

# NRC PROTECTION POLICY



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NORWEGIAN  
REFUGEE COUNCIL



**OUR VISION:**

**RIGHTS RESPECTED  
PEOPLE PROTECTED**

**Our Mission Statement:**

NRC works to protect the rights of displaced and vulnerable persons during crisis.

Through our programmes we provide assistance to meet immediate humanitarian needs, prevent further displacement and contribute to durable solutions. Through our stand-by rosters we provide expertise as a strategic partner to the UN, as well as to national and international actors. Through our advocacy we strive for rights to be upheld and for lasting solutions to be achieved.

We take action during situations of armed conflict, and engage in other contexts where our competencies will add value. We are a rights-based organisation and are committed to the principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality. <sup>1</sup>

# INTRODUCTION



Protection is concerned with the *safety, dignity, and rights* of people affected by disaster or armed conflict. A commitment to protection underlies all humanitarian action and responses to displacement, and is an essential element of NRC's mission as a humanitarian agency that is dedicated to the protection and assistance of displaced and vulnerable persons. Through sensitive and proactive programming, expert deployments, courageous advocacy, and a commitment to partnership and coordination, NRC seeks to reduce or prevent threats to the safety, dignity, and well-being of individuals and communities, to reduce their vulnerability to such threats, and to strengthen their self-protection capacities, in all phases of displacement.

NRC recognises that joint efforts are needed to confront complex protection challenges. Other actors, such as States, protection-mandated UN

agencies, peacekeeping operations, and the ICRC, have fundamental protection responsibilities, mandates and capacities. The protection needs of displaced and vulnerable persons can only be dealt with through coordinated efforts. NRC's protection approach seeks to encourage state authorities, as the primary duty bearers, to uphold their responsibilities to protect civilians, including displaced persons, and to engage constructively with other mandated and non-mandated protection actors to maximise the scope and quality of protection efforts.

NRC subscribes to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee endorsed definition of protection as "all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of the relevant bodies of law, including human rights law, international humanitarian law, and refugee law."<sup>2</sup>

## TARGET GROUP

Displaced and vulnerable persons are often at immediate and heightened risk, facing insecurity, threats to their safety and dignity, and serious challenges to their ability to meet their basic needs. Displacement also incurs considerable stigma, risk, and challenges to the establishment of a dignified life. NRC frequently operates in contexts where displaced and vulnerable persons are exposed to violence, oppression, exploitation, coercion and deprivation, as well as restrictions on their access to services, assistance, livelihoods, and other rights.

While recognising that crisis-affected populations face numerous and multi-dimensional protection risks, NRC prioritises responding to risks that are caused or exacerbated by displacement; NRC will further prioritise by undertaking a rigorous protection analysis and considering NRC's competencies and added value.

## AGE, GENDER AND DIVERSITY

NRC seeks to ensure that the different needs, risks, and vulnerabilities faced by different groups, such as children, older people, youth, and minorities, are recognised in order to identify responses that address inequalities and specific needs.

NRC integrates a gender, age, and diversity perspective into all its work. This entails recognising and addressing the specific roles, needs, risks, vulnerabilities, capacities, and opportunities that women, men, girls, and boys face in displacement and crisis situations. While all conflict and disaster-affected populations are at risk, displaced women and girls are often exposed to greater risk and may have additional protection needs.

## PROTECTION PRINCIPLES

NRC is committed to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independence, and impartiality. It recognises the universality of human rights and is committed to non-discrimination, respect for human dignity, and prioritising the most vulnerable amongst its target group. The following principles provide a normative and legal framework for NRC's protection approach.

## SPHERE PROTECTION PRINCIPLES

NRC is guided in all its work by the Sphere Protection Principles<sup>3</sup>:

- 1 Avoid exposing people to further harm as a result of your actions.
- 2 Ensure people's access to impartial assistance – in proportion to need and without discrimination.
- 3 Protect people from physical and psychological harm arising from violence and coercion<sup>4</sup>.
- 4 Assist people to claim their rights, access available remedies and recover from the effects of abuse.



## RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

NRC is a rights-based organisation, and recognises individuals as rights-holders with legal entitlements to protection and assistance. NRC seeks to encourage duty-bearers to respect and protect the rights of displaced and vulnerable persons set out in domestic and international law, including international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, regional instruments such as the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention), and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

## PARTICIPATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

NRC endeavours to ensure the participation of displaced and vulnerable persons, including host communities, in all aspects of context and protection analysis, such as the assessment of

threats, vulnerabilities, and capacities, as well as the planning, design, and implementation of activities, through recognising individuals' and communities' self-protection capacities. NRC activities are conducted in a transparent and consultative manner, with accountability to beneficiaries and affected populations.

## COORDINATION

NRC participates actively in inter-institutional coordination structures, such as the Protection Cluster and its sub-clusters, encouraging concerted and coordinated approaches to achieve shared protection objectives. NRC works closely with UN partners, in particular the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, to strengthen a system-wide approach to protection. NRC's expert deployments provide important protection capacity support for UN partners.

# NRC'S PROTECTION OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH

For NRC, protection in practice represents a two-pronged duty:  
To work proactively and to work responsibly.

## WORK PROACTIVELY Reduce protection risks, change the environment

### OBJECTIVE

NRC takes proactive steps to reduce protection risks and change the environments that it works in, in order to prevent harm and abuse, to assist displaced and vulnerable persons to exercise their rights, and to contribute to durable solutions.

### APPROACH

NRC recognises that short-term, lifesaving assistance often does not protect displaced and vulnerable persons from violence, coercion or deprivation, nor does it address the root causes of conflict and displacement or resolve the inequalities that catalyse vulnerability. These challenges demand a more holistic approach to protection and the promotion of durable solutions. Therefore, NRC seeks to proactively reduce protection risks that affect displaced and vulnerable persons by reducing threats and vulnerabilities, and strengthening self-protection capacities. In particular:

- NRC takes all reasonable steps<sup>5</sup> in order to prevent, halt, or minimise the effects of abuse suffered by displaced and vulnerable persons by adapting programmes and initiating activities in response to protection threats.
- Where displaced and vulnerable persons are unable to access assistance and protection – either due to constraints on freedom of movement or as a result of deliberate withholding of goods and services – NRC takes all reasonable steps to restore access, through advocacy with relevant duty bearers, support to duty bearers and/or the direct provision of assistance.
- NRC assists displaced and vulnerable persons to understand and access their rights, and works to strengthen individuals' and communities' capacities for self-protection in order to cope with and overcome threats and abuses.
- NRC advocates with duty bearers, such as state authorities and protection-mandated agencies and institutions, to improve protection of displaced and vulnerable persons. This includes advocacy to improve protection regimes at national, regional and international levels, and to change policies, practices and attitudes relevant to the perpetration of threats and the creation or exacerbation of vulnerabilities.



- NRC advocates with perpetrators of abuse in order to moderate their attitudes and behaviour. This advocacy is based on an analysis of the motivation, intention, opportunity and capacity of perpetrators, and/or the capacity of duty bearers to alleviate threats and the relative vulnerability of individuals to those threats.
- NRC raises awareness of the rights of displaced and vulnerable persons, and of the responsibilities of national, regional and international duty bearers, in order to improve access to rights and to reduce instances of abuses.
- NRC supports and facilitates activities that break cycles of displacement and initiate durable solutions, including voluntary return, local integration or settlement in a third location, to contribute to sustainable protection.
- NRC addresses arising and increasing protection challenges during situations of armed conflict, and in other contexts where our competencies will add value.
- NRC supports partner organisations with protection capacity. Through ProCap and GenCap it deploys protection, child protection, GBV, and gender experts to protection-mandated and non-mandated UN agencies, peacekeeping operations, and other national, regional and international partners, to reinforce their capacity to provide strategic and operational protection coordination and response in conflicts and disasters.

## WORK RESPONSIBLY

### Ensure conflict and context sensitivity; do no harm

#### OBJECTIVE

NRC designs and implements activities in a way that responds to the particular needs and risks of displaced and vulnerable persons and that minimises negative, unintended consequences of its interventions. NRC consciously considers the political, social, environmental, and economic impact of its work, recognising its responsibility to do no harm.

#### APPROACH

NRC recognises that if humanitarian action and other responses to displacement are implemented without reference to the political, social, environmental, and economic context, they can have serious unintended consequences. Aid can sometimes feed into the cycle of conflict or create dependency. NRC therefore has a fundamental responsibility to avoid causing harm through its actions by ensuring that:

- NRC's field-level decision-making reflect an understanding of the protection threats in the local context and the relative vulnerability of different beneficiary groups to those threats, as well as their capacity to cope. NRC takes steps to ensure that programme design does not inadvertently expose beneficiaries to protection threats, or exacerbate vulnerabilities to those threats (safe programming). Rapid action is taken as soon as parts or all of a programme design is seen to contradict do no harm principles.
- NRC is sensitive to context, conflict and displacement dynamics. Aid can be manipulated to strengthen political and armed actors, or to legitimise particular people or factions in times of conflict. NRC employs comprehensive context analysis to design activities and programmes with careful consideration of political, social and economic factors to mitigate or eliminate negative unintended consequences to the extent possible. If negative consequences are unavoidable, the decision not to engage, or to disengage must always be an option.
- NRC considers social, political, economic, environmental, cultural, religious and/or other contextual factors that might make it more difficult for particular groups to access assistance and protection. NRC adapts activities and programmes to ensure that they do not exacerbate the vulnerability of particular groups by inadvertently reinforcing barriers to access.
- NRC delivers humanitarian assistance in an impartial and non-discriminatory manner, strictly on the basis of and in proportion to the needs of displaced and vulnerable persons, and in proportion to their vulnerabilities and capacities.
- All information collected and published by NRC, including for media purposes, is managed in a way that does not jeopardise the security, confidentiality or dignity of informants (including beneficiaries) or others who might be identifiable from the information.





# MAINSTREAMING PROTECTION

## Protection is an overarching objective for all NRC activities

Protection is a cross-cutting commitment affecting all of NRC's work. NRC integrates the protection principles, objectives, and approaches of this policy in all stages of its efforts, seeking to recognise and realise the safety, dignity, and rights of displaced and vulnerable persons. This policy can only be implemented if an understanding of protection is mainstreamed into all of NRC's efforts by ensuring that:

- Protection considerations, including an analysis of threats, vulnerabilities, and capacities, and the potential for negative, unintended consequences, are applied at every stage of the NRC programme and project cycle. The protection analysis should identify the particular vulnerabilities or threats which may arise due to the causes and nature of displacement.
- All of NRC's work is informed by regular consideration of the likely intended and unintended impact on beneficiaries, affected populations and the prevailing political, social, cultural, environmental and economic context. This includes all technical and support elements such as procurement, logistics, human resources, security risk management, and communications activities, as well as beneficiary selection and partner identification.
- All NRC staff are trained and guided to have – at a minimum – a working understanding of the NRC Protection Policy, and how this should be applied and operationalised in their day-to-day activities.
- NRC invests in institutional protection capacity development and supports cross-fertilisation of expertise, understanding, and ideas across the organisation.
- All NRC staff has a role and a responsibility for actively contributing to protection objectives. The responsibility for integrating and mainstreaming protection in NRC programmes, expert deployments, and advocacy lies with the line management.

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### FOOTNOTES:

1 NRC vision and mission statement, NRC Policy Paper, 2012

2 Protection of Internally Displaced Persons, Inter-Agency Standing Committee Policy Paper, New York, 1999, <http://www.brookings.edu/fp/projects/idp/iascprotectionpaper.pdf>

3 Sphere Handbook, 2011, <http://www.spherehandbook.org/>. These principles are echoed in ICRC's Professional Standards for Protection Work, which emphasise the need to place affected populations, communities and individuals at the centre of protection activities.

4 As a humanitarian NGO, NRC is not in a position to use force to provide physical protection or security to civilians/displaced people.

5 This means actions that are within NRC's mission, competencies and capacity, and that can be undertaken without endangering the safety and security of staff, beneficiaries and/or affected populations.





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