – particularly those with comparable operational experience or possessing specific technical expertise.

FIGURE 13: THE WAY TO SAFER ACCESS



*Note: The characteristics of a National Society shown here are those most relevant to application of the Safer Access Framework and do not preclude others required of a National Society more generally.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: GLOSSARY

Active acceptance measures

See **positioning or active acceptance measures**.

Armed conflict

An armed conflict exists whenever recourse is made to armed force between States or protracted armed confrontation between governmental armed forces and organized armed groups or between such groups arising on the territory of a State (party to the Geneva Conventions). **International humanitarian law** distinguishes between two types of armed conflicts, namely:

- International armed conflicts (IAC), involving two or more opposing States;
- Non-international armed conflicts (NIAC), between government forces and non-government armed groups, or between such groups only.[26]

Gatekeepers

Gatekeepers are all those who are in a position to control, restrict or grant access to people adversely affected by events. They may include national and local authorities, security forces, armed actors, non-State actors, religious and community leaders, community members and people in need. Gatekeepers are one of the larger group of **stakeholders** that a National Society needs to consider when carrying out its operations.

Internal disturbances and tensions

Article 1(2) of the 1977 Additional Protocol II to the 1949 Geneva Conventions states: "This Protocol shall not apply to situations of internal disturbances and tensions, such as riots, isolated and sporadic acts of violence and other acts of a similar nature, as not being armed conflicts." "Internal disturbances" and "internal tensions" have been defined in the ICRC commentary to the 1977 Additional Protocol II.

Internal disturbances

"This involves situations (…) which [are] (…) characterized by a certain seriousness or duration and which involve acts of violence. These latter can assume various forms, all the way from the spontaneous generation of acts of revolt to the struggle between more or less organized groups and the authorities in power. In these situations, which do not necessarily degenerate into open struggle, the authorities in power call upon extensive police forces, or even armed forces, to restore internal order. The high number of victims has made necessary the application of a minimum of humanitarian rules."[27]

[26] *How is the term 'Armed Conflict' defined in International Humanitarian Law?*, ICRC Opinion Paper, ICRC, Geneva, March 2008.

[27] Y. Sandoz, C. Swinarski and B. Zimmermann (eds), *Commentary on the Additional Protocols of 8 June 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949*, ICRC/Martinus Nijhoff, Geneva, 1987, p. 1355, which cites the description of internal disturbances given by the ICRC during the first session of the Conference of Government Experts held in 1971.

Over the years, it has become clear that the above definition does not refer exclusively to situations involving State authorities, but also includes those confrontations between different groups of individuals, none of which are in power.

Internal tensions

"These could be said to include in particular situations of serious tension (political, religious, racial, social, economic, etc.), but also the sequels of armed conflict or of internal disturbances. Such situations have one or more of the following characteristics, if not all at the same time:

- large-scale arrests;
- a large number of "political" prisoners;
- the probable existence of ill-treatment or inhumane conditions of detention;
- the suspension of fundamental judicial guarantees, either as part of the promulgation of a state of emergency or simply as a matter of fact;
- allegations of disappearances."[28]

International humanitarian law

International humanitarian law (IHL) is a branch of public international law. It comprises the rules which, in times of armed conflict, seek – for humanitarian reasons – to protect persons who are not or are no longer participating in the hostilities, and to restrict the means and methods of warfare. More precisely, international humanitarian law refers to international treaty or customary rules which have been specially developed to resolve humanitarian issues arising directly from armed conflicts, whether of an international or non-international character.

Non-State actors

Non-State actors can include opposition or pro-government groups, demonstrators, insurgents, territorial gangs, communal groups, criminal groups or private military and security companies. They may or may not be armed.

Operational security risk management

Operational security risk management consists of assessing an operational context, identifying and analysing risks to personnel, assets and operations and implementing mitigating strategies and measures to reduce the likelihood and impact of an undesirable event.

[28] Y. Sandoz, C. Swinarski and B. Zimmermann (eds), *Commentary on the Additional Protocols of 8 June 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949*, ICRC/Martinus Nijhoff, Geneva, 1987, p. 1355, which cites the description of internal tensions given by the ICRC during the first session of the Conference of Government Experts held in 1971.

Personnel

Personnel are all staff and volunteers of a National Society, including governance members.

Positioning or active acceptance measures

Positioning or active acceptance measures involve building and maintaining good relations with local communities, armed actors and other relevant stakeholders as part of an operational security risk management strategy, and obtaining their acceptance and consent for the National Society's presence and its work.

Risk assessment

Risk assessment is the overall process of risk identification, risk analysis and risk evaluation.

Security

Security refers to freedom from risk or harm from such intentional acts as can occur in sensitive and insecure contexts, including armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions.

Sensitive and insecure contexts

The term sensitive and insecure contexts, as used in this guide, covers a broad range of situations, from those which involve no violence but which nonetheless present National Societies with perception or acceptance issues to violent demonstrations, riots or spontaneous acts of revolt (also referred to as **internal disturbances** or **internal tensions** and to outright **armed conflict**), as well as many situations combining characteristics of several different contexts. Security and access issues can also arise following a natural disaster or in situations where banditry, gang violence or other forms of criminality prevail.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders is the term used to refer to anyone concerned with, involved in or affected by the actions of the National Society, such as the people it aims to assist or provide services to, representatives of communities, the public authorities, Movement components, donors, non-State actors, armed actors, donors, the media, other organizations and businesses. **Gatekeepers** are a subset of stakeholders.

Supplementary preparedness actions

Supplementary preparedness actions are those taken over and above a National Society's usual emergency preparedness for response activities and are aimed at increasing its security in a given situation.

ANNEX 2

SAFER ACCESS FRAMEWORK QUICK REFERENCE CHART

Safer Access elements	Actions and measures
The underlying purpose of each element is to increase acceptance and security in order to increase access to those in need in sensitive and insecure contexts, including armed conflict and internal disturbances and tensions.	For each Safer Access element, areas have been identified where action may be required to address the gaps, barriers, risks and challenges to acceptance, security and access. If other Movement components are present in a given context, the National Society closely coordinates its preparedness and response activities with them in accordance with Movement coordination policies and other mechanisms in order to maximize the humanitarian impact and to ensure complementarity.
I. Context and risk assessment *National Societies have a clear understanding of the interlinked political, social, cultural and economic aspects of the evolving operational environment and the inherent risks, which forms the basis for preventing and managing those risks.*	1.1 Understand the similarities and differences between preparing for and responding in sensitive and insecure contexts and in disasters 1.2 Explore and analyse emerging political, social, cultural and economic trends that could influence humanitarian action and use knowledge to guide preparedness and response 1.3 Develop and maintain a continually evolving context assessment to better understand the context and needs 1.4 Conduct an ongoing risk assessment 1.5 Assess and develop the National Society's capacity and ability to manage identified risks 1.6 Develop and refine a contingency plan which builds on community preparedness and takes account of specific anticipated scenarios
II. Legal and policy base *National Societies have sound legal and statutory instruments and develop policies that provide a basis from which to carry out their humanitarian mandate and roles in conformity with Movement policies, international humanitarian law (IHL) and domestic legislation.*	2.1 Know the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law and domestic legislation in order to determine how best to carry out the National Society mandate 2.2 Develop and strengthen domestic legislation, statutes, policies, agreements and plans to reinforce the National Society mandate to respond in sensitive and insecure contexts 2.3 Promote a common understanding among internal and external stakeholders of the National Society mandate, its status within the Movement, its auxiliary role and its commitment to act in accordance with the Fundamental Principles 2.4 Know and respect the legal base and mandates of other Movement components and establish a strong Movement coordination framework 2.5 Ensure that domestic legislation regulating the use of the emblem, National Society logo and name exists, is known, respected and enforced 2.6 Know and incorporate relevant Movement policies into National Society policies, strategies, programmes, operations and security risk management systems, tools, training and practice
III. Acceptance of the organization *National Societies have attained a high degree of acceptance among key stakeholders by providing relevant, context-sensitive humanitarian assistance and protection for people and communities in a manner consistent with the Fundamental Principles and other Movement policies.*	3.1 Develop and provide relevant humanitarian programmes and activities, working closely with communities, throughout the country. 3.2 Establish and implement strong human resource management practices to reinforce acceptance, security and access 3.3 Engage in ongoing dialogue with State bodies to ensure that they understand the importance and value of the National Society as a neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian organization 3.4 Develop and use appropriate context-sensitive response approaches (i.e. do no harm), grounded in the context and risk assessment 3.5 Know and apply the Fundamental Principles to guide thought processes, communication, decision-making and practice 3.6 Identify and map all stakeholders and develop engagement strategies to increase acceptance by them 3.7 Foster trust, respect and accountability with all stakeholders through active acceptance and positioning strategies 3.8 Establish mechanisms to guide the formation of partnerships and ensure they are consistent with Movement policy thus preserving neutrality, impartiality and independence 3.9 Establish and implement a reputation risk management system 3.10 Establish and implement an integrity management system 3.11 Establish and implement a distinct and recognized visual identity system

Safer access elements	Actions and measures
IV. Acceptance of the individual *Staff and volunteers have attained a high degree of acceptance among key stakeholders by working in a manner consistent with the Fundamental Principles and other Movement policies.*	4.1 Screen and select personnel to increase acceptance and security for them and the National Society 4.2 Staff and volunteers act in a conformity with the code of conduct and Fundamental Principles, thus preserving their own and the National Society's positive reputation 4.3 Provide adequate preparatory training, mentoring, guidance and protection 4.4 Staff and volunteers understand their personal responsibility towards their own security and access and take or suggest appropriate actions 4.5 Establish working terms and conditions, systems and procedures to ensure adequate support 4.6 Establish compliance systems related to policies, guidelines, standard operating procedures and practice 4.7 Establish a stress management (psychosocial) support system for staff and volunteers 4.8 Staff and volunteers know how to monitor their stress levels apply this knowledge in practice; they know how to access the Society's stress management support system
V. Identification *National Societies take all necessary steps to protect and promote the organization's visual identity and that of its staff and volunteers.*	5.1 Know the extent of and support the authorities in addressing emblem misuse 5.2 Promote knowledge of the functions of the emblems with key stakeholders 5.3 Take measures to ensure the National Society's visual identity is distinct from that of armed actors and of their medical services 5.4 Establish and implement internal guidelines and systems to support the correct use of the emblems/logos and to protect visual identity 5.5 Ensure that any joint display of identification with select partners remains exceptional and discreet and does not create confusion
VI. Internal communication and coordination *National Societies implement well-developed internal communication and coordination strategies and mechanisms, which enhance coordination with other Movement components.*	6.1 Establish and implement an internal communication strategy and action plan supported by templates, tools, equipment and training 6.2 Establish internal communication systems, equipment and technology to reinforce the security of field teams 6.3 Establish and implement an information management system that captures key information on the context and its inherent risks 6.4 Develop and implement an internal operational management and coordination structure, system and processes (crisis management unit) 6.5 Establish a strong Movement strategic and operational communication framework
VII. External communication and coordination *National Societies implement well-developed external communication and coordination strategies and mechanisms, which enhance coordination with external actors.*	7.1 Establish and implement an external communication strategy and action plan, supported by templates, tools, equipment and training 7.2 Promote knowledge and acceptance of domestic legislation, statutes, policies, agreements and plans to key stakeholders 7.3 Promote the national implementation of international humanitarian law and support the public authorities in its dissemination to key stakeholders 7.4 Promote compliance with international humanitarian law with key stakeholders and advocate for the respect and protection of affected people and communities 7.5 Establish, communicate and enforce a social networking policy and guidelines for staff and volunteers 7.6 Conduct regular, targeted operational communication among key stakeholders 7.7 Use online and electronic media to preserve the dignity of and to protect people and communities; harmonize with Movement partners 7.8 Participate in external operational coordination mechanisms in a way that preserves independence and confidentiality of information as required 7.9 Establish two-way communication mechanisms with affected people and communities
VIII. Operational security risk management *National Societies assume responsibility and accountability for the safety and security of staff and volunteers by developing and implementing an operational security risk management system and structure.*	8.1 Establish and implement a safety and security policy 8.2 Build on community self-protection practices that contribute to safer response teams and communities 8.3 Establish an integrated operational security risk management system and structure in accordance with duty of care provisions, the application of the Fundamental Principles and other Movement policies 8.4 Provide regular training in operational security risk management 8.5 Foster a security culture among all staff and volunteers at all levels 8.6 Provide adequate insurance coverage for staff and volunteers

Note: For the extended version of the Safer Access Framework chart, see Part Three, Section II.

ANNEX 3: CONTENTS OF THE SAFER ACCESS PRACTICAL RESOURCE PACK

The **Safer Access Practical Resource Pack** comprises a number of print, electronic and audiovisual products, of which this guide is the core component. Together, they support and accompany National Societies in their quest to increase their acceptance, security and access to people and communities in need.

The components of the Practical Resource Pack include:

1. **Safer Access: A guide for all National Societies** – available in print, on DVD, and online (www) at www.icrc.org/saferaccess as printable and interactive PDFs. The following reference and application tools are available online (www) at the above internet address:

   - The SAF chart (also contained in the guide)
   - The SAF quick reference chart (Annex 2 to the guide)
   - SAF assessment and planning tool
   - SAF benchmarking and monitoring tool (being tested; available 2014)
   - Facilitator's Guide (in development; available 2014)
   - Safer Access PowerPoint presentation

2. **Practical advice:** Practical information and advice on each of the eight SAF elements, including an overview of each element and sample tools, reference documents and links. Available online (www) at www.icrc.org/saferaccess.

3. **Safer Access in Action**
   - National Society case studies – in-depth descriptions of National Society experiences of applying the SAF, available in print as part of the Resource Pack, on DVD, and online (www) at www.icrc.org/saferaccess as a printable PDF.
   - Selected Experiences: Brief accounts, in their own words, of specific access and security issues encountered by National Societies and how they overcame them; located online (www) at www.icrc.org/saferaccess. These will be progressively added to as they are documented and become available.
   - Video – available to Movement components only in four languages (English, French, Spanish and Arabic). Contact your nearest ICRC delegation for a copy.

4. **Book: Staying Alive** – available as a PDF or to be ordered in print from www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/publication/p0717.htm; also included on the DVD.

Certain components of the Practical Resource Pack can also be purchased from shop.icrc.org.

Note: The International Federation also has a number of helpful resources relevant to this topic on its website, https://www.ifrc.org, on its learning platform, https://ifrc.csod.com, and on its intranet, https://fednet.ifrc.org, including several on protecting volunteers and the "Stay Safe" package of material specifically pertaining to security management.

MISSION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is an impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance. The ICRC also endeavours to prevent suffering by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and universal humanitarian principles. Established in 1863, the ICRC is at the origin of the Geneva Conventions and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It directs and coordinates the international activities conducted by the Movement in armed conflicts and other situations of violence.

ICRC

4149/002 10.2013