

RCRC

Red Cross Red Crescent

Issue 3 · 2015

www.redcross.int

A planet of extremes

Forecast calls for global and grass-roots action

Fighting by the rules

Getting warring parties to respect the law of war

A stronger base

How to nourish more sustainable local humanitarian action



Dying for a better life



THE MAGAZINE OF THE INTERNATIONAL
RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is made up of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the National Societies.



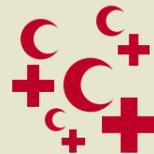
ICRC

The International Committee of the Red Cross 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.



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest volunteer-based humanitarian network, reaching 150 million people each year through its 189 member National Societies. Together, the IFRC 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. Guided by Strategy 2020 — a collective plan of action to tackle the major humanitarian and development challenges of this decade — the IFRC is committed to 'saving lives and changing minds'.



National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies embody the work and principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in more than 189 countries. National Societies act as auxiliaries to the public authorities of their own countries in the humanitarian field and provide a range of services including disaster relief, health and social programmes. During wartime, National Societies assist the affected civilian population and support the army medical services where appropriate.

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

is guided by seven Fundamental Principles:

humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality.

All Red Cross and Red Crescent activities have one central purpose:

to help without discrimination those who suffer and thus contribute to peace in the world.

Migration: put humanity first

WHEN I THINK of the plight of migrants — and the global Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's response to their suffering — two photographs taken in Italy this year come to my mind. The first portrays a young boy, just landed in the Italian port city of Catania, in the arms of an Italian Red Cross volunteer. In the second, that same toddler plays with volunteers in an Italian Red Cross camp for migrants in Rome.

I imagine the onward journey this child will make. Along the way, will he be held in the arms of an Austrian Red Cross volunteer? Will he receive a meal from the German Red Cross or get medical care from another National Society, depending on where his family goes next? Perhaps they have already been helped by the Movement, in the country from which they fled or somewhere else well before landing in Europe.

Along heavily travelled migration routes in Europe and beyond, the Movement's direct, front-line assistance and compassionate response make a powerful statement: whatever their current legal status, people fleeing conflict, persecution, poverty or natural disaster deserve to be treated with humanity. Fortunately, many others also take this stance. Moved by images and news of desperate migrants, people around the world have stepped forward to help.

Earlier this year, the world was deeply moved by another image — the photo of a child, a Syrian boy named Aylan, who drowned in the waters between Turkey and Greece. This tragedy shocked the conscience of many, inspired even greater empathy for migrant families and helped change the tide of public opinion. It even helped shift migration policy in certain countries.

Still, discussion at the international level too often focuses on securing borders,



Photo: Giovanni Zambello/IFRC

We must also work together much more effectively — in countries of origin, transit and destination — to place human beings at the centre of our collective response.

rather than on understanding the causes, providing long-term solutions and offering a humane response. People fleeing for their lives from cities destroyed by bombs or escaping persecution, starvation or the aftershock of natural disasters, will always seek new pathways to safety. If legal avenues to migration are increasingly restricted, those routes are likely to become even more dangerous.

Earlier this year, the Movement launched the Protect Humanity campaign (#ProtectHumanity) in which we ask people around the world to join our call for the protection and dignified treatment of people along all migratory routes. We will present this call to states gathered in Geneva, Switzerland in December for the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, a global meeting convened every four years to discuss critical humanitarian concerns and concrete proposals for reducing human suffering.

What are we calling on states to do? Along migratory routes, governments must take the necessary steps to protect the safety, well-being and dignity of all migrants, regardless of their legal status. Migrants must have full access to humanitarian assistance, while states must be prepared to search for and rescue people in distress at sea and work harder to protect and assist victims of human trafficking.

Asylum seekers must have access to fair and efficient processes for determining asylum claims, as well as medical care and the means of staying connected with their families. Public officials, meanwhile, must clearly articulate their rejection of violence, xenophobia and discrimination against migrants. Finally, everyone concerned must work together to find political, economic and social solutions to address the root causes of forced migration.

As a global humanitarian network, the Movement is present in countries where conflict, chronic instability, poverty and natural disaster force people to flee their homes in great distress. What we see in these places tells us that we have much work to do to prevent and reduce suffering and to protect vulnerable people, wherever they may be.

We must also work together much more effectively — in countries of origin, transit and destination — to place human beings at the centre of our collective response. Together, we can greatly diminish the despair along dangerous migratory routes and even put an end to these devastating photographs of shipwrecks and drowned children. Sign the petition at #ProtectHumanity or www.ifrc.org/protecthumanity and join our call for a safer and more humane world.

By **Francesco Rocca**

Francesco Rocca is president of the Italian Red Cross and vice president of the IFRC.

More Movement workers killed in Yemen

The conflict in Yemen claimed the lives of four more Movement workers in recent months. In late September, two Yemen Red Crescent Society volunteers, Qaed Faisal, 28, and Omar Fareh, 31, were killed along with other civilians during an airstrike in southern Yemen. "It is another tragic event for all of us in the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement," said Fuad Al-Makhazy, secretary general of the Yemen Red Crescent Society. "Since March, we have lost a total eight staff and volunteers in Yemen."

The volunteers' deaths came only three weeks after two staff members of the ICRC were shot and killed in Yemen as they travelled in a convoy between the cities of Saada and Sana'a. They worked as a field officer and as a driver. Both were from Yemen. "The ICRC condemns in the strongest possible terms what appears to have been the deliberate targeting of our staff," said the head of the ICRC delegation in Yemen, Antoine Grand.

Indian Red Cross responds to monsoon floods

As monsoon clouds threatened still more rain, the Indian Red Cross Society geared up to respond to floods that killed more than 200 people and affected some 10 million others. More than 40 million hectares of land in the country is

prone to flooding, with an average of 18.6 million hectares of land flooded each year. "As well as assessing what people need, our trained volunteers are in action distributing emergency supplies of tarpaulins, blankets and other aid," said S.P. Agarwal, secretary general of the Indian Red Cross. In response, the IFRC allocated US\$ 355,000 from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund to support Indian Red Cross efforts to help 80,000 people.

Flash floods leave families stranded in Pakistan

In Pakistan, monsoon rains coupled with outbursts from glacial lakes — caused when natural dams of ice or rock in northern mountain ranges suddenly fail — have so far claimed 219 lives and affected about 1.5 million people in more than 4,000 villages. Allahyaar, a 45-year-old farmer from Chak Dumra village, barely had time to grab his family's meagre savings. "Our village experienced flooding in previous years but every year the water level rises higher than before," he said. An IFRC emergency appeal helped the Pakistan Red Crescent Society address the immediate needs of 5,700 families.

Myanmar villages recovering after farmlands flooded

As monsoon flood waters began to recede in the south-western delta region of Myanmar, the fields around villages such as Yay Dar Gyi still looked more like a lake than farmlands in late August. Water levels in some paddy fields were three metres deep and the homes built on stilts just barely rose above the water. "The Red Cross has already started to plan for the long-term recovery of affected communities in other parts of the country where the floods have receded and people have returned to their villages," said Nicolas Verdy, IFRC operations coordinator in the area.

Irresponsible transfer of weapons is rife

Many countries are still involved in illegal arms transfers despite having committed themselves to an international treaty to regulate the flow of such weapons, according to



Photo: Ahmed Firoz/ICRC

Members of Bangladesh's physically challenged cricket team (above) took part in the five-nation cricket tournament for people with physical disabilities, organized by the ICRC in September. Teams from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, England, India and Pakistan competed in the tournament, held in Bangladesh.

the ICRC. Hundreds of thousands of civilians are being killed, injured or forcibly displaced in conflicts fuelled by such transfers. "I am concerned about the gap... between the duty to ensure respect for international humanitarian law in arms transfers and the actual transfer practices of too many states," said ICRC President Peter Maurer in a video delivered to states party to the Arms Trade Treaty, who were meeting in Mexico in August to decide on mechanisms for implementing the agreement.

Movement renews calls for end to nuclear weapons

At the 25th United Nations Conference on Disarmament Issues in Hiroshima, Japan, Movement representatives emphasized the need for governments to take urgent action to ban and eliminate nuclear weapons through a

binding international agreement. "Nuclear weapons and their terrible humanitarian consequences threaten the existence of each and every one of us," IFRC President Tadateru Konohe told the gathering.

Mounting needs spur larger distributions for refugees

With support from the Lebanese Red Cross, the ICRC distributed 90 tonnes of food to around 10,000 Syrian refugees in northern Lebanon in late September. "It's the first time we have made such a large food distribution in Lebanon since the Syrian crisis began," said Jeroen Carrin, ICRC's coordinator for the food distribution. "It's a sign that needs are growing significantly." Food was also given to Lebanese families who have been hosting the refugees.

Humanitarian index

25: Percentage of the world's migrants who are in Africa.*
400: Average number of people who die annually crossing the Mexico–United States border.**
54,000: Number of people known to have undertaken sea crossings in 2014 in Asia Pacific region.***
175,000: Approximate number of Syrian people who entered Greece by boat in 2015 as of 10 September — roughly 70 per cent of all migrants entering Greece this year. More than 50,000 people were from Afghanistan, 11,000 from Pakistan and 9,000 from Iraq.***
432,761: Number of migrants and refugees who have reached Europe

by sea in 2015 as of 10 September.***
1.2 million: Number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon — an estimated 20 per cent of the country's population.****
1.59 million: Number of Syrians who had fled to Turkey by the end of 2014.****
13.9 million: Estimated number of people newly displaced due to conflict or persecution in 2014. This includes 11 million people newly displaced within the borders of their own country, the highest figure on record. The other 2.9 million were new refugees.****
59.5 million: Number of people forcibly displaced worldwide.****

Sources: *IFRC, **United States Border Patrol, ***International Organization for Migration, ****Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

ISSUE 3 · 2015 · www.redcross.int

Cover story

Dying for a better life

The horrific tragedies and struggles that have befallen people hoping to reach safe shores in Europe have propelled the migration issue to the forefront of global humanitarian agenda.

Horn of Africa faces a new dilemma

The Gulf of Aden, which separates the Horn of Africa from the Gulf states, is one of the world's most deadly border crossings for migrants and refugees. Now the conflict in Yemen has reversed traditional migration patterns and created new humanitarian challenges.

'Anywhere that is safe'

For many migrants who make dangerous sea crossings or walk many kilometres towards Europe, finding a safe haven is a primary concern. In many cases, National Society volunteers are the first to offer aid.

So close, yet so far

Along the seaside border of Italy and France, people fleeing conflict, persecution and poverty are trapped in limbo, losing hope. The Italian Red Cross offers help both when migrants arrive and as they move further along the migration trail.

The border of broken dreams

Sent back after being caught by Mexican police on their way through Mexico to the United States, Guatemalan migrants are left at the border with little more than the clothes they are wearing. The Guatemalan Red Cross works to make their return less painful.

Articles, letters to the editors and other correspondence should be addressed to:
Red Cross Red Crescent
 P.O. Box 303, CH-1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland
 E-mail: rccr@ifrc.org ISSN No. 1019-9349

Editor
 Malcolm Lucard

Production Officer
 Paul Lemerise

Design
 Baseline Arts Ltd, Oxford, UK

Layout
 New Internationalist, Oxford, UK

Printed
 on chlorine-free paper by Artgraphic Cavin SA, Switzerland

Editorial board
ICRC
 Mohini Ghai Kramer
 Dorothea Krimitsas
 Sophie Orr

IFRC
 Benoît Carpentier
 Maureen McKenna
 Nina de Rochefort

4 Focus 14

A world on the run

The migration debate now engulfing Europe has in many ways been propelled by powerful images. This collection of photographs tells some of the lesser-known dramas of the global migration saga, some far from Europe's shores.

Between the cracks

Even for those who manage to make it to a destination country with a strong economy and a generous social safety net, the odyssey is not over. Living in the shadows of an affluent social welfare society, migrants and refugees in Norway struggle to survive.

A planet of extremes

As the planet warms, climate patterns are changing and in many cases becoming more extreme. New technologies and approaches are being used hand-in-hand with traditional knowledge to help prepare communities for extreme weather events.

Fighting by the rules

Could a voluntary, non-politicized compliance system bridge the gap between the intent of international humanitarian law and the reality of what happens on the ground during combat?

A stronger base for local action

Beyond projects and emergency response, how can international humanitarian organizations support sustainable local action?

Resources 29

Strengthening healthcare after Ebola; how better to manage epidemics; and more.

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of researchers and support staff of the ICRC, the IFRC and National Societies. The magazine is published three times a year in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish and is available in 189 countries, with a circulation of more than 70,000.

The opinions expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Unsolicited articles are welcomed, but cannot be returned.

Red Cross Red Crescent reserves the right to edit all articles. Articles and photos not covered by copyright may be reprinted without prior permission. Please credit Red Cross Red Crescent.

The maps in this publication are for information purposes only and have no political significance.

On the cover: A migrant crosses the River Suchiate, which runs along the border of Guatemala and Mexico near the Guatemalan town of El Carmen. Photo credit: Vladimir Rodas/IFRC

Photos this page from top: Stephen Ryan/IFRC; John Engedal Nissen/IFRC; Vladimir Rodas/IFRC; Noel Celis/IFRC; Benoît Matsha-Carpentier/IFRC.



4. Dying for a better life



8. 'Anywhere that is safe'



12. The border of broken dreams



20. A planet of extremes



26. A stronger base for local action

Dying for a better life



📍 A local man helps an exhausted Syrian refugee who jumped off a dinghy and swam to the beach on the Greek island of Lesbos in late September. Photo: REUTERS/Yannis Behrakis

April 2015: A boat carrying some 550 migrants sinks off the coast of Libya. More than 400 people are believed to have drowned while roughly 150 people are rescued and taken to a hospital in southern Italy. Six days later, another shipwreck off the coast of Italy's Lampedusa island south of Sicily claims the lives of some 800 people.

August 2015: Two boats carrying about 500 migrants sink after leaving the port of Zuwara, Libya. The same day, an abandoned truck in Austria is found to contain the bodies of 71 people, believed to be from Syria.

September 2015: The photo of a 3-year-old Syrian boy, who drowned along with his mother and 5-year-old brother while trying to reach Greece by boat from Turkey, inspires widespread sympathy for migrants and asylum seekers.

THESE ARE JUST SOME of the more shocking stories among the many tragedies that have befallen people hoping to reach safe shores in Europe in 2015. While this is not a new phenomenon, the frequency of such atrocities this year

have helped to make migration the central defining humanitarian, political and economic issue of the day.

Meanwhile, images and stories of the suffering and frustration of people on the migration trail have spurred both immediate humanitarian outreach and tough measures to keep the migrants out of so-called 'fortress Europe': hundreds of people blocked at a train station in Hungary; people scaling razor-wire fences in a Spanish enclave in North Africa; crowds of men desperately jumping onto trucks entering the tunnel that connects France and England; thousands of people walking along train tracks through Serbia, many carrying small children.

Many are like the Samir family, who fled Syria and travelled through the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where they were cared for by Macedonian Red Cross doctor Sandra Ignjatovska in a crowded tent near Gevgelija. The family had just crossed the border from Greece after travelling for 20 days from Daraa, in southern Syria, with four children all under 6



Photo: John Engedal Nissen/IFRC

Help all along the way

National Societies along migration routes have mobilized to offer medical care as well as provide food, water, hygiene kits and help contacting loved ones, among other services.



Photo: Tatu Blomquist/Finnish Red Cross

Migration in Africa

The humanitarian needs of migrants don't begin in Europe. The Movement also supports those displaced by war in many parts Africa, where more than 20 per cent of the world's migration is taking place.

Migration to Europe

670,000: Number of arrivals in Europe by sea in 2015.

3,100: Number of migrant deaths at sea in the Mediterranean in 2015.

Source: International Organization for Migration, as of 21 October 2015.



Photo: Turkish Red Crescent/IFRC

Neighbours to conflict

The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement is also helping migrants in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, countries that are hosting by far the largest number of asylum seekers from the Syrian and Iraqi crises.



Photo: Ibrahim Mallal/IFRC

In places of conflict

The Movement also assists people in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, countries from which a large number of migrants to Europe are coming.

years old. "We were five days on the border of Syria and Turkey, sleeping in the open, and all the time there were shots and sniper fire from above," says 24-year-old Abukushlif Samir, the father of two of the children. On this day, the family is cared for by volunteers as they wait to catch a train north towards Serbia. They are given food, water, nappies and hygiene kits.

"It was very bad on the sea," Samir recalls. "We were seven hours on the water and we almost drowned — the little boat we were in had 70 people and it kept filling with water. The boat behind us with 60 people sank and they all drowned. There were many babies; we saw it all happening right in front of our eyes."

By night-time, the family has gone, heading north to Serbia and Hungary, hoping to reach family in Sweden. Roughly two-thirds of the people heading north from Greece through eastern Europe are, like the Samirs, Syrians fleeing conflict — a fact that has brought greater attention to the plight of people fleeing the horrors of war.

With more than 60 conflicts ongoing around the world, the number of forcibly displaced people globally has reached unprecedented proportions. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates there are now 59.5 million forcibly displaced people worldwide; 14 million of them were newly displaced in 2014.

For the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, responding to the needs of the displaced has long been at the core of its humanitarian mission — whether the displacement was caused by conflict, natural disaster, climate change, poverty or violence. With the humanitarian needs magnifying dramatically, National Societies along newly emerging migration trails have quickly geared up and responded.

The IFRC and National Societies worldwide, meanwhile, have launched numerous emergency appeals while the ICRC is supporting National Societies with services such as Restoring Family Links, giving migrants an opportunity to search for or make phone calls to loved ones. In September, the Movement launched the Protect Humanity campaign (#ProtectHumanity), which asked people around the world to join a call to states for the protection and dignified treatment of migrants along all migratory routes. ■

"We were seven hours on the water and we almost drowned. The boat behind us with 60 people sank and they all drowned. There were many babies; we saw it all happening right in front of our eyes."

Abukushlif Samir, a 24-year-old father who fled southern Syria with his family and received help from the Red Cross of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Horn of Africa faces a new dilemma

The Gulf of Aden has long been one of the world's deadliest places for migrants. Now the conflict in Yemen has reversed traditional migration patterns and created new humanitarian challenges.

AMINA AND HER FAMILY decided to flee from Shumaili in Yemen after surviving a harrowing 15 days of shelling earlier this year. "We were used to gunfire sounds," she says, "but it later changed to aerial bombardments coming down like rain. I had nowhere to run, no underground shelter to hide in. We had to flee Yemen for our safety."

Amina is one of thousands of Yemeni people who fled the fighting in Yemen by taking the risky, 260-kilometre journey across the Gulf of Aden to find refuge in Somalia, a country that has itself endured a succession of internal conflicts for two decades and suffers from devastating cyclical drought.

It's an ironic and tragic turn of events. For years, Yemen has been a destination for many Somalis who aspired to leave conflict and poverty behind by applying for refugee status in Yemen or carrying on towards Saudi Arabia.

As the Yemen conflict worsened throughout the year, many of those Somalis have returned home, often on the same boats as Yemeni asylum seekers.

One of those Somali returnees is Zeynab, who arrived in Bosaso, Somalia with her three children. "I remember preparing breakfast for my children, but it was not meant to be," she says. "The gunfire and explosions had become intense. The fighting was at our doorstep. We had no choice but to flee for safety."



The returnees and asylum seekers have been arriving in ships at the two main Somali ports of Berbera in Somaliland and Bosaso in Puntland. The ships arrive day and night, sometimes with up to 1,000 people on board.

In both locations, the ICRC provided a small amount of food and other essential items and Somali Red Crescent Society volunteers were on call, 24 hours a day, to offer basic first aid. Free phone calls were provided to all new arrivals to contact relatives back in Yemen, Somalia or elsewhere.

Zeynab, for example, lost contact with her husband amid the chaos. Upon arriving at Bosaso, Somali Red Crescent volunteers helped the two re-establish contact. "I was so worried," says Zeynab, who had received no news from her husband for more than a month. "I heard his voice on the phone and was relieved he is alive."

A similar dynamic is unfolding in Djibouti, which neighbours Somalia to the north and has received both Yemeni refugees and Ethiopian migrants, many of whom had been living in Yemen for years.

At the ports of Djibouti and Obock, the main entry points, the Red Crescent Society of Djibouti has also been offering free phone calls to people who want to call their families and say, "I am safe and well in Djibouti." Unfortunately, the situation in Yemen at present means volunteers and ICRC staff cannot send Red Cross messages on paper to people living in Yemen.

"The gunfire and explosions had become intense. The fighting was at our doorstep. We had no choice but to flee for safety."

Zeynab, a woman from Somalia who had fled to Yemen to escape conflict and poverty, only to be forced back when war erupted in Yemen in 2014



"In Somalia, the ICRC team not only monitored RFL [Restoring Family Links] services but wanted to see if those arriving from Yemen had other needs that the ICRC could address or forward to the relevant agencies," says Ahmed Zaroug, the protection coordinator overseeing the RFL programme in Somalia.

"If you have unaccompanied children, they would have specific needs," he notes. "They arrive traumatized from the dire incidents they have seen, while others are sick and some are wounded." ■

By Rita Nyaga and Miraj Mohamud

Rita Nyaga is an assistant in the ICRC Somalia delegation's economic security unit based in Nairobi. Miraj Mohamud is a communication assistant for ICRC's Somalia Delegation and a contributor to the ICRC Somalia Blog (blogs.icrc.org/somalia).

A global phenomenon

After being cast adrift in the Andaman Sea by human traffickers and floating aimlessly for three months with little food, water or shelter, 561 migrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar landed on a beach in Aceh, Indonesia in May. Rescued by local fishermen, many barely had the strength to make it to shore.

"Most of them, including the children, were in very bad shape," says Ahmad Yani, who works at the North Aceh branch of the Indonesian Red Cross Society, locally known as Palang Merah Indonesia (PMI). "Their health problems ranged from dehydration to psychological trauma."

After helping to move the migrants to a safer place not far from the beach, PMI helped establish a health centre in collaboration with a local association of doctors to provide first aid and health services. PMI volunteers also operated a field kitchen, serving meals to all, three times a day.

Within a week, more than 1,800 migrants had arrived at different points along the coast of eastern Sumatra and local government established six shelters in response. PMI also distributed clothes, blankets and baby kits, gave health and hygiene promotion sessions and offered Restoring Family Links services so migrants could send messages to family in their countries of origin.

Perilous routes

The landings in eastern Sumatra are just one example of the dangerous migratory routes people are taking around the world. In South-East Asia, many people fleeing conflict, oppression, poverty or the aftermath of natural disaster take boats towards Australia and Indonesia. Boats carrying hundreds of migrants are landing or are frequently intercepted at sea in the waters around Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand. The overland routes are also perilous. In May of this year, Malaysian authorities uncovered several mass graves among campsites believed to have been used by people trafficking migrants from Myanmar.

One of the most dangerous maritime border crossings is the Gulf of Aden, a long-time migratory crossing for people leaving the Horn of Africa. Now, it's the scene of reverse migration with people fleeing Yemen. Though they receive far less global media attention, sea disasters in the Gulf of Aden are frequent—in February 2015, for example, roughly 35 people went missing while making the crossing in a small fishing vessel. According to the International Organization for Migration, the East African crossing is the second most deadly border crossing area for migrants after the Mediterranean.

☞ A man carries a sick woman from a ship arriving at the port of Bosaso in Somalia's Puntland region, in June 2015. The boat was carrying hundreds of families fleeing violence in Yemen.

Photo: REUTERS/Abdiqani Hassan





'Anywhere that is safe'

For many who make dangerous sea crossings, or walk hundreds of kilometres towards Europe, their first concern is finding safety.

Escaping conflict in Iraq, Farah and her parents made their way to the Greek island of Kos in August. Each day, they came to wait at the police station to find out if their migration registration process was complete.

Photo: Stephen Ryan/IFRC

ON THE GREEK ISLAND OF LESBOS, in a makeshift camp outside a 'first reception centre', the place where newly arriving migrants must register with authorities, hundreds of families wait in crude shelters, often for days.

One of those waiting is Daod, who says he and his wife Layla thought only of the lives of their two children when setting off on their perilous journey from Afghanistan.

"We want to find somewhere where it safe to raise a family," he says. "In Afghanistan, nowhere is safe for us; you never know when the next bang on the door will be people with guns."

The family hope to make it to Germany and register for asylum. "I have heard it is a good place to raise children," says Daod. "But we will be happy anywhere that is safe, and we can be together." Daod and his wife are not alone in this hope.

On the island of Lesbos, between 1,500 and 2,000 people arrive each day. The Hellenic Red Cross is providing assistance to those at the first reception centres, but resources are in short supply. The number of people arriving in Greece has continued to rise, with estimates of more than 54,000 in the first three weeks of August alone.

In their temporary 'home' — made from plastic sheeting on one side, a low olive tree on the other, and some cardboard as a floor — Mustafa explains about the journey taken by his family. "We came from Afghanistan, by bus to Turkey. We are tired, but we must wait here for the registration before we can carry on."

It has not been an easy journey. Mustafa says that he was scared crossing the sea at night. "There were more than 50 in the small boat. We know it is not safe, we know people die, but we have no choice; we cannot go back."

The Hellenic Red Cross has been distributing relief items to 450 people twice each week at the first reception centre. Outside the centre, however, there are thousands more who are also in need.

Today, Greece is bearing the greatest share of the burden of migration in Europe. Since the beginning of the year, more than 160,000 people have arrived in the country, the vast majority by crossing the Aegean Sea to one of the many islands close to the Turkish coast.

The island of Kos has also received a large number of people migrating to Europe, as it is one of the closest points to Turkey. Each night, hundreds climb into small rubber boats, dozens in each, and cross the sea in darkness. They bring only what they can carry, as there is little space in the boats. It is not a safe journey; numerous people have drowned while attempting to reach Kos, including small children.

As the number of people arriving on the island rose over the past months, the Kos branch of Hellenic Red Cross has done everything it can to provide assistance, using resources raised locally to help those in need before relief items arrived from Athens, purchased using funds provided under the IFRC's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund.

On the first day of distributions, some 350 people received food and hygiene items. Blankets and infant packs including sanitary items were also given to those caring for babies. "We are trying to meet their most immediate needs but it is not enough. More support is urgently required," explains Irene Panagiopoulou, president of the local branch in Kos.

"We are trying to meet their most immediate needs but it is not enough. More support is urgently required."

Irene Panagiopoulou, president of the local Hellenic Red Cross branch on the island of Kos, Greece



Daod and Layla from Kabul, Afghanistan, say they took their two children on a boat from Turkey to the Greek island of Lesbos in their search of a safe place to raise their family.

Photo: Stephen Ryan/IFRC

Habib Jaami from Afghanistan is one of those waiting to register in Kos. He crossed the sea from Turkey together with his wife and his cousin's family, which includes five children. They explain that the two families fled from Afghanistan after receiving death threats. "I was famous in Afghanistan as a TV presenter, but I interviewed the 'wrong' people, and this is the price; to flee for my life," says Jaami.

By Stephen Ryan

Stephen Ryan is a communications consultant for the IFRC.



Photo: Stephen Ryan/IFRC

Why are they coming?

Photos like this one, which shows the wholesale destruction of what was once a highly populated urban neighbourhood, provide a stark response to the question: why are so many people fleeing their homes in search of safety? It's not just conflicts that are leading to the rapid rise in migration, but also the nature of those conflicts, which are often being waged in ways that

blatantly contradict the basic provisions of international humanitarian law (IHL). According to IHL, for example, civilian populations should not be targeted and combatants must take steps to avoid damage to civilian structures, as well as the health facilities and the water-and-sanitation systems that sustain life. Indiscriminate use of highly lethal explosive weaponry in and around densely populated urban areas, however, is not only claiming thousands of lives but eliminates any chance of habitation for many years to come.

The nature of conflict

"I am not aware of any definitive studies to show that people are fleeing due to specific violations of IHL but what we are observing is that the way war is being waged, in heavily populated areas with high-intensity weaponry, is certainly a contributing factor to the major displacements we are seeing around the world today," says Pierre Gentile, head of the ICRC's protection division.

The current migration phenomenon has also highlighted the strains that the conflict in Syria has placed on surrounding countries such as Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey. The number of refugees now living in Lebanon — some 1.1 million — is roughly equal to one-fifth of the country's population. The United Nations estimates more than 1.7 million Syrian refugees are in Turkey and more than 650,000 are in Jordan.



So close, yet so far

Along the Mediterranean coast near the border of Italy and France, people fleeing conflict, persecution and poverty live in limbo. A local branch of the Italian Red Cross rises to the challenge.

☺ Migrants camped at the French–Italian border ask for a humanitarian and political solution to their plight in June 2015. Photo: Fiametta Cogliolo/Italian Red Cross

ABOUT 30 KILOMETRES from the border with France, the Italian city of Ventimiglia is nestled on a narrow band of flat ground between steep, craggy cliffs and the Mediterranean coast.

The picturesque landscape is one reason thousands of tourists come here and to the Côte d'Azur just across the border to enjoy sunshine, beaches, amusement parks or go for a cruise in one of the many pleasure craft that dot the area's harbours and bays.

In this holiday paradise, however, another narrative has unfolded this past year. Throughout the summer, more than 4,500 people from places as far flung as Bangladesh, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Libya, Mali, Pakistan, Sudan, Syria and elsewhere have come through Ventimiglia, trying desperately to get across the border into France. With little prospect of work or legal residency in Italy, they hope France will bring them one step closer to a place to call home.

But their chances are slim. With no visas, and little more than the clothes on their backs, their only hope is to sneak across the border by train, walk along the train rails at night or trek by way of rocky, treacherous trails across the mountains that line the coast — all of which are patrolled by French border agents.

Mohamed Omer, a 25-year old from Sudan, managed to make it across the border to Nice, where he was arrested and spent four days in jail before being brought back to the Italian border.

"I will try again," says Omer, who arrived from Egypt in small boat with 500 people only one week earlier. "Again and again and again. As many times as it takes." Like many here, he doesn't have a precise destination. "Anywhere," he says. "Any job at all. Anything I can do to support myself, to promote myself and help my people."

Reaching a boiling point

While the border area near Ventimiglia has long provided a route to France for migrants, things reached

a crisis point this summer after the arrival of numerous large boats, packed with migrants, at various Italian ports. Hearing this border crossing was possible, many got the first train they could catch.

Once they got to the border, however, they were stopped by French border police. Before long, hundreds of migrants had gathered along the waterfront close to the border checkpoint. Meanwhile, another several hundred migrants had taken up temporary residence at Ventimiglia's main train station.

Red Cross volunteers from Ventimiglia and the coastal region of Liguria joined other local supporters who brought food, water and other supplies to migrants at the station and those camping near the border. Local authorities then asked the Red Cross branch in Ventimiglia to establish a shelter in a vacant building adjacent to the train station.

By late August, more than 4,300 migrants had stayed at the shelter — with more than 50 new people every night on average — and the Ventimiglia branch of the Italian Red Cross has served breakfast, lunch and dinner to roughly 200 people a day.

"The biggest challenge now is that winter is coming and we don't have a heating system in the shelter," says Paola Amato, the branch president. "It rains a lot in Liguria and it's cold and windy here in the winter."

A local and national response

It has been a huge challenge for the branch. But with support from volunteers from around Italy who come to work in 12-day rotations, Amato feels the branch will be able to continue offering key services — once-a-week visits from a legal adviser, free phone calls to relatives back home and free medical services — for the foreseeable future.

On any given day, volunteer nurses and doctors from various parts of Italy attend to patients inside a mobile Red Cross medical clinic while an Arabic-speaking volunteer translates for the camp's many Arabic speakers. "At the beginning there was a lot of scabies," explains Tommaso Croese, a medical doctor who has volunteered at the shelter since it was set up in June. "Now there are just a few cases. Blood pressure is a big issue, as well as people with abscesses, fevers and coughs, and we see some pregnant women."

The response in Ventimiglia is just one example of the Italian Red Cross's efforts to help migrants, from the first moment they set foot on Italian soil, to camps in cities such as Rome and Milan, and in other cities where migrants pass through or try to settle.

In ports such as Messina, Palermo and Catania, for example, Red Cross volunteers have been on the scene when boats arrive, providing immediate healthcare, food and shelter or translation services. In Rome and Milan, they provide emergency health

services in the main train stations and in Rome, the National Society established a 'tent city' nearby to provide shelter, food and medical checks for hundreds in need. For migrants or asylum seekers who plan to stay in Italy, it offers various services to help people integrate into Italian society.

The search for solutions

In Ventimiglia, the people staying at the shelter express gratitude for the assistance. Many have survived harrowing journeys and arrived with nothing more than the clothes on their backs. A 23-year old from Sudan, Osman Ibrahim arrived only a week earlier on a boat from Egypt and doesn't know where to turn. While he is grateful for the Red Cross's help, he yearns for a permanent resolution to his plight.

"This is not the first time I've received help from the Red Cross," Ibrahim adds, who received Red Cross assistance at a refugee camp in western Chad after leaving Sudan. "For any food and shelter, I say 'thank you' to the Red Cross. But it's not a solution to my problem."

For many of the migrants here, the solution involves not just their own dreams of legal residency and a job in Europe, but also more serious attention from the international community towards resolving the conflicts and other crises back home that are causing this exodus towards Europe. It also means finding some kind of fix to a situation in which migrants are trapped at one of Europe's borders, unable to go home, unable to stay, yet unable to move forward.

"This is not something we decided to do last week," says 23-year-old Amir from the Darfur region of Sudan, who says he worked for three years in Libya, where he was imprisoned as an undocumented migrant, in order to save money to get a boat to Italy. "We've worked a long time and suffered a lot in order to get out. The war has destroyed everything and we have nothing to go back to and nothing to lose. So we will keep trying for as long as it takes." ■

By **Malcolm Lucard**

Malcolm Lucard is the editor of *Red Cross Red Crescent* magazine.



☺ Red Cross volunteers and staff welcome more than 570 migrants as they leave an Italian coastguard ship in the port at Messina, Sicily, in July 2015. The volunteers offered the migrants food, water, health checks and psychological support, among other services.

Photo: Carlos Spottorno/Panos

"The war has destroyed everything and we have nothing to go back to and nothing to lose. So we will keep trying for as long as it takes."

Amir, 23, from Sudan



The border of broken dreams

Sent back to Guatemala after being caught by police in Mexico, Guatemalan migrants arrive at the border with little more than the clothes they are wearing. The Guatemalan Red Cross works to make the return less painful.

AT THE IMMIGRATION CHECKPOINT in El Carmen, a small, sleepy town on the border between Guatemala and Mexico, a large tourist bus pulls up to the kerb. Judging by the colourful football t-shirts, brandishing the logos for Real Madrid and Barcelona, this could almost pass for a bus full of football fans on the way to watch a match.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The expressions on people's faces are sullen, weary, downcast, worn by failure and disappointment.

The bus has been hired by the Mexican police to return Guatemalan migrants to their country of origin. The bus on this day has brought some 40 people to El Carmen, where the Guatemalan Red Cross has a migrant reception centre and where Erik Adalberto García, a staff member, greets them and tells them about the services offered.

"You can get something to eat and drink, get a bit of rest, obtain information on how to get home, make a free telephone call to your families and receive counselling from a psychologist," García tells them, standing in the aisle of the bus and handing out leaflets.

"Some of them do not even know where they are," he explains later, "and we have to show them where El Carmen is and how they can get back to their homes."

Between 30 and 40 people arrive here every day, the majority of them adult men, between 18 and 40

years old, although often there are also women and children.

Forgotten borders

While much media and political attention is placed on what happens at the border of Mexico and the United States, people around the world hear less about the plight of those at places such as El Carmen, roughly 1,000 kilometres to the south.

"I had been travelling for four days when I was stopped by the Mexican police in Tabasco," says Wilmer, a 30-year-old electrician who had already succeeded once in getting into the United States.

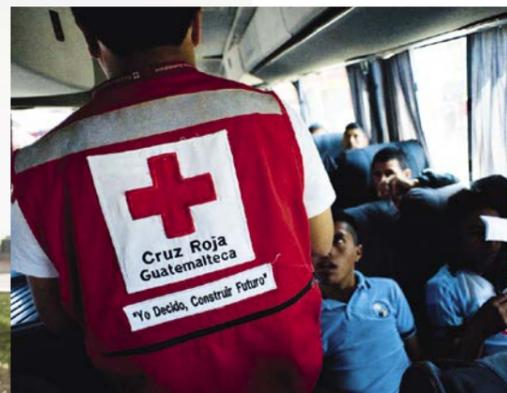
At the Guatemalan Red Cross post, Wilmer was given water, food, information about the route he has to follow to get home safely and the use of a telephone to call home.

"I was able to talk to my mother," he says. "She was very moved because she had been very worried about me all these days. She was crying but I told her I will be there soon, today or tomorrow at the latest."

Wilmer's tale is just one of the many sad stories one hears at the migrant reception centre, says the centre's psychologist Carlily Aguilar. "When the Mexican police stop them, they spend several days in Mexican jails until they arrive here, which is the main arrival point for deported migrants," Aguilar says. The most common problems among the migrants on their long

Guatemalan migrants cross the River Suchiate, which runs along the border of Guatemala and Mexico, on their way towards the United States; the Guatemalan Red Cross's Erik Adalberto García welcomes migrants who have been returned to Guatemala by Mexican police; a repatriated migrant speaks to relatives using a free phone provided by the Guatemalan Red Cross.

Photos: Vladimir Rodas/IFRC



journey, she explains, are the psychosocial after-effects of their ordeal and malnutrition.

In some cases they have also been victims of physical aggression or even sexual abuse. In these cases, they are often very afraid and ashamed to talk, especially men, and so she is there to offer psychological support.

The services available in El Carmen are just one element of the Guatemalan Red Cross's migrant project, implemented in 2012 in four districts in San Marcos department, bordering the Mexican state of Chiapas.

The project also includes hygiene services such as showers, medical care at local clinics at points where migrants often pass, ambulance services when needed, psychosocial support and other programmes focused on helping returning migrants get back on their feet when they return to their cities or towns of origin.

A common tragedy

The migrants have often lost a lot of money as well. "It is a very expensive and very dangerous journey, and they are often cheated," explains Héctor López, head of the Guatemalan Red Cross migration programme.

"If they go on their own, they have to pay for all the bus and train tickets before they reach the capital and then to the United States border," he says. "If

they go with the fixer, they have to pay him several hundred dollars and it is even said that there are fixers who, for US\$ 5,000, will ensure you reach the United States. These figures have turned migration into a highly lucrative business."

Criminal gangs also pursue migrants to rob them and even kidnap them in order to demand ransoms that families find very difficult to pay, García points out.

Aguilar says one Guatemalan migrant told her how gang members threw a Honduran migrant out of the train to Mexico City after demanding a high price for continuing the journey. The migrant died brutally, run over by the carriages. "She looked horrified when she told me," Aguilar recalls. "She said that after she had seen that, she would not try again to reach the United States."

Aguilar is also the psychologist at the *Casa del Migrante*, a centre for migrants in the town of Ayutla, some 32 kilometres south of El Carmen. The centre is part of the Catholic Church's pastoral care of human mobility project, which works in coordination with the Guatemalan Red Cross migration programme.

Scene of despair

Separated from Mexico by the River Suchiate, Ayutla sees a constant flow of traders in all kinds of goods and, to a lesser extent, migrants. They cross over to Mexico in boats made of truck tyres and wood. Their owners charge 10 quetzals (US\$ 1.5) to take them to the other side.

Some 300 metres from the river is the *Casa del Migrante*, which opened in 2011. As in El Carmen, most of those who come are returning to Guatemala. "Migrants can stay there for up to three days to recuperate before going back to their homes," explains Aguilar. In many cases, they also receive medical attention at the Guatemalan Red Cross clinic in Ayutla, which opened in 2012.

For many who visit the centres in Ayutla and El Carmen, these small gestures of help ease their despair. Sipping a glass of water at the El Carmen migrant centre, 22-year-old Auri says he was caught while travelling with his brother towards Cancún, where they have cousins who emigrated a few years ago and are doing well. "We did not make it and now we have lost everything, the 1,200 pesos [about US\$ 200] that it cost each of us to reach Cancún," he says with a sigh. ■

By Manuel Ruiz Rico

Manuel Ruiz Rico is a freelance journalist based in Brussels, Belgium.

"I was able to talk to my mother. She was very moved because she had been very worried about me all these days. She was crying on the phone and I told her I will be there soon, today or tomorrow at the latest."

Wilmer, a 30-year-old electrician, who was sent back to Guatemala from Mexico after trying to reach the United States



A world on the run

Powerful images of migrants drowned at sea, crossing over razor-wire fences or arriving on shore after a shipwreck have propelled the current migration phenomenon to the forefront of public consciousness in Europe in the past year. The photos of the infant Aylan Kurdi, who was washed up on the shore in Turkey, were perhaps the most heart-stopping for many. But other, equally tragic, dramas are unfolding for migrants as they embark on dangerous journeys across oceans, deserts and heavily patrolled borders and lands controlled by gangs or rival armed groups. This collection of photos, from Africa, the Americas and Asia, tell part of the migration story that has received less attention than the crisis in the Mediterranean.

☞ A migrant runs to catch a train in Chacamax, in the Mexican state of Chiapas, in June 2015. Hundreds of Central American migrants travel through Mexico on their way to the United States and suffer many hardships and dangers along the way. Photo: AFP/Alfredo Estrella



☞ El Hadji Khoury Diop, president of the Association of Repatriated Irregular Migrants and Affected Families, of Thiaroye-sur-mer, a coastal community on the outskirts of Dakar, Senegal. Many people make the treacherous journey on the open ocean from Senegal towards Europe on boats like these. Diop lost eight members of his family as they tried to reach Spain.

Photo: Moustapha Diallo/IFRC

☞ Rescued African migrants play football with Tunisian Red Crescent volunteers in front of a former chicken farm, newly refurbished into a dormitory. Tunisian Red Crescent volunteers provide numerous services for migrants saved from shipwrecked vessels. They've also faced the task of burying the remains of migrants drowned in their attempt to reach Europe.

Photo: Tatu Blomqvist/Finnish Red Cross



☞ Migrants often face hostility, fear, resentment and xenophobia in their adopted communities. Here, a protester carrying a stick demonstrates against foreign migrants in the Jeppestown district of Johannesburg, South Africa in April 2015. Photo: AFP/Marco Longari



☞ In many parts of the world, boats carrying migrants often cover far greater distances than those crossing the Mediterranean Sea. This overcrowded vessel, full of migrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar, was cast adrift in the Indian Ocean for more than 30 days before it was rescued off the Indonesian coast in May.

Photo: AFP/Marco Longari



Between the cracks

Even for those who manage to make it to a destination country with a good economy, their odyssey is not over. Living in the shadows of an affluent social welfare society, migrants in Norway struggle to survive.



INSIDE THE 50-BED SHELTER for migrants run by the Norwegian Red Cross in Oslo, a tall, middle-aged man named Fernando, originally from the West African country of Guinea-Bissau, beds down for the night. He's just arrived from Spain, where he did construction jobs while his wife, a medical doctor, worked at a local hospital.

When the global financial crisis hit in 2008, his wife lost her job and construction work dried up, he says. Finally, this year, he decided to leave Spain for Norway.

"There is no work in Spain," he says, alternating between Spanish, Portuguese and French. "I'm looking for work but I've heard it's very hard here. And I don't speak Norwegian at all."

Fernando, who did not want to give his last name, is among a growing subset of the migrant population here — those who have lived in Greece, Italy, Portugal or Spain — but have ventured on as life in those countries became increasingly difficult.

Arriving in Norway, many find that their prospects are not much better. Without knowing the language and without official residency, and the national identification number that goes along with it, finding a job is extremely difficult.

Also among those at the shelter are people fleeing conflict or persecution and who may claim asylum. Many others have legal residency in one of the 26 European countries that are part of the Schengen

"The Norwegian welfare society is very good... But if you are not part of the welfare system because you are an undocumented migrant, the landscape is very different."

Ulf Rikter-Svendsen, head of the Norwegian Red Cross's social inclusion programmes

Convention, which means they can enter and stay in Norway legally but their access to public services and the job market is restricted.

Parallel worlds

Such is the paradox for many who come to Norway, a country known for having a generous posture towards both international humanitarian and human rights issues and the social welfare of its citizens.

"The Norwegian welfare society is very good," says Ulf Rikter-Svendsen, head of the Norwegian Red Cross's social inclusion programmes. "If you are not working or are sick, you are entitled to all services and benefits provided by the local municipality. But if you are not part of the welfare system because you are an undocumented migrant, the landscape is very different."

Because Norway's economy is highly regulated, everything from basic healthcare to filling a prescription, renting an apartment, opening a bank account, getting a driver's licence and even getting membership at a gym is dependent on having a valid national identity number.

The strong economy, meanwhile, fuelled by revenues from national petroleum reserves, has afforded Norwegians a high standard of life. But it also contributes to high prices for basic goods.

Many migrants, therefore, find themselves living in a parallel world: sleeping in the streets or on trams, trains, buses and ferries, or staying in an

overnight shelter as they look for work or a place to live.

Over the last decade, as migration has increased, the Norwegian Red Cross has increasingly offered services for vulnerable people falling through the cracks of an otherwise affluent society.

Along with a well-known local charity, the Church City Mission, the National Society has opened two overnight shelters in Oslo, one for men and another 50-bed shelter for women, and it offers a wide range of programmes to help migrants and refugees cope. In 2009, for example, it opened a health clinic specifically for migrants and asylum seekers.

Today, that clinic is a multi-disciplinary health centre run with help from 150 volunteers, including medical doctors, nurses, specialists, psychologists, physical therapists, biological technicians, social workers, interpreters and greeters who welcome people in the waiting room.

The Norwegian health system offers medical services to undocumented migrant children and to adults for urgent problems that are deemed acute. One problem, however, is that migrants don't always know when they go to the hospital whether or not their illness will be considered acute or how much they might be billed.

Further, many undocumented migrants are afraid to go to the hospital for fear of being detected. "Everywhere you go, they say, 'you are illegal, you are illegal,'" says Yeshe, a woman from Ethiopia who

On cold nights, the number of people waiting outside the Norwegian Red Cross overnight shelter for migrants sometimes exceeds the number of beds available. Here a volunteer speaks with a woman waiting to enter. Photo: Benjamin A. Ward/Norwegian Red Cross

has lived in Norway for eight years and is currently appealing her so-far unsuccessful asylum claim. "I do not have basic shelter and to eat I have to beg; to sleep I have to beg. These are the difficult things we are facing."

Because of the stresses many migrants and asylum seekers face, the Red Cross health centre seeks to offer refugees a welcoming environment and it assures clients strict confidentiality. "Anytime I come here I feel whole and I have received good help," says Yeshe, who herself has become a volunteer and prepares dinner for healthcare workers every Tuesday evening.

Fitting in to the system

Making people such as Yeshe feel comfortable is important, says Merethe Taksdal, a nurse who helped found the centre and who volunteers there at least once a month. "The problem is that people don't go to get help until they have serious problems, while you have a lot to gain by helping them early," she says.

Many of the ailments she sees among clients are stress related, she says. "They suffer from sleeplessness. They are worried. For these young Afghan and Iraqi boys, for example, there are so many expectations from home and they themselves had such high hopes — that they would come here learn something, gain a skill, be a resource for family. And then they find themselves in some sort of limbo."

Many come to the clinic because they work long hours in unregulated businesses, using toxic cleaning chemicals without proper protection or lifting heavy weights, while their sleep and nutrition are inadequate.

“Some of the health problems are also related to the unstable and bad living conditions,” says Linnea Nasholm, a social worker who coordinates mental health services at the centre. “Still others have skin-related problems because they are sharing an apartment with 15 people and have limited access to good hygiene.”

Losing hope

A soft-spoken man in his late 20s, an asylum seeker named James first came to the health clinic in 2009 due to back pain he developed working in a fish packing factory in northern Norway. After fleeing from Jonglei, then part of Sudan, for the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya in 2005, he says he came to Norway where he was told he'd have a better chance of gaining official refugee recognition.

“It was so different,” he recalls. “It was so cold and there were just one or two hours of light a day. In Africa, it was always 12 hours of light and 12 hours of darkness.”

Then he started developing back problems. “I didn't know how to lift heavy things properly so I had a lot of back pains,” says James, who had made his way to Oslo in search of other work. “Then I got to know about this clinic and they helped me. It's still a problem but not as bad as before.”

Now James, like many asylum seekers here, is turning to the health centre for another kind of support — help with a depression that has settled in due to his uncertain future. James says he is appealing a second rejection of his asylum claim but one of the problems is that he doesn't have any identification or other papers to prove he is from South Sudan, an independent country since 2011. “At this point, I want to go home but I can't because I don't have the proper identification for South Sudanese authorities.”

Meanwhile, in Norway, he cannot open a bank account, go to school, get a job or rent an apartment. “I live just for the day because I cannot plan anything and I don't know where I will be tomorrow,” says James, who stays with friends or sleeps outside and volunteers at a local church to stay busy. “I am losing hope,” he says.

This kind of depression is common among refugees, Nasholm says. “It's very normal to react the way they do,” she says. “They are worried and many also feel they are a burden for their network of family and friends. They are always depending on others and constantly have to move from one place to another.”



Photo: Benjamin A. Ward/Norwegian Red Cross



Photo: Thea Rabe/Norwegian Red Cross



Photo: Thea Rabe/Norwegian Red Cross



Photo: Thea Rabe/Norwegian Red Cross

“So we do a lot of support talks,” says Nasholm, adding that for more serious symptoms, the centre makes referrals to government-supported local psychologists. But the system that offers psychological and psychiatric help accepts very few patients — either because of the patient's legal status or because the patients are living in situations too unstable for therapy to be effective.

Settling in

Even for those who are granted residency as refugees, integration in Norway is not necessarily easy. Here, refugees granted asylum are assigned to live in specific municipalities in various parts of Norway. Until then, they wait in temporary facilities, usually between 9 and 12 months, called reception centres.

The Norwegian Red Cross offers services and activities at many of the reception centres and they continue reaching out in various ways to refugees once they are settled in to their new communities. Language training, for example, is offered in most Red Cross branches, while volunteer ‘refugee guides’ are paired with individual refugees for weekly sessions in which they can talk, practise speaking Norwegian and discuss the country's institutions, culture and daily life.

Kaysa Amundsen, a volunteer and refugee guide based in Bergen, in western Norway, says volunteers often develop into lasting friendships. In Bergen, they even have a refugee and refugee-guide hiking group. “One weekend every year, we hike the Galdhøpiggen, the highest peak in Norway,” says Amundsen. “The trip is free but the migrants need to come for training sessions.”

Why hiking? “It's a pleasant, natural way to get to know one another,” she says. “And generally, Norwegian people like to trek so it helps the refugees fit in. We joke that you can use diplomas to apply for a job and that's ok, but once you tell them you've been on Galdhøpiggen, they will hire you.”

The National Society also offers some services specifically for women, who face special difficulties in their adopted country. One of those services is the Stella Café, a resource centre for women trying to enter the job market. Some 170 volunteers offer roughly 90 hours of activities each week, from yoga and English lessons to one-on-one coaching sessions. Complete with a small coffee bar, the café brings together about 40 women each day from places as far afield as Iraq, Poland, Russia, Somalia and Ukraine, among other places.

Many of these women were highly educated professionals in their countries of origin. Here in Oslo they are starting from scratch. Many have lost some of their self-esteem in the transition to a new culture and economy, says café coordinator Marianne Bockelie, adding that one of the goals here is to help

Many Norwegian Red Cross volunteers serve as ‘guides’ who help refugees in Norway find their way in a new culture, and in some cases, families welcome unaccompanied minor refugees to live in their homes; Norwegian Red Cross social worker Linnea Nasholm speaks with an asylum seeker visiting a health centre for migrants set up by the National Society; nurse and migrant health centre volunteer Merethe Taksdal; a young man named James from South Sudan who fled fighting there in 2006 but whose asylum claim in Norway has been denied.

boost the women's confidence. “In the labour market today, if you don't believe in yourself, no one else will,” she says.

While refugees face big challenges integrating into Norwegian life and the country's migration policy is a controversial topic, Norwegians have shown considerable solidarity with their new neighbours. A newspaper poll in early August, for example, found that 57 per cent of Norwegians had a favourable view towards migrants and refugees. This may have something to do with the general Norwegian attitude. Known for their adventurous spirit, many are very curious about people from other cultures who come to their country.

One difficulty, however, is that under the Norwegian system, municipalities bear the cost of local social welfare needs. Local officials and residents, therefore, are often concerned about whether their communities can afford to welcome more refugees. In addition to helping refugees cope in this environment, one goal of the National Society is to encourage a welcoming attitude through public awareness campaigns and advocacy on the national migration and asylum policy.

A welcoming smile

Indeed that welcoming attitude is an integral part of the humanitarian response to migration and it animates many of the volunteers working on services for migrants and refugees.

Back at the overnight shelter, one volunteer points to her broad smile when asked what she feels is her most important contribution to the migrants here. “It's contagious, this smile,” she says, her grin widening. “I smile and then they smile. It's very important. You bring positive energy. They go through so much every day so to get something positive in their life makes a big difference.”

Another volunteer at the shelter, Thomas Moxnes-Andexer, responds to a different question. What's the most challenging part of working here? “When we don't have enough spaces for everyone who needs a bed. At the old shelter when we had 100 beds and 180 people in line and we had to reject 80 people in one night. That was the worst evening we had, in March 2014. It was really cold outside, too.”

Anne Anderson, the coordinator of the shelter, is asked what is the most satisfying part of her work. “Those times when the number of people who come match the number of beds and everyone gets to stay. It's like ‘yes!’”

Given the growing needs and the limited number of beds, how often does that happen? “Not that often,” she responds. ■

“I live just for the day because I cannot plan anything and I don't know where I will be tomorrow. I am losing hope.”

James, an asylum seeker from South Sudan

By **Malcolm Lucard**

Malcolm Lucard is editor of *Red Cross Red Crescent* magazine.

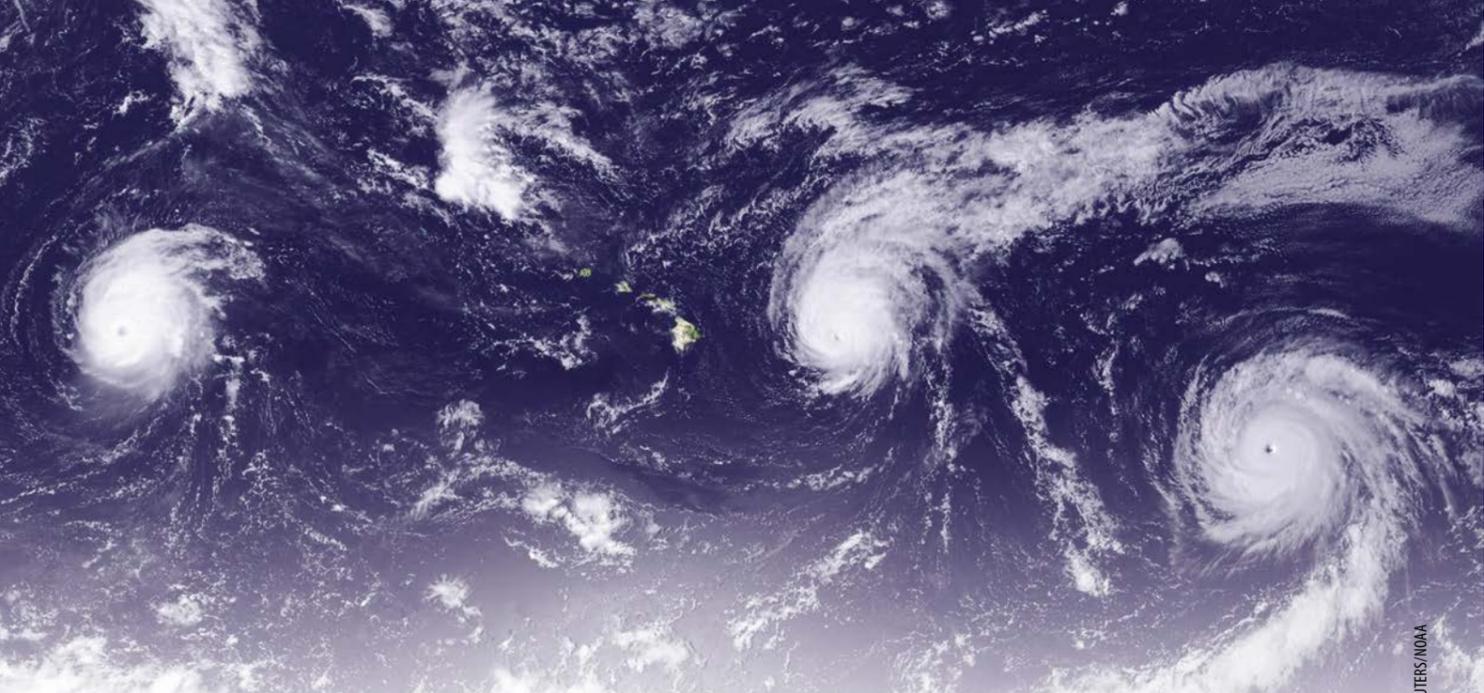


Photo: REUTERS/NOAA

A planet of extremes

As the planet warms due to climate change, weather patterns are changing and in many cases becoming more extreme. Heatwaves are getting hotter, droughts are drier and longer, monsoons rains are heavier and storms more frequent and ferocious, while the rise in sea levels means storm surges are having a more severe impact on coastal communities. There are solutions, however. Ambitious global targets on reducing greenhouse gas

emissions could prevent further warming, while investment in local resilience building and disaster risk reduction can help reduce the damage and the human costs.

The adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction earlier this year, along with efforts such as the IFRC's One Billion Coalition for Resilience, are helping to make preparedness for climate-related disaster a key part of both the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals

and the Paris meeting of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, also called 'COP21', in December. These global policy efforts, however, must be linked to national policies and concrete, locally-driven solutions. The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement has long been engaged at the global level and on the front lines, using a mix of new technology and approaches with older, traditional practices to reduce risk in communities most affected by our changing climate.

Plants that protect

Like many countries in South-East Asia, Viet Nam is vulnerable to storm surges, flooding and droughts that increasingly threaten the country's verdant shorelines and extensive deltas. With some 3,260 kilometres of coastline and an average of six to eight typhoons annually, the country is ranked among the nations most affected in terms of fatalities and economic losses.

If sea levels along Viet Nam's coastal regions rise between 65 to 100 centimetres by 2100, as predicted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the impact on the coastal population, some 6 million people, could be severe.

At the same time, rapid population and economic growth, along with expansion and intensification of agriculture, wetland conversion and urbanization have increased the coastal regions' vulnerability.

Rapid development of shrimp farms and other industrial and urbanization projects, for example, have led to a significant decrease in mangrove forests, which provide nutrients for the marine life that many local people depend on for food and income. Mangroves also protect communities from storm surges and erosion by capturing soil during periods of heavy precipitation and thus stabilizing shorelines.

For this reason, the restoration of mangrove forests has been a central focus of both governmental and non-governmental actors in the region, including the Viet Nam Red Cross Society, which has played a leading role in the efforts.



Photo: Jenelle Eli/American Red Cross

National Societies throughout South-East Asia and the Pacific region help rebuild natural protections from storms by planting mangrove trees and other plants that fortify coastal areas from erosion and storm surges. Above, a volunteer from the Indonesian Red Cross Society works in a nursery for mangrove trees. Below, mangrove seedlings are planted by the Philippine Red Cross; trees planted by the Kiribati Red Cross Society line a beach front while in Viet Nam; long-time mangrove planting has paid off in the form of increased yields of shellfish.

A recent evaluation found that these efforts have had a significant impact in reducing disaster risk and enhancing local livelihoods. Roughly 2 million people were indirectly protected through the forestation efforts, according to the report. By comparing the damage caused by similar typhoons before and after the intervention, the evaluation found that damages to dykes were reduced by US\$ 80,000 to US\$ 295,000 – savings which represent less than the cost of planting mangroves. How-

ever, total savings due to avoided risks in the communities at large were roughly US\$ 15 million.

Meanwhile, the per-hectare yield of aquaculture products such as shellfish rose between 209 and 789 per cent, depending on the shellfish in question. Direct economic benefits of these and other activities were found to be between US\$ 344,000 and US\$ 6.7 million in the communities selected for the evaluation. ■



Photo: Kate Marshall/IFRC



Photo: Benoit Matsha-Carpentier/IFRC



Photo: Daniel Cima/IFRC

Cash, seeds and training

Already the driest country in sub-Saharan Africa, Namibia is increasingly suffering from droughts. In the north of the country, where tribal groups depend on crops or cattle, the Namibia Red Cross is helping people prepare by providing training and cash grants while they recover from the effects of drought.

In a country where 70 per cent of the population works in agriculture, drought affects hundreds of thousands of people. Crops suffer, pasture for livestock becomes scarcer and boreholes dry up, meaning farmers have to travel greater distances to find grazing land for their animals. Families also resort to drinking dirty water.

Working with the Namibia Red Cross, the IFRC responded in four of the worst-affected regions in the north of the country. The immediate need was to get food, clean water and sanitation facilities — water tanks, jerrycans and purification tablets — to the people affected. Water points, such as boreholes, were also repaired.

But as the southern African country is regularly hit by natural disasters, merely



Photo: Hanna Butler/IFRC

responding to crisis is not enough. Much of the Red Cross work in Namibia, therefore, focuses on supporting communities

to take responsibility for their own futures. “The impact of climate change is very real and communities have to

continually respond to changes in the environment,” says Kenny Hamilton, a British Red Cross delegate working with the IFRC. “There’s greater pressure on land resources so we have to make sure that communities have better access to water, improved farming or agricultural techniques and an increased understanding of the effects of climate change and how to meet the challenges that lie ahead.”

Training is being provided to pastoral communities to help them manage cattle more sustainably, while seeds and tools are distributed to farmers who are also given information about more sustainable agriculture practices.

Households in tribal communities are also being given grants to enable them to buy breeding livestock or seeds, depending on the tribe. The cash grants mean people don’t have to sell or slaughter their livestock for food and can instead use the money as they choose, which in turn helps to support local businesses and strengthens the local economy. ■

A region bled dry

Nowhere on earth is the intersection between conflict and water more evident than in the Middle East. Even before the conflicts of recent decades, water use was already at unsustainable levels in many countries in the region.

“This is an area that relies heavily on agriculture and food production, which demands a lot of water,” notes Guillaume Pierrehumbert, ICRC water and habitat coordinator who has worked in several countries throughout the region.

Consider the case of Jordan. Prior to the conflict in Iraq and Syria, and the influx of refugees, water use in the country was already unsustainable. In many parts of the country, local authorities were dealing with declining water-tables, rising pumping costs and increasing salinity of groundwater.

At the same time, the water infrastructure was ageing and was unable to handle demand efficiently, according to a recent ICRC report about water supply in the Middle East entitled *Bled Dry: How war in the Middle East is bringing the region’s water supplies to breaking point*. The north of Jordan had the highest rate of water loss, as well as problems with water quality and consistency in supply.

At the same time, Jordan has absorbed an unprecedented number of refugees flee-

ing from Syria, which comes on top of earlier waves of refugees from conflicts in Iraq and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Some 80 per cent of Syrian refugees here reside in host communities, while 20 per cent live in camps.

‘Finding’ new water through conservation

“Much of the region depends on ageing infrastructure that requires considerable maintenance,” says Michael Talhami, ICRC regional water and habitat adviser for the Near and Middle East.

When looking to make more water available in arid areas, therefore, the answer is not always to sink another borehole.

“We can’t just work on the supply-side options — i.e., drilling more boreholes to extract more water. That would make the water crisis even worse. Wherever possible, we need to shift to managing demand and helping to conserve water, by reducing losses and improving the efficiency of the whole water-supply system.

“In North Badia in northern Jordan, this is exactly what we’re striving to do,” says Talhami. “By upgrading ageing infrastructure we can significantly reduce the losses in the system and hence make room for considerable gains in water delivery.” ■



Photo: Philippine Red Cross

The purok advantage

As part of the Typhoon Haiyan recovery operation, the Philippine Red Cross is working to promote disaster risk reduction in some of the remote Calamian island communities in northern Palawan, the most westerly province in the Philippines.

Among them are members of the Tagbanwa people, many of whom live in

isolated villages two hours or more by boat from the main island of Busuanga.

These tiny rock islands lack viable water sources and have to import water from the mainland. To help them better manage their water, and better prepare for recurring tropical storms, the Philippine Red Cross is sponsoring ‘learning visits’ by com-

munity leaders from the Calamian islands to San Francisco, a municipality in the Camotes island group known for its advanced disaster preparedness practices.

A tourist paradise, San Francisco made headline news as one of the very few places in the region to avoid a single loss of life after Haiyan struck in November 2013. The Camotes islands are also known for good water management.

“After visiting Camotes, the leaders and elders will have learned new ideas to have more water,” says Febbie Ann Motin, a Philippine Red Cross volunteer and a community member in Cabugao in the Calamians, where the Red Cross also offers sessions on how to keep water clean for daily use. “Nowadays, there is not enough water for washing clothes and bathing.”

This knowledge could be particularly critical this year, as meteorologists warn that the El Niño phenomenon will likely further reduce rainfall in Palawan.

Catalina Jaime, a disaster risk delegate with the Swiss Red Cross, which supports the programme, says San Francisco has become a model for disaster preparedness in part because of its use of a traditional system for managing local issues and en-

couraging self-reliance. In this system, members of small, local communities, known as *puroks* are on the disaster front line, to educate, inform and warn people. Residents are prepared for upcoming storms and encouraged to participate in hazard reduction and disease-control programmes. Participants said the visits were very useful because they could observe first-hand the relationship of municipalities with their respective *barangays* (districts) and see how they have organized communities at the household level to cope with disaster.

“For example, in Barangay Abaroan, the main hazards they identified are floods, so each family is mobilized to reduce the risks and the adverse impacts from floods,” says Lucy Joy Nery, a Philippine Red Cross volunteer and youth community leader in Maglalambay in the Calamian islands. “The community has also developed an early warning system in which the *barangay* captain knows the capacities of his community members to prepare for whatever might happen.”

Following the visits, Calamian leaders will receive Red Cross support to replicate San Francisco’s innovations. ■

A place in the shade

The sun in Paraguay’s north is often so intense, it scorches the earth, making it impossible to grow fruits and vegetables. Here, a resident from the village of Tacuatí Poty spreads a shade net for plants provided as part of an ICRC programme, carried out with the Paraguayan Red Cross, to help rural families cope with the area’s harsh climate. “Without shade, the sun just kills off the plants,” says resident Nélica González. Aimed at helping people affected by violence, the programme provides tools, seed and training, as well as wire, fabric and netting needed to create partial shade.



Photo: Bruno Radicchi/ICRC

Fighting by the rules

Could a voluntary compliance mechanism, designed to be non-binding and non-political, help bridge the gap between the ideals behind the rules of war and real-world practice on the ground?

DENIAL OF HUMANITARIAN RELIEF to civilian populations. Indiscriminate shelling. Hostage-taking. Torture.

These are just some of the visible trends seen in today's conflicts that are causing great suffering, but also undermining the notion that wars have rules that must be obeyed.

As Peter Maurer, president of the ICRC, told the fourth meeting of states on strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) in Geneva in April: "The current state of human suffering, and of humanitarian needs caused by armed conflicts around the world, would be far lower if international humanitarian law were properly implemented by the parties on the ground."

The problem is there is a big difference between what is called for under international humanitarian law and what often happens on the ground. Or as Maurer put it during the meeting in Geneva: "There is — still — an overwhelming implementation gap."

Bridging that gap is not an easy task, however. Today's conflicts have become increasingly complex and less international in nature with a greater number of those engaged in fighting belonging to what are often referred to as 'non-state' armed groups.

Although they are still bound by international humanitarian law, some of these armed groups may have limited knowledge of its rules — while others reject them outright or ignore them in practice.

States meanwhile also often violate the letter and spirit of IHL in their battles against such armed

"The IHL mechanisms provided for in the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I have proven unable to contribute to filling the implementation gap."

Peter Maurer, ICRC president



groups. In either case, this can lead to unspeakable civilian suffering and the prevention of assistance and protection to affected populations.

In terms of addressing alleged violations of IHL there is also a wide gap. Under the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I, there are three potential mechanisms which a state party to an international armed conflict can trigger with respect to its adversary.

Developed at a time when most conflicts were international disputes between states, they have rarely been put into action and it is even less likely today, given that most armed conflicts involve states and one or more non-state armed groups.

Thus, as Maurer further noted, "The IHL mechanisms provided for in the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol I have proven unable to contribute to filling the implementation gap."

A need to meet

Meanwhile, the Geneva Conventions are practically the only treaties of international law that are not accompanied by a framework within which states can regularly discuss implementation and compliance.

With other international treaties — such as the ban on the use of anti-personnel mines or the regulation of arms transfers — regular meetings are called for as part of the treaty text. These meetings help focus states and international bodies on developing the capacity, internal reporting, good practice and other measures that might ensure compliance.

In this context, the ICRC has been involved as facilitator in a joint diplomatic initiative with the government of Switzerland aimed at developing agreement around new ways to ensure compliance with IHL. Based on Resolution 1 adopted at the 31st International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, which took place in Geneva in 2011, Switzerland and the ICRC carried out a consultation process open to all states parties to the Geneva Conventions. During this process, more than 140 states took part in nine meetings between 2012 and 2015.

The resulting proposal, favoured by the great majority of states, which will be discussed at the 32nd International Conference in Geneva this December, calls for a non-binding, voluntary mechanism with the following main components:

- A regular meeting of states as the centrepiece of the new system. It would provide a venue for sustained dialogue and cooperation among states on ways to enhance the implementation of IHL.
- Thematic discussions on IHL issues that would allow an exchange of views on key legal, practical or policy questions.
- A periodic reporting system on national compliance with IHL that would permit states to periodically review and assess the efficacy of measures taken at the domestic level to ensure respect for IHL. This function would also enable the sharing of good practices, recognizing each state's capacity-building needs. It will also help

☞ An elderly man sits in the ruins of homes and buildings destroyed by intense bombardment. In many of today's conflicts, such widespread destruction, caused by indiscriminate use of force in populated areas, is one manifestation of the lack of respect for international humanitarian law on the part of warring parties.

Photo: Thomas Glass/ICRC

them identify challenges in IHL implementation and ways of resolving them.

Avoiding politicization

A new meeting of states on IHL would not involve the examination of specific situations, but rather focus on general or common issues, so as to avoid politicization, according to Swiss Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter. "This new mechanism must not be used to point an accusing finger at anyone," Burkhalter said during the fourth meeting of states in Geneva in April. "It will aim to facilitate implementation and create an environment that encourages greater respect for humanitarian law."

To further avoid politicization, national compliance reports submitted during the process would not be individually discussed, but would be consolidated in 'non-contextual' documents that should permit those gathered at the meeting of states to examine ways of enhancing IHL implementation in a non-politicized manner. Similarly, thematic debates on IHL would raise issues that are relevant to a number of states, in order to avoid association with any one particular context.

"A number of states expressed the fear that — given the antagonistic character of international relations today — a new IHL compliance mechanism might be instrumentalized," noted Maurer, referring to the concern that the system might be used as a tool or 'instrument' to achieve a political rather than a humanitarian goal.

Sufficiently strong?

Some observers have questioned whether a voluntary system will be sufficient to ensure changes on the battlefield, arguing that perhaps stronger elements are required.

However, given concerns that such enforcement mechanisms may not always be politically neutral, Helen Durham, director of International Law and Policy of the ICRC, says the proposed non-political approach is an important step towards enabling states to share best practice and discuss their experiences in the implementation of IHL.

"The ICRC has been very appreciative of the level of engagement and interest many states have shown during the four years of discussions relating to the mechanism being proposed," Durham says. "It is clearly an issue that is recognized globally as requiring attention."

"There are many approaches to improving compliance with IHL and we need to look at how all these means can complement each other," she says. "The role of the ICRC is to constantly focus on proposing solutions that address critical humanitarian problems — the lack of compliance with IHL certainly has a significant impact on the lives of all those involved in armed conflict." ■

A stronger base for local action

Beyond projects and emergency response, how can international humanitarian organizations support sustainable humanitarian engagement at the local level?

FOR MORE THAN 80 YEARS, the Ethiopian Red Cross Society has been delivering critical services to people displaced by conflict or who have suffered from recurring natural disasters such as floods, droughts and even famine.

But like many National Societies reliant largely on external emergency funding, and operating almost continually in crisis mode, the Ethiopian Red Cross Society has not been able to address some of the systemic issues that have kept the organization from truly charting its own course, according to Secretary General Frehiwot Worku.

Employee turnover, lack of adequate visibility for National Society operations, difficulty with reporting on those operations in a timely manner and a need to diversify funding sources have been some of the key challenges, she says. Before Worku took up her current post, the National Society had already concluded that it needed to act on many of these issues and that the National Society needed to examine its overall strategic direction and its positioning vis-à-vis government, donors and partners.

"We do a lot of things, but often based on projects and programmes, not on strategic plans, and not in a sustainable manner," she says. "Partners come and have funds and project ideas, and we often take on these projects. Or we have project ideas, and partners come. But it's always a project."

Most of these projects, she says, come with a capacity-building element, which may include purchasing equipment and training to develop specific competencies among volunteers or coordinators. "These are useful things, but not really building any systemic ca-

capacity of the National Society," she says. "There's been a lot of funding going through the National Society for these projects and programmes but it hasn't built systematic capacity within the National Society."

National Societies such as the Ethiopian Red Cross, Worku says, must be careful not to let external funding, sometimes crucial in responding to urgent needs, prevent it from developing its own independent, autonomous strategies and priorities.

Sustainability and independence

This is not just an issue for Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies, but for humanitarian relief efforts around the world. Just as aid agencies must try not to deliver assistance in a way that creates dependencies among beneficiaries, they must consider the unintended side-effects of their actions on in-country partners and other locally based humanitarian actors.

The issue takes on increasing importance in an era when international relief groups rely more heavily on local organizations to deliver aid — either because they are more accepted in local communities or because it's simply too dangerous for international workers to be present in some areas. At the same time, the number of regional, national and local relief groups working in the field has increased greatly.

Still, many international aid agencies, some experts say, treat local actors as organizations to be used simply as implementers, not partners. In other cases, international relief agencies bypass or ignore local actors and set up parallel, temporary assistance systems.

"Approaches which assume that local and national capacity requires substitution have become



"There's been a lot of funding going through the National Society together with projects and programmes but it hasn't built systematic capacity within the National Society."

Frehiwot Worku, secretary general of the Ethiopian Red Cross Society

the default response mode for the international response system," note Sophia Swithern and Lydia Poole, in a chapter of the IFRC's *World Disasters Report 2015*. "The overwhelming majority of international humanitarian financing follows this pattern and continues to flow via international actors."

"Calls for a change in the status quo however have emerged from many sectors, not least from local and national actors themselves, and the need to modify the international modus operandi to reflect realities in which national actors play a critical role has become increasingly apparent," they say.

Regional consultations for the United Nation's World Humanitarian Summit (a global meeting planned for May 2016 focusing on improving humanitarian response) have given a global platform for local and national civil society actors to express concerns about their marginalization within international humanitarian decision-making, policy-setting and resource allocation, the authors continue. "Participants have called for the role of national and local NGOs [non-governmental organizations] to be better appreciated and financially supported — and 'not just as vehicles enabling international response,'" they write.

As national organizations that rely on community-based branches and volunteers, this challenge also affects many Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies. In the Red Cross Red Crescent paradigm, it's the in-country actors, the National Societies, that should be in control of the direction of the global network to which they are affiliated. Strengthening those local actors has been a key goal of the IFRC's

Strategy 2020 and its subsequent *National Society Development Framework*, which make several core proposals for shifting the paradigm from providing international assistance to strengthening National Societies.

Still, the realities and dynamics of emergency funding within the larger network of National Societies mean that sometimes host Societies working in areas of natural disaster or conflict become merely 'implementing partners' for more well-resourced National Societies, the IFRC, the ICRC or others that have the funds to make projects happen.

From the bottom up

Conversely, well-resourced National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC have also invested more heavily in helping National Societies develop as organizations. Ongoing initiatives from the IFRC include a global review of volunteering aimed at improving National Society management of volunteers, a new tool aimed at supporting branch development, leadership and resource mobilization training, and a process in which National Societies conduct thorough internal assessments aimed at identifying strengths and weaknesses.

This assessment initiative, known as the Organizational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC), was launched by the IFRC in 2011 as a tool designed to measure, analyse and ultimately help National Societies improve their performance and competencies from the bottom up. In short, staff and volunteers at all levels and departments of the organization participate in three-day workshops

The above photo offers a good example of why the Lebanon Red Cross's volunteer-based emergency medical services enjoy a good reputation. But the National Society is also seeking to improve in not-so-visible ways in order to enhance the long-term sustainability of its operations, beyond the cycles of scaling up for major emergencies.

Photo: Lebanese Red Cross



➤ A volunteer with the Ethiopian Red Cross Society helps a young boy plant a tree as part of a programme to encourage volunteerism and mitigate the effects of climate change. Also well known for its ambulance services and its response during major emergencies, the National Society is exploring ways to develop sustainable in-country funding and strengthen its organizational capacity from the ground up. Photo: Berhanu Gezahegn/Ethiopian Red Cross Society

in which they come to consensus on where the National Society stands on a set of 85 specific organizational attributes, from volunteer development to fundraising and risk management.

“This is not a navel-gazing exercise,” says Roger Bracke, head of the IFRC’s Organizational Development Department. “This is about facing the hard reality in terms of what National Societies are doing well, or not doing well, so that in either case, we can improve our actions on behalf of people who are suffering.

“Just as importantly, the findings that come from this process are not being delivered by outside auditors or consultants,” he adds. “They come from the people who work for the National Society every day. The gaps and strengths uncovered in each National Society, therefore, are well understood and then become an opportunity for targeted efforts to address these weaknesses and build on their strengths.”

The Ethiopian Red Cross conducted an OCAC review in 2013 and the insights gained helped the National Society design its Change Plan of Action, a process already under way aimed at reshaping its relations with government and donors, evaluating new programmes and projects, and formulating a more robust and diverse resource mobilization strategy.

For numerous National Societies, the OCAC process has already led to concrete changes in organization structure and management practices with direct consequences at the community level.

“Instead of running programmes and projects from national office, we’ve started strengthening our branches and conducting more training of branch volunteers so that they are empowered to do more of the work themselves,” says Filipe Nainoca, director general of the Fiji Red Cross Society.

“For the first time branches were able to run their own programme, a dengue outbreak response,” Nainoca says, adding that 200 volunteers in 14 branches were trained and ultimately reached 86,000 people.

“Before OCAC, the dengue programme would have been run mainly from national office and only in the branches when national office staff were present,” he

says, adding that the National Society is focusing on other low-cost activities conceived and developed by branch volunteers. “Now the volunteers are more empowered to do the work in their communities.”

In many cases, it’s not just the dynamics of aid funding that inhibits organizational development of National Societies but the fact that many must operate in nearly constant emergency response mode, year after year. Faced with external crises, they often don’t have the breathing space to adequately consider their own organizational development.

The Lebanese Red Cross is a case in point. Widely respected and accepted for its ambulance and first-aid services in Lebanon, a very diverse and often divided country, the National Society has served all quarters of its population through numerous crises over the last 50 years.

“The Lebanese Red Cross does a lot and has a very good reputation in terms of the services we provide to the population, but our organizational capacities are not as strong as they should be because we haven’t invested in them enough,” says Nabih Jabr, assistant director at the Lebanese Red Cross, Emergency Medical Services Department.

When the National Society brought staff, leadership, governance people and volunteers together into one room for the three-day OCAC workshop in 2013, managers learned that they were losing skilled, dedicated people simply due to the way they managed volunteer ambulance crews.

“Being a volunteer emergency medical service worker is very demanding in terms of time — about 20 hours per week,” Jabr says “When people get married or progress in their careers, they no longer have this kind of time. And these are people that have become Red Cross through and through; they have been there for five or ten years. But when they cannot commit to the time anymore, we basically kick them out. So we started to think that perhaps we could offer them other opportunities that are less demanding and where their experiences can benefit other services that we offer.”

The OCAC process, along with support already being received from sister National Societies, also led to improvements in financial management and human resources that Jabr says will improve the long-term strength and sustainability of Lebanese Red Cross operations. Jabr says he’s very proud of what the National Society has achieved, even while operating in emergency mode during successive conflicts. “But imagine how much better we could be,” he adds, “if we continued to improve our organizational capacities and how much that would benefit all these services.” ■

By **Malcolm Lucard**

Malcolm Lucard is editor of *Red Cross Red Crescent* magazine.

Resources

PUBLICATIONS



World Disasters Report IFRC 2015

The 23rd edition of IFRC’s *World Disasters Report* focuses on local actors and their role at the centre of effective humanitarian action. The report addresses some problematic questions, explores current experience and examines future trends in the roles of local actors in humanitarian work.

The report also tracks humanitarian financing and questions why local organizations receive relatively little in comparison to large international organizations, examines the challenges of developing partnerships with local actors and reports on the challenges of delivering aid in insecure and inaccessible environments, among many other issues.

Available in English, with summaries in Arabic, French and Spanish

Three publications on gender and diversity IFRC 2015

Sensitivity to gender and diversity is an essential part of ensuring the effectiveness of our efforts to help the most vulnerable. Gender and diversity is currently being mainstreamed through the areas of disaster risk reduction, disaster management, climate change and resilience, migration and violence prevention. These three publications offer a snapshot of the IFRC approach to gender and diversity: *Gender and diversity in food security and livelihoods*

programming; Gender and diversity for urban resilience: An analysis of South-East Asia Regional Delegation and Gender and diversity for urban resilience: An analysis.
Available in English

Health activities ICRC 2015

An overview of the ICRC’s health programmes on the ground and the principles underpinning them. Treating and caring for the wounded and sick in armed conflict, other major violence and natural

ICRC materials are available from the International Committee of the Red Cross, 19 avenue de la Paix, CH-1202 Geneva, Switzerland. www.icrc.org.
IFRC materials are available from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, P.O. Box 303, CH-1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland. www.ifrc.org.

disasters has always been bound up with the organization’s history, identity, values and reputation.
Available in English

Humanity in action ICRC 2015

Humanity in action 2014 explains the ICRC’s wide-ranging activities and how it spends its money, gives an overview of the impact of ICRC action during 2014 and introduces some of the people who benefited.
Available in English, French, Italian and German

VIDEOS



Economic security: Saving lives, building a future ICRC 2015

In times of conflict and crisis, the ICRC’s Economic Security Unit is on the front line, providing urgent relief and long-term support to people affected by violence. Every year it puts millions of people on the road to recovery, helping them restore their livelihoods and build a sustainable future.
Available in English and French

Ensuring Sierra Leone’s healthcare system is stronger post-Ebola IFRC 2015

With cases of Ebola decreasing in Sierra Leone, IFRC staff are now training local colleagues on infection, prevention and control to ensure they are better equipped to respond to infectious disease outbreaks in the future. At the same time, the Red Cross is maintaining full capacity to respond should Ebola cases again spike.
Available in English

Cambodia: Building confidence and camaraderie through wheelchair basketball ICRC 2015

“I want to let others know that disabled people can play sports too,” says Pring Thorn, who was born with polio and cannot walk without help. She spent her life feeling isolated and alone, but everything changed one day when a friend invited her to watch a local wheelchair basketball game. Today, Pring volunteers for a local women’s association and is a proud member of a wheelchair basketball team.
Available in English

Haiyan — Red Cross shelter recovery operation — Assisted alignment IFRC 2015

When Typhoon Haiyan destroyed most of the houses in his community, Enteng did such a good job rebuilding his own house that he was employed by the Philippine Red Cross and IFRC’s shelter recovery operation. A carpenter by trade, his skills are in such demand that he has plenty of work lined up once the operation has finished. One happy neighbour said: “He builds each house as if it were his own.”
Available in English

Epidemic preparedness in Indonesia and Epidemic preparedness in Myanmar IFRC 2015

These two separate case studies are part of the implementation and analysis of the roll-out of IFRC’s epidemic control for volunteers toolkit and training manual in Myanmar and Indonesia.
Available in English

Trace the Face: People looking for missing migrants in Europe ICRC 2015

Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies across Europe are publishing photos of people looking for their missing relatives, online and in posters, in the hope of reconnecting families. This video explains the online tracing service set up by the ICRC and Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Europe to help refugees and migrants find missing family members.
Available in English, French and Spanish

A life on hold: Addressing the needs of families of the missing ICRC 2015

Disappearances are a reality. They happen for different reasons: during war, when people migrate and due to natural or man-made disasters. For the families of the disappeared, the anguish of not knowing the fate of their loved ones is the same, no matter what the cause. In this video, the ICRC meets three people from different corners of the globe, each with a unique story about someone close who has gone missing — a man in Uganda searching for his son, and two women, one in Mexico and the other in Georgia, both looking for their brothers. The emotional, economic and social impact that this situation has on their lives is seen through their eyes.
Available in English, French and Spanish



The mass movement of migrants in Europe today has drawn comparisons to the huge migrations caused by the Second World War. This photo, taken in 1942 by an unidentified photographer, shows a mother and her children, displaced during the siege of Kozara, in what is today Bosnia and Herzegovina, by German forces during the Second World War.

Photo: ICRC archives