



# WATER AND HABITAT STRATEGY (2020–2023)



# INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

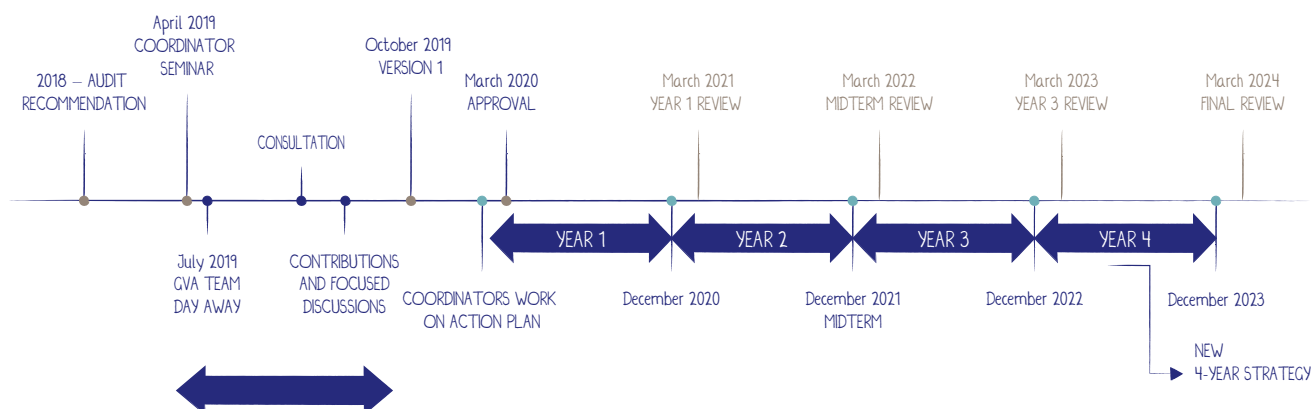
This strategy was prepared in response to a recommendation of the Internal Audit team of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) following its 2018 assessment of the Water and Habitat Unit’s approaches, processes, structure, constraints and challenges at headquarters and in the field. It shows how the Water and Habitat Unit is guided by the ICRC Strategy 2019–2022<sup>1</sup> and the policy document on assistance<sup>2</sup> and sketches out the main ways in which we could further develop our work in the future in keeping with key strategic objectives and the related enablers. Our main strategic priorities are based on an analysis of changes within the humanitarian operational environment combined with a resource-based analysis of the unit’s internal strengths and weaknesses.

This document is intended to reflect our identity and capture the concerns of all our teams. We prepared it following a consultation process with our headquarters and field teams. Additional input was provided by colleagues from other units, especially when it came to cross-disciplinary topics and the organization’s global orientations.

The structure of this document reflects that of similar documents prepared by other units, in particular the Health strategy and Economic Security strategy. Selected references from field operations are provided in footnotes in order to substantiate our narrative.

We hope that this strategy document will be a source of guidance and motivation for Water and Habitat teams and the teams we work with. It underpins our forward-looking effort to help influence debates affecting our overlapping fields of work and, more importantly, to design and implement high-quality programmes that responds to the needs of people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence (hereinafter “armed conflict and other violence”).<sup>3</sup>

Over the course of this four-year strategy, the unit will coordinate closely with the operations department in implementing the strategy and reporting annually to that department’s senior staff.








1 <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/4354-icrc-strategy-2019-2022>

2 [https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/irrc\\_855\\_policy\\_ang.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/irrc_855_policy_ang.pdf)

3 The ICRC uses “other situations of violence” (hereafter “other violence”) to refer to situations of collective violence, perpetrated by one or several groups, that do not reach the threshold of an “armed conflict”, but that may have significant humanitarian consequences. The ICRC’s engagement in such contexts is guided by its policy, “The ICRC’s role in situations of violence below the threshold of armed conflict” (2014), which is available here: <https://international-review.icrc.org/articles-international-committee-red-cross-icrcs-role-situations-violence-below-threshold-armed>.

**The aim of this paper is to:**

- strengthen the role of the Water and Habitat Unit in operations and clarify the unit’s interdisciplinary scope of work for regions, delegations and other divisions
- inform and guide the decision-making process for future organizational strategic orientations and investments in areas of core importance to enable the unit to fulfil its mission and achieve its vision
- help guide the progressive development of the Water and Habitat Unit’s operations to ensure a professional, coherent and integrated approach that can deliver on the related strategic orientations and objectives set out in the ICRC Strategy 2019–2022.

	Institutional Strategy 2019–2022	Water and Habitat Strategy 2020–2023
	<b>SO 1:</b> Influencing behaviour to prevent violations of IHL and alleviate human suffering	<b>SO 3:</b> Develop expertise in priority areas, while influencing the debate in the humanitarian space
	<b>SO 2:</b> Building relevant and sustainable humanitarian impact with people affected	<b>SO 2:</b> Promote a flexible, systemic and sustainable approach that engages with people affected by crises to meet their long-term needs
		<b>SO 1:</b> Maintain and extend emergency preparedness and response capacities to have a timely and effective impact
	<b>SO 3:</b> Working with others to enhance impact	<b>E 3:</b> Develop operational partnerships to extend our reach and impact
	<b>SO 4:</b> Creating an inclusive and diverse working environment	<b>E 1:</b> Encourage skills and expertise development, and attract, retain and include talent at all levels and from diverse groups
	<b>SO 5:</b> Embracing the digital transformation	<b>E 2:</b> Use quality digital information to inform decision-making in programmes

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Water and Habitat Unit’s operational environment is changing rapidly: conflicts are lasting longer, crises are affecting urban areas more and more, long-term systemic solutions are increasingly needed, and global trends like climate change and digitalization cannot be ignored. We need to step up our response to emerging needs and adapt the type, size and extent of the solutions we bring.
- Much has changed at the ICRC in recent years, but the Water and Habitat Unit’s work remains an essential component of the organization’s assistance and protection programmes. Our growing team enjoys a solid reputation thanks to our technical expertise, consistent operational results and concrete field experience. The aim of this strategy document is to further strengthen our position by better aligning the unit with the ICRC’s organizational priorities for the 2020–2023 period.
- For our strategy to succeed, we need to keep pace with an underlying cultural shift towards learning to do things differently, accepting change constructively and creating a safe space to prototype new processes and approaches.
- This document sets out three main strategic objectives:
  - maintain and advocate for emergency preparedness and response capacities
  - promote a flexible, systemic and sustainable approach that engages with people affected by crisis to meet their long-term needs
  - continue to develop expertise in key areas while influencing the debate and policies in our operational space.

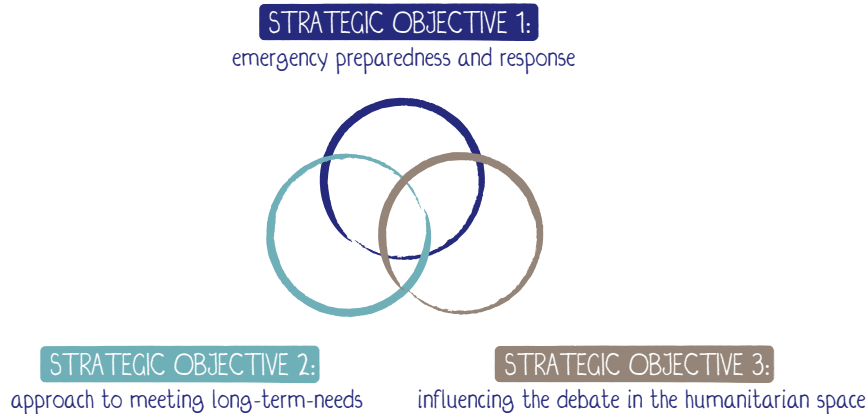
- Reaching these objectives will require three enabling factors: staff development and diversity, the digital and information landscape and partnering capacity.
- This strategy also sets out the strategic investments that the Water and Habitat Unit needs in order to achieve these objectives. It includes a call to adapt the structure and allocation of resources but also points to the need to re-think existing job roles and profiles.
- The main strategic objectives are based on the Water and Habitat Unit's best practices and our teams' recent experience. This document highlights the changes we need to make in order to systematically incorporate these improvements into all our operations.

This strategy document identifies three main strategic choices and three enablers that are designed to help us overcome our weaknesses, learn, and adapt to future challenges, while preserving our unity and team spirit.

The cultural shift reflected in this strategy will bolster its impact in three ways:

- We will focus on improved operational impact as the single most important value of our work, both when the unit takes the lead and when we contribute to other units' objectives.
- We will accept change constructively, remaining aligned with the organization and seeking maximum advantage from new approaches and tools.
- We will encourage initiatives and creativity in a safe space to test out different ways of working, learning from both positive and negative experiences.

The three main strategic choices set out in this strategy are interlinked and build on each other, from analysis and design to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. As such, they should not be considered separately but as part of a global approach.



## MISSION STATEMENT

*Working within the ICRC's mandate, the Water and Habitat Unit takes a collaborative, systemic and sustainable approach, grounded in public health engineering, to mitigating the impact of armed conflicts and other violence on civilians and ensuring that those affected enjoy essential services and dignified living conditions.*

## VISION

*The Water and Habitat Unit is a highly motivated team that has the knowledge and resources it needs to help strengthen the resilience of communities and their access to essential services during armed conflicts and other violence.*



# EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT – THE HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGE

More than 130 million people in the world are in need of humanitarian aid or protection as a result of major conflict- and violence-related crises.<sup>4</sup> When people are trapped in – or forced to flee – acute or protracted crisis situations, they are often deprived of proper shelter and essential services, such as a reliable water supply, sanitation and solid-waste management, electricity and health care. The needs are overwhelming, yet humanitarian organizations have limited resources and face both old and new threats and challenges in their operating environment. In 2019, the Global WASH<sup>5</sup> Cluster published a study that concluded: “The WASH sector is still struggling to do the basics. [...] It is not in a position to meet the many challenges ahead. With the connection between WASH, accelerated urbanization, new epidemic dynamics, climate change, accelerated demographic pressure and technological risk, people will have to pay a high price if WASH responses are insufficient.”<sup>6</sup>

When discussing challenges to our external environment, one key factor is crisis duration. Today, the average length of the ICRC’s top ten operations (in terms of budget and set-up) is 36 years. Initial emergencies all too easily turn into prolonged crises, causing government-run infrastructure to gradually fail. Essential services become interrupted as various factors – a lack of money to build, operate and maintain infrastructure, assets being destroyed outright and an erosion of skilled staff – add up. In some cases, development organizations are deterred from getting involved by the precarious environment and outlook. And when battlefields move to urban areas, the effects are magnified. Large and complex interdependent services, such as in Goma, Maiduguri, Jordan and Lebanon, are unable to meet the added demand from large numbers of displaced people. The result, too often, is outbreaks and far-reaching epidemics, as we have seen recently in Yemen.

In an increasingly common scenario, more assertive countries are rejecting humanitarian aid or dictating where it can be delivered. At the same time, disregard for international humanitarian law (IHL) will continue to trigger large waves of displacement (examples can be found in the ICRC’s latest report<sup>7</sup>). This reduces the space for neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action, as refugees and marginalized groups are the primary victims of governments’ exclusionary counter-terrorism and migration policies. As a result, field security for humanitarian workers will continue to be challenged, and humanitarian organizations will have to consider reducing their physical presence in certain situations and expanding their use of new technologies and extended networks of local partners. For the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement), this has amplified trends and efforts towards further localizing the delivery of humanitarian assistance and thus expanding the role of the local National Society.

This complexity tends to blur the traditional boundary between emergency and development-oriented humanitarian action, requiring humanitarian organizations and donors to bravely invest in long-term, holistic and sustainable solutions that have a humanitarian impact.

Other global trends, such as climate change, environmental degradation and unequal access to scarce resources, further exacerbate the damage wrought by conflicts, leaving the coping mechanisms and adaptive capacity of communities ever further stretched. Daunting environmental prospects are now nudging countries towards a mind-set of environmental sustainability; inaction is no longer an option. Humanitarian organizations able to incorporate climate adaptation measures into their operations must do so quickly by understanding the impacts on health, water supply and sanitation, food production, economic systems, migration and conflicts. At the same time, ensuring access to a reliable energy supply is often a considerable challenge in many countries and yet the energy sector is

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4 <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-humanitarian-overview-2018-enaesfrzh>

5 WASH refers to water, sanitation and hygiene.

6 [Analysis of the Capacity of the WASH Sector](#)

7 <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/4344-displaced-cities-experiencing-and-responding-urban-internal-displacement-outside>

also vulnerable to climate change. The need to achieve energy security is increasingly being realized through the diversification of energy sources and the adoption of new renewable technologies. This represents an excellent opportunity to invest in more resilient energy systems in our work.

In new operating environments, such as middle-income countries like Venezuela, the ICRC together with our Movement partners must address unconventional needs alongside our traditional emergency response. In addition to providing food, health care, shelter, water and sanitation services, we are increasingly being called on to provide support in areas such as power grids and large hospital infrastructure – and telecommunications may not be far behind. These were traditionally beyond the scope and reach of humanitarian organizations in view of their sophisticated engineering and major funding requirements.

Then there are the inequities brought about by the digital shift occurring in our permanently connected societies. New digital and communication technologies are being widely adopted, empowering individuals through educational opportunities, easy access to news and information and the ability to voice their opinions as citizens and consumers. Yet these technologies are not available to all people and in all countries. This creates a divide, where the digitally marginalized do not benefit from the same access to resources and services. In addition, this hyper-connectedness – and the reams of personal data collected from the internet and smart sensors – will shape the future in both good and bad ways. The risk of cyberattacks and social manipulation will continue to rise. Yet humanitarian work will be more relevant and timely in an era of instant communications, informed decision-making and predictive analysis.

The humanitarian sphere is set to evolve as well, as large corporations grow in transnational power, at times eclipsing the humanitarian role of governments. They will be our new partners in some cases. With sustainability as a megatrend, these corporations will be called on by their own customers to move beyond the paradigm of monetary profit and play their part in creating value for society. Guided by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, especially goals 6, 7, 13 and 17), corporations will get involved in issues traditionally addressed by humanitarian organizations. They will struggle to succeed alone, but they could usefully provide technical expertise and physical support to humanitarian organizations.

## **INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT – THE WATER AND HABITAT UNIT**

In conflict situations, access to essential services can be restricted by a number of factors, e.g. infrastructure being destroyed, resources made inaccessible or an influx of large numbers of displaced people. In such situations, the ICRC's water and habitat teams deliver both emergency solutions and long-term improvements to ensure residents and displaced people in both cities and rural areas enjoy safe and decent living conditions and can access public utilities, whether they are housed in a health facility, a place of detention, a shelter or their own home.

Water and habitat engineers have to keep pace with an evolving humanitarian sector, a fast-changing work environment and the growing number of demands placed on our programmes. As part of their work, our engineers must be guided by basic ethical questions in order to preserve the ICRC's neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action and ensure the organization's humanitarian impact remains relevant, effective and efficient. These ethical questions<sup>8</sup> are summarized on page 7.

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<sup>8</sup> In French: [http://gpp.oiq.qc.ca/Test\\_d\\_une\\_decision\\_ethique.htm](http://gpp.oiq.qc.ca/Test_d_une_decision_ethique.htm)

**DOING THE RIGHT THING AND DOING THINGS RIGHT**

For a decision to pass the test, the answers to the following three questions must all be 'yes':

**TRANSPARENCY**

If my decision is communicated publicly, would I be comfortable defending it and explaining it?

**EXEMPLARITY**

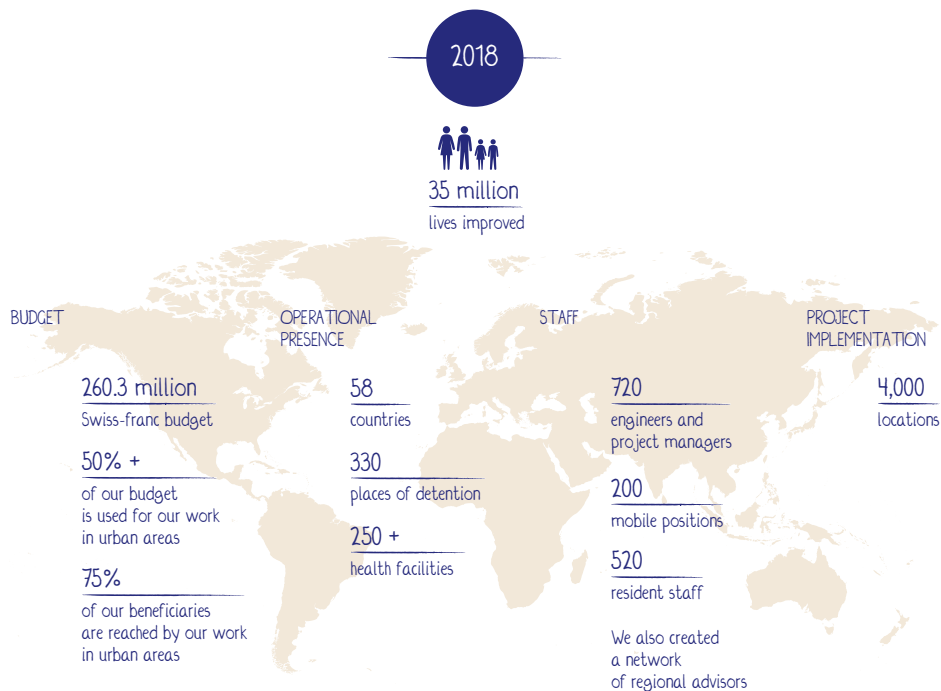
Could my decision serve as an example in a similar situation?

**RECIPROCITY**

Would I still consider my decision correct if I were the one to bear its consequences?

Water and habitat teams significantly enhance the organization’s assistance activities – working on the preventive-care side of the health pyramid – as well as prevention and protection activities aimed at reducing civilian harm. And through their expertise, grounded in a solid understanding of field work, they contribute to the ICRC’s diplomatic efforts. The unit takes an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach, ensuring the organization’s work remains on track throughout the emergency-to-development spectrum. In addition, the ICRC’s delegations, in their holistic programming, can count on the Water and Habitat Unit’s on-the-ground experience and feedback to inform their positions and decisions. The unit also provides important support to other departments. Examples of this include when the unit is involved in building or rehabilitating the premises that house ICRC operations, such as health facilities and physical rehabilitation centres, as well as the ICRC’s own premises and warehouses; when the unit’s systemic approach is used to enable multidisciplinary responses, as seen in the Criteria for Technical Standards in Prison Infrastructure in Latin America (CETIP) project, for example; and when the unit’s work ultimately enhances the humanitarian impact beyond the unit’s own objectives, which is evident in the Durable Return Programme in Iraq (where the combined efforts of economic security, protection, and water and habitat teams help allow displaced people to return safely to their place of origin).

The figure below shows the size of the Water and Habitat Unit’s current operations, its main achievements in terms of people reached, and its budget.



Since the unit was created over 35 years ago, it has managed to remain agile over time, continually updating its areas of expertise in order to keep pace with the fast-growing complexity of the humanitarian environment. The unit remains capable of delivering a meaningful and high-quality response by working with the private sector (e.g. consultants, contractors and partnerships) and by expanding its pool of experts, in particular when it comes to urban projects and large construction processes. Less visible in the work force but still essential are the thousands of technicians and engineers from the National Societies and the public and private sectors who are hired under contractual agreements and memoranda of understanding. These working relationships must meet the ICRC's humanitarian values and professional norms and standards.

Because they have made an effort to expand their skills and increasingly specialize, water and habitat teams are today more numerous, more capable in different technical domains and gradually becoming more diverse in terms of gender, nationalities and backgrounds. Additional team members have been hired as needed, yet never at the expense of the quality that underpins our reputation and field acceptance.

While maintaining its extensive technical field experience and solid reputation, the unit needs to continue incorporating major organizational changes to remain effective in terms of teamwork and operational support. A general effort is required to modernize the unit, and this includes adapting roles and responsibilities to new ways of working.

The water and habitat coordinators also have increasing responsibilities across the board, such as engaging in negotiations at various levels (local, national and international), contributing to the development of law and policy and public communications to ensure crisis-affected people and their representatives are heard, and that our response reflects their stated needs, priorities and concerns insofar as is possible, feeding into the organization's diplomatic efforts with evidence-based arguments, and complying with the many requirements of donors and other influential stakeholders.





# STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1

By 2023, maintain and extend emergency preparedness and response capacities in all high-risk settings to have a timely and effective response in the event of a crisis.

The ICRC's Water and Habitat Unit continues to be recognized internally and externally – by the global WASH community – as one of the leading humanitarian service providers, particularly in urban settings. Yet the ICRC must further strengthen the unit's capacity, keeping engineering teams and related support services in all high-risk environments equipped with relevant and updated knowledge and technology. Close coordination with the ICRC's rapid deployment mechanism must also be maintained, given the organization's renewed effort to improve crisis response through this mechanism, which is designed to clarify all practical aspects of deployment among all the units and departments involved.

When designing an effective emergency response at field level, we seek to leverage factors such as our good understanding of the local response capacity and the resilience levels of communities, the length of our in-country presence, our proximity to adversely affected groups, and our familiarity with the various stakeholders' networks. With enhanced situational intelligence and data analytics capacities, crises can be detected earlier and addressed using existing contingency plans and more sustainable solutions. The effectiveness of our response, especially in complex urban environments that are subject to recurring crises,<sup>9</sup> will depend largely on the preparatory work we do in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders. Prevention-related studies, such as the *Rapid Preparedness Assessment for Health Care Facilities*,<sup>10</sup> can show exactly how emergency responses must be planned and how they can be enhanced by more resilient service delivery.

National Societies remain the ICRC's main operational partners by default. Their WASH capacity must be cultivated through long-term investments in successive generations of teams and coordinators.<sup>11</sup> In addition, a stronger link must be established with National Societies working internationally on WASH activities to bolster joint preparedness and surge capacity in emergency response.

## TACTICAL CHOICES FOR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1:

- Achieve short response times through simplified procedures and fewer layers of approval.
- As soon as the initial, life-saving phase of a crisis ends, include “resilience to future shocks” as a design response parameter.
- Improve our understanding of situations and systems ahead of crisis events as part of contingency planning exercises.
- Help delegations to take the lead in orchestrating an inclusive Movement response.
- Strengthen expertise in emergency response and related trainings.

<sup>9</sup> For an example involving the Gaza Strip: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/water-gaza-crisis-slow-motion>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/4315-security-survey-health-facilities>

<sup>11</sup> Here are two examples, involving the Philippines Red Cross: <https://www.redcross.org.ph/wash-office/>.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

By 2023, be able to promote a flexible, systemic and sustainable approach that engages with people affected by crisis to meet their long-term needs.

In recent years, the Water and Habitat Unit has gradually engaged in projects of growing size and complexity in which we need to map out assets, responsibilities and interdependencies so that we fully understand how entire systems are affected if one component fails or is improved. We must also assess the long-term effects of crisis, improve the resilience of essential services and that of crisis-affected communities and identify new needs. For our work to have a lasting impact, sustainability needs to be built into project design at the social, economic and environmental levels. Multi-year programming requires a long-term view and commitment, along with budgeting and planning tools that extend beyond the ICRC's annual budgeting exercise (planning for results or PFR).

This includes looking beyond the limits of the relief–rehabilitation–development paradigm that no longer holds true if we define a humanitarian action by its purpose and not by its timeframe or type of activity.<sup>12</sup> For example, water trucking and rehabilitating a pumping station in partnership with the authorities should go on simultaneously, as both activities respond in a complementary manner to the same humanitarian objective.

In urban areas, the ICRC's approach was designed to mitigate the direct and indirect effects of conflicts from accumulating and taking hold, factoring in the staffing, infrastructure and consumables required to ensure sustainable access to these services and reduce the rate at which they deteriorate over time. This type of assistance not only serves people's immediate needs by helping prevent WASH conditions and health outcomes from worsening, but also works towards securing "development footholds" and making a modest but nonetheless vital contribution to the SDGs. Urban settings pose unique challenges with respect to targeting and to the protection of civilian objects. As a result, a more integrated approach to the Water and Habitat Unit's work – involving the assistance, protection, legal, weapon-contamination and relations-with-arms-carriers teams – is becoming increasingly necessary, in particular for the use of "explosive weapons in populated areas".

Complex emergencies are increasingly prevalent and posing a serious challenge to humanitarian action. As armed conflicts and displacement settings become more protracted, the greater the likelihood that multiple crises, including the risks associated with climate hazards, can occur at the same time, complicating the response and typically overwhelming all of those involved. For this reason, the Water and Habitat Unit adopts an all-hazards approach<sup>13</sup> to better inform emergency preparedness and response. Regarding climate hazards, the ICRC has committed to strengthen our humanitarian response through supporting communities affected by conflict and violence to adapt to shocks and stresses caused by the combined consequences of conflict and climate change. This is requiring the Water and Habitat to more systematically integrate adaptation measures into our response to conflict affected people and our support to water supply and sanitation service providers, including more sustainable energy supply solutions.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://blogs.icrc.org/law-and-policy/2018/06/21/humanitarian-development-nexus-that-works/>

<sup>13</sup> As part of emergency preparedness planning, the most probable hazards in a given context, in addition to armed conflict, are factored into the design of WatHab interventions to the extent possible, if they could cause injury, damage to critical civilian infrastructure and facilities, disruption to essential services, and have an environmental impact that poses a risk to the public health of the population.

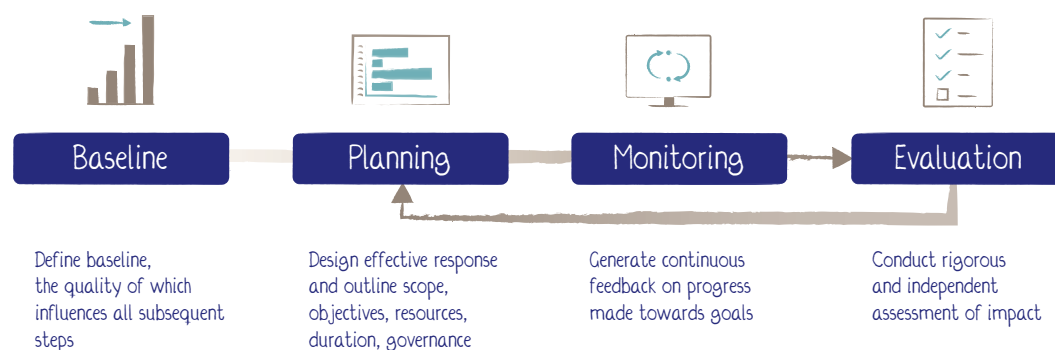
The trend in needs towards larger projects is demanding more from us in terms of project management. This is particularly evident in our support to places of detention, hospitals and physical rehabilitation centres, and premise, just to name a few. For instance, we are increasingly taking a longer-term approach to detention, as we move from targeted actions to a systemic approach in parallel actions at different levels: from prisons to supervisory authorities; from individual organizations to entire regulatory frameworks at country level; and in regional coordination forums. In this field, in particular, progress requires years of continuous engagement, and the delegations' long-term commitment is necessary from the very first assessment.

The long-term approach does not end there. Projects to renovate large hospitals or build physical rehabilitation centres and even large ICRC premises require a multi-year commitment from the Water and Habitat Unit and involve multi-sector objectives and more advanced project management tools.

To be effective in complex settings, the Water and Habitat Unit's work must be based on actionable evidence with methodically constructed baselines in improved assessment formats. These formats should be common to all assistance units and strengthened by evidence-based policy, practice and research (e.g. resilience, social analysis, epidemiology, health impact assessments, remote sensing and area-based multi-sector assessments). The use of baselines will strengthen the Water and Habitat Unit's oversight capacity and its monitoring and evaluation responsibilities. The unit will be in a better position to monitor and assess the human impact and relevance of projects, as well as the reliability and appropriateness of technical choices thanks to a detailed understanding of people's real needs.

Acknowledging the diversity of people in every community, the Water and Habitat teams will ensure that the realities, specific vulnerabilities and perspectives of various groups within the population are identified and fully integrated into its response.

Oversight mechanisms will have to be integrated in the unit's working procedures with the proper resources at all levels, from headquarters to regions and field teams. This process will be crucial to improving accountability and applying best practices. This includes the need to document contextualized failures so as to influence future operational choices and continually improve our effectiveness.



The same approach should be applied to building the capacity of the authorities and service providers we work with and of our National Society partners that have dedicated in-house engineering expertise. We need to provide and promote appropriate tools, trainings and resources so that these authorities have the data management and analytical capabilities – e.g. baseline geographic information system, project data management, digital document management, community call centres and infrastructure and service-level monitoring – that they need to improve their infrastructure and service level.

The inclusive response the ICRC seeks to promote and support in large and protracted operations will necessarily lead the Water and Habitat Unit to assess (alone and/or with partners) needs beyond those that the ICRC alone can meet. Water and habitat teams may therefore also coordinate or, at the very least, ensure that activities undertaken with other Movement entities in the fields of water, shelter and sanitation are aligned and, potentially, technically appropriate.

### **TACTICAL CHOICES FOR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:**

- Strengthen the Water and Habitat Unit's engagement with the development sector beyond simply funding.
- Develop, consolidate and optimize the use of methods and tools more holistically and strengthen multidisciplinary project design practices with other assistance and protection units.
- Strengthen our operations and maintenance capacity in urban and rural settings, detention, hospitals and ICRC premises.
- Collect, analyse and use essential data sets and information to improve affected people and donor accountability while effectively safeguarding personal data.
- Incorporate monitoring and evaluation practices in project cycle management and the PfR for all project managers in the field, along with the necessary budget, staffing and time.
- Prepare for remote-management scenarios in the face of a shrinking humanitarian space.





## STRATEGIC OPTIONS/OBJECTIVE 3

Through 2023, continue to develop expertise in priority areas, while influencing the debate in the humanitarian space so that we and other entities can respond more effectively.

One of the Water and Habitat Unit's strongest assets is our reputation, which is based on our mandate and our unique ability to reliably deliver quality work in conflict settings as part of a holistic approach to assistance and protection. To maintain this level of service, we need to invest in key areas of expertise. We can only sustain and build on this expertise by investing in knowledge and creating a safe space for prototyping new concepts and processes.

The key areas in question include detention, urban settings in crisis situations, power supply and, in general, complex health care and infrastructure projects and operational management. The unit must also build synergies with other units in all project phases (assessment, design, monitoring and evaluation).



Thanks to our technical leadership in key areas of the field of humanitarian engineering, we can influence the debate through publications and by participating in international forums, workshops and cluster meetings. The ultimate goal is to improve the quality of service delivery for crisis-affected communities by everyone in our operating environment – not only humanitarian agencies but also national authorities, universities and the private sector. Part of our role is thus to help to create the right conditions so that other entities can take action in a spirit of collaboration and complementarity. This ranges from facilitating their physical access on the front lines to building their response capacity and resilience and setting standards in our technical areas of expertise.

Whenever the Water and Habitat Unit's technical expertise can help influence policy-making, or when the unit can help preserve critical civilian infrastructure from damage and destruction, the Water and Habitat Unit will act preventively and engage in a protection dialogue with the parties to the conflict in order to document and analyse the situation and, in some cases, to propose specific actions (recent examples include Syria, Iraq, the Gaza Strip, Yemen, Ukraine and the Philippines).

### TACTICAL CHOICES FOR STRATEGIC OPTIONS/OBJECTIVE 3:

- Promote knowledge-sharing on key thematic files from individuals to networks of experts.
- Include in our analysis new and relevant factors and phenomena that affect civilians or particular groups of civilians in our operational areas.
- Expand the scope of our engagement with the energy sector to meet the primary energy needs of communities and crisis-affected groups in addition to providing energy to critical infrastructure.
- Improve the Water and Habitat Unit's capacity to influence ICRC policies and trends in the humanitarian sector, including the need for a more holistic response to the combined effects of conflict and climate change.
- Create a safe space to test new concepts and processes at headquarters and in the field.

# ENABLER 1: STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Encourage skills and expertise development, attract, retain and include talent at all levels and from diverse groups.

In the face of new challenges, specialized needs and growing demand, the Water and Habitat Unit must continue to grow and develop in terms of numbers and expertise. Organizational policies on diversity and inclusion must be actively applied at all operational levels as an opportunity to broaden perspectives within the unit and deepen staff synergies.

By accurately mapping out our unit’s functional competencies, we will be laying the groundwork for our staff members to develop and grow within their career paths. The unit will also benefit directly from this mapping exercise, which will improve our hiring and placement processes and alert us to future hiring or training needs. In this regard, an allocation of dedicated resources will be necessary if we are to effectively manage talent – from proactively sourcing skilled staff to retaining them. An emphasis on knowledge management will be crucial across these processes.

The role of water and habitat coordinators is being transformed. They have gone from being technical supervisors to managing large and complex programmes with a focus on people management in line with both professional and organizational expectations. As a result, they are taking on an increasing number of HR-related tasks, and they need to be trained on these tasks and allotted the time necessary to complete them.

For individual staff members, a culture of constructive and two-way feedback between peers and with supervisors will be encouraged. All staff should benefit from a continuous process of feedback, learning and growth along well-defined career paths.



### TACTICAL CHOICES FOR ENABLER 1:

- Continuously update staff members' roles and job descriptions, the team structure and the attribution of responsibilities.
- Add project management capacity for newer and more complex operational responses.
- Support water and habitat coordinators in their people management duties.
- Expand learning opportunities and develop a roadmap that lays out future career paths.
- Strengthen the link between talent management and knowledge as a pillar of career development.
- Foster diversity among the different segments of our workforce and ensure inclusion.

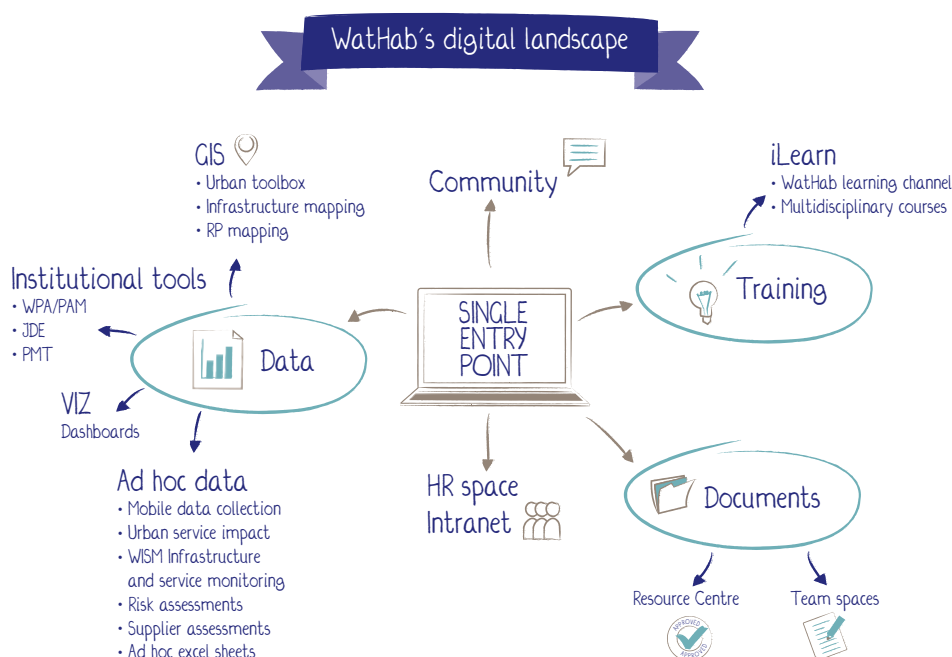




# ENABLER 2: THE WATER AND HABITAT UNIT'S DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

Use quality digital information to inform decision-making in programmes and to support our partners in developing their digital capacity.

Digitalization offers us the chance to be in closer contact with crisis-affected groups, improve our operational efficiency and be more agile in our work. Yet technology alone cannot achieve all that. We need to be willing to use it, open to different ways of doing things and ready to learn.



We must now make data literacy a basic requirement for all field teams and design a simpler and more consistent digital architecture for the Water and Habitat Unit. To make the most of the digital transformation, we will need the right skills and tools in our unit. Data analysts will be required to draw on external and internal data sources in order to build the baselines that all project managers will use as the foundation of response design; information and reporting assistants will be required to support teams in information management and knowledge-sharing and to facilitate administrative processes; and programme coordinators will be required to master the language and features of new apps and guide their teams in making the best use of available resources. The unit will also continue to work closely with other units and divisions, such as finance and administration and logistics, to ensure that there is continuity in the data model and that the data sets are integrated. In this way, we will be able to maximize the number of reports and analyses with a minimum of data collected.

## TACTICAL CHOICES FOR ENABLER 2:

- In keeping with the priorities of the institutional data management model, further develop our ability to collect and analyse the operational data we need to design our specific actions, including relevant disaggregated data.
- Monitor and enforce data quality at the point of entry to ensure the data are actionable.
- Adopt new technologies like remote sensing, building information modelling, 3D scanning, artificial intelligence and sensor-based data collection (e.g. IoT for pressure, flow, water-quality data logging and transmission).
- Strengthen information management practices in order to build up institutional memory and shared knowledge.

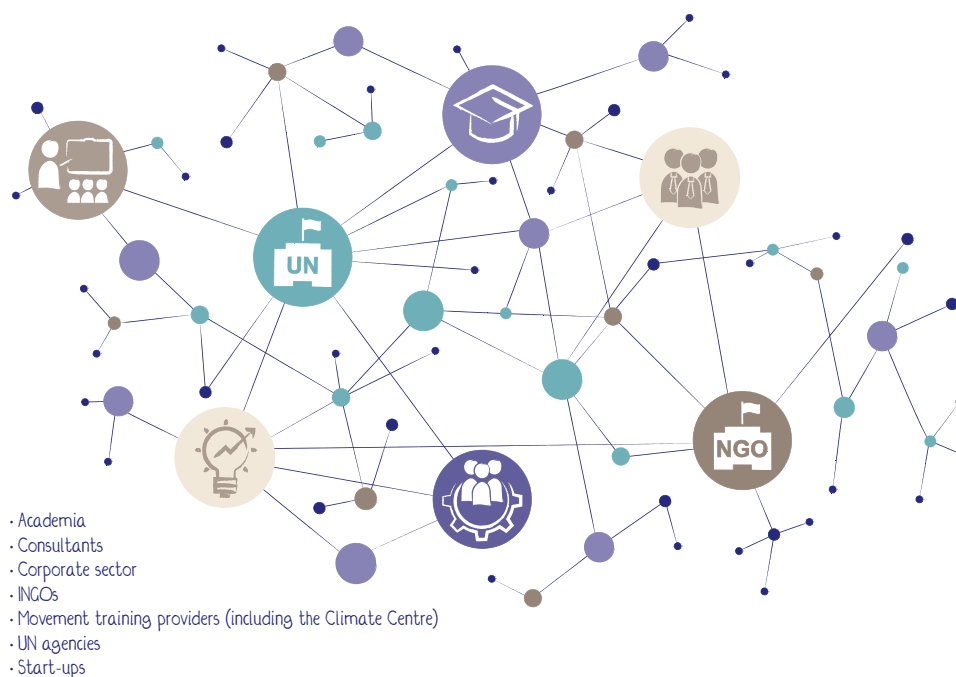


## ENABLER 3: PARTNERING CAPACITY

Develop operational partnerships to extend our reach and impact by operating as part of a network of competencies.

We always involve service providers and authorities in the design and implementation of our programmes over the long term so that they can eventually take over operational and maintenance responsibilities. These relationships also help us with project design, understanding the local environment and conducting contingency planning in times of crisis. In addition, we commonly work with our Movement partners, and this includes helping to build capacity in National Societies' WASH teams in such areas as maintaining and developing their ability to deliver services sustainably.

These relationships are strong, and further emphasis should be placed on this practice. However, the real aim of our partnerships should be to create value together with one or more other entities in a network that extends beyond the humanitarian space to include the corporate sector, development agencies, universities, start-up ecosystems and training providers. We need to develop partnerships in which we contribute our expertise in exchange for tools, methodologies and competencies that we would otherwise have to develop in-house. This process, which involves headquarters as much as the delegations, requires both a willingness to work openly with others and the ability to do so. This implies having a clearly defined vision and rationale for partnering, including a list of potential key partners and the types of collaboration that will create the most value. Co-designing our programmes with the right partners will ensure the best humanitarian outcomes.



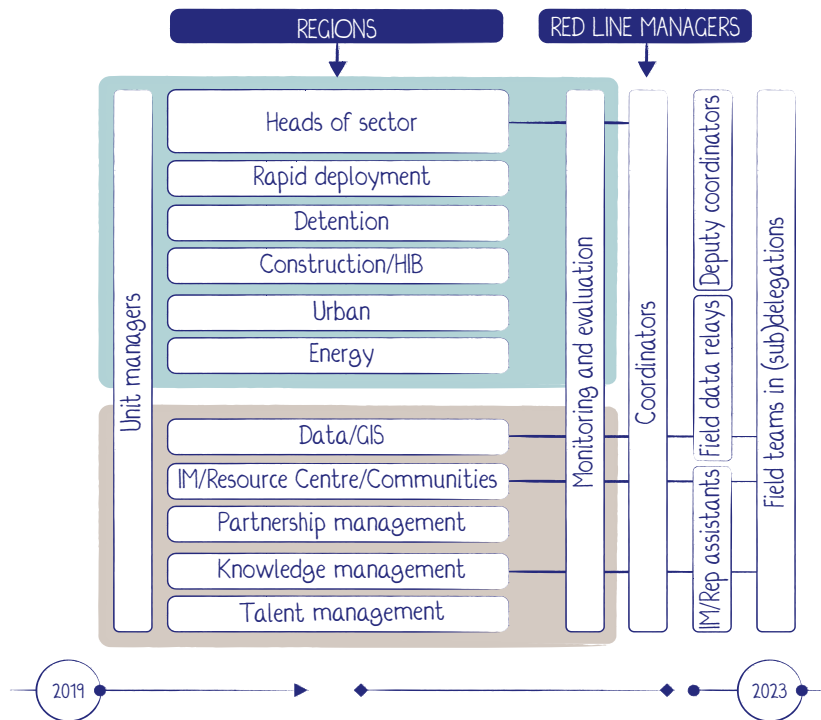
### TACTICAL CHOICES FOR ENABLER 3:

- Learn more about how other organizations and donors operate in order to lay the groundwork for various initiatives that will generate synergies.
- Acquire the internal skills required to guide the partnership process.
- Forge partnerships to acquire high-end expertise to improve our response or to upscale and deliver more sustainable humanitarian impact to address the combined effects of armed conflict and climate risks.
- Ensure the Water and Habitat Unit's processes remain consistent with the organization's policy on engaging with outside entities and on new financing mechanisms.

# RESOURCES

To implement this strategy, the organizational design must reflect our objectives. We will need resources, yet we must also be ready to use existing resources differently, reviewing, testing and prototyping different ways of working.

The chart below shows the main functions and capacities that we believe must have a place in the unit in the coming years. It is not an organizational chart, but rather a broad overview that will have to be operationalized through input from headquarters, the regions and the field teams.



Our goals include:

- bolstering talent-management activities, from acquisition to retention, while encouraging staff development through learning and development opportunities along well-established career paths
- expanding the network of regional advisers involved in urban projects so that they can keep pace with the shifting of needs to urban areas and the growing complexity of multi-year project design and accountability requirements with new donors; regional urban and construction advisers can also be brought in to help with project design and contract preparation
- allocating dedicated resources to engineering work in prisons, with a position at headquarters linked to the rest of the detention team, as well as to a solid network of senior regional advisers; at field level, focal points should be able to engage at multiple levels through a systemic support approach, and they should also be fully integrated into delegations' detention coordination mechanisms
- building capacity in the field of power supply and energy management throughout the workforce to scale up the number and size of such projects in line with the investments made at the organizational level in the energy and sustainability roadmap
- responding more systematically to the combined effects of armed conflict and climate change by developing the capacity and capabilities to take an all-hazards approach as part of emergency preparedness planning and when necessary integrate adaptation measures into our programmes and projects

- integrating data analysis into the Water and Habitat Unit’s existing GIS field capacity as a key support to evidence-based decision-making, monitoring and evaluation processes; dedicated data analysts will work closely with a network of individuals responsible for data analysis at headquarters, in the regions and in the delegations’ field teams
- creating the capacity to monitor and evaluate the Water and Habitat Unit’s work in all fields of humanitarian engineering by building a roster of private-sector consultants and experts and onboarding highly specialized advisers and evaluators
- updating the profile of water and habitat coordinators to reflect the fact that their role is no longer to only manage the technical side of engineering-related activities but rather to manage all aspects of complex, long-term programmes; expanding the coordinators’ teams with additional deputies and analytical, administrative and reporting staff; and providing the coordinators with training on people management, including diversity and inclusion, holistic strategy development, partnerships, how to represent the ICRC, data and digital literacy and administrative and logistics processes.








The ICRC helps people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything it can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with its Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. The organization also seeks to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.



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