



## UKRAINIAN RED CROSS SOCIETY

**“We are close to you”**

Long-term National Society Development investments that strengthened the positioning, sustainability and impact of the Ukrainian Red Cross Society in a fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected environment





# 1. Background

In 2016 the World Humanitarian Summit's **Grand Bargain Commitments set out the goal of "localising" humanitarian action.**

As its own contribution to localisation, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) defines National Society Development (NSD) as "the continuous effort of each National Society to achieve and maintain an accountable and sustainable organisation that delivers – through volunteers and staff – relevant services to address needs, reduce vulnerabilities and build resilience in a changing environment". NSD encompasses all aspects of the life of a National Society, including both what is referred to as Organisational Development and Capacity Strengthening / Enhancement. The policy defines these two interrelated areas as follows:

- **Organisational Development** is the part of NSD work that focuses on fundamental issues within the National Society: its mandate, legal base, identity, long-term strategic direction, basic organisational model, leadership drive, capacity to anticipate and adapt, and the relationships between different parts of the organisation or between the National Society and its environment, including the auxiliary role. Organisational Development recognises the interconnectedness of a National Society's different functions and levels, and their influence on performance and impact.
- **Capacity Strengthening / Enhancement** is the part of NSD work that focuses on improving existing services and capacities by making them more impactful, effective, widespread and better related to the National Society mandate and mission. This includes both strengthening areas of work that focus on community resilience and empowerment, and strengthening underpinning systems, procedures and tools. (IFRC NSD Policy, 2022.)

However, little is documented about how Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies local NSD investments strengthen their impact in line with the Movement's seven Fundamental Principles – in particular those of Neutrality, Impartiality and Independence – which exist to help staff and volunteers gain access, acceptance and trust in all communities and parties in highly conflict-sensitive contexts. This case study was commissioned by a task force of Red Cross Red Crescent Movement (Movement) members<sup>2</sup> as part of a study of long-term National Society Development investments in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts<sup>3</sup>, to record the impact of these and how they will inform future work. It shows how the Ukrainian Red Cross (URCS) has, through NSD activities over the past 10 years, successfully strengthened its unique positioning as a strong, principled, trusted, and local humanitarian actor through:

- Better services
- A more effective structure
- A more sustainable organisation
- A stronger capacity for both response and community resilience building.



1 Local humanitarians are often first to respond when disaster strikes and are often able to get to areas international staff and volunteers can't. Because they're within the affected communities before, during and after crises, they're better placed to both understand people's needs, and connect them to the right ongoing support. In 2016 the Grand Bargain Commitments established a "Localisation Workstream" to "learn from successful localisation practices around the world" and introduce humanitarian processes that:

- Strengthen locally-led, accountable and principled humanitarian action
- Reset power balances between local and international actors so local humanitarians can lead and deliver relevant, sustainable services
- Use a more strategic blend of local to international resources to create more efficient, collaborative, speedy response.

2 The study taskforce was convened and led by British Red Cross and comprised of the American Red Cross, Australian Red Cross, Canadian Red Cross, Danish Red Cross, German Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

3 The term 'investments' refers to all activities undertaken by a NS to strengthen itself, and any support given by partners to help achieve this, including money, time, expertise and other resources.



## 2. Executive summary

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*"In the first days of the war our Emblem was considered a protection sign. We saw it as a symbol of the huge work we had done. We could build on our good relations in communities and on the capacities we had strengthened over the years. As a result, many people came to support us. In 2023, we grew to have more than 200 branches, 1,500 staff and 8,000 registered and trained volunteers, with many other spontaneous volunteers. On the first day of war, 50,000 people nationally asked for arms to protect the city, but at the same time lots of people came to us to offer humanitarian assistance. They helped in railway stations, transport hubs, and collection and distribution sites. By the end of 2023 we had directly assisted more than 12 million people, supported the evacuation of over 300,000 people, and distributed 12 million food and hygiene kits. We felt the unity of support everywhere as a result of the trust we had built in communities for many years before that."*

Dr Mykola Polishchuk, president of URCS

The Ukrainian Red Cross Society (URCS) has had to respond to increasing humanitarian needs caused by social, political and economic turbulence in the country since its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. These grew amid a humanitarian crisis resulting from a vastly escalated armed conflict in the east of the country in 2014, and again in 2022. To transform itself in relevant ways and rise to these challenges, URCS's leadership launched a phased organisational reform process in 2016, which continues to this day.

Founded in 1918 and re-constituted in 1992 after the fall of the Soviet Union, URCS has delivered over a 100 years of stable humanitarian service. Its complex organisational structure comprised of a national headquarters, 663 branches, and over 180 internal, legally independent entities. Prior to the escalation of armed conflict in 2014, its Soviet-era characteristics resulted in it being mainly known for its national State-funded Home Nursing Service. Supported by dependable funding, these traditional services continued with unmodernised systems and minimal infrastructure, guided by a national, regional and local level leadership who would not acknowledge any need to change.

Following the escalation of armed conflict in 2014, branches close to the Line of Contact (LoC) found themselves divided by the conflict, and straddling two separate territories defined as the Government Controlled Area (GCA) and Non-Government Controlled Area (NGCA).

In the first response to this conflict, over 30 Movement partners mobilised humanitarian assistance and human resources to help affected people, with many continuing to do so until today. In the second phase of conflict escalation, from February 2022 onwards, the number of Movement partners increased to 40. Some partners also expanded support and forged partnerships with ICRC and IFRC to strengthen URCS's operational and organisational capacities, at HQ and in directly affected branches.

With millions of people displaced, both in 2014 and 2022, URCS's ability to adapt and deliver new services in a neutral, impartial and independent manner was significantly challenged. The branches divided by the LoC, while still known as Red Cross Organisations found their legal status became unclear amid parties' competing claims to territory. Humanitarian assistance from partners was sometimes uncoordinated and often ad hoc. In early responses, problems with coordination, deployment of and branch delivery systems undermined trust and acceptance of URCS's neutrality, impartiality and independence in the east.

In 2016, URCS's reform process acknowledged its internal lack of unity among the largely independent network of Branches and resulting inability to deliver effective coordinated assistance to local communities. The need for a revised Red Cross law and modernised statutes became a priority to achieve cohesion.

Although the 2002 URCS law set out a number of appropriate auxiliary roles, it retained a traditional, narrow focus on its nationwide Home Visiting Nurse service, alongside a limited disaster response mechanism. Both services relied entirely on State funds for salaries and infrastructure, until these were withdrawn in 2016 amid a public reputational crisis involving allegations of misappropriation of humanitarian goods and funds. URCS's legal authority became unclear, hindering the mobilisation of local resources such as commercial first aid income, which could have helped establish a more sustainable local organisational model.



Nevertheless, URCS has continued to provide vastly scaled up resources to respond to the loss of life, livelihoods, wellbeing and displacement of millions of people. It has done so by building modernised and relevant services and sustainable capacities, and by strengthening its positioning as a neutral, impartial and independent national humanitarian institution. It meets the needs of millions of people made vulnerable by conflict, natural disasters, and declining overall health and wellbeing. New approaches were needed to establish active, community-based networks of members, volunteers, youth and staff, including scaled-up promotion of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and humanitarian values, to contribute to socially cohesive, resilient, and well-prepared communities in the most affected areas of the country.

Since the escalation of armed conflict in February 2022, nearly one third of all Ukrainians have been forced from their homes. It is one of the largest human displacement crises in the world today. UN situation reports from October 2022 indicate that within Ukraine, more than 6.2 million people remain internally displaced by the war, while at least 7.6 million refugees from Ukraine were recorded across Europe. Around 4.2 million of those refugees have registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes. Most of those who remain undisplaced face insecurity, damage to residential buildings, and disruption of services including heating.

The following table summarises key statistics showing how URCS's sustained NSD investment activities have helped increasing numbers of people with neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian services.

Measurable increases in people reached through	People reached in 2020	People reached in 2023
Disaster Response (food and non-food relief items)	100,000	2,771,039
CASH assistance activities to individuals	1,004	382,938
Emergency health services (via Mobile Health Teams)	21,507	453,000
Home based care beneficiaries	1391	6,409
Restoring Family Links messages	9,356	19,558
<b>URCS capacities</b>		
First aid trained	5,466	18,779
First aid seminars	17,620	77,539
First aid trainers	41 and 305 instructors	185 new instructors
Emergency Response Teams (ERT)	20 with 9 sub-units	25 with 15 sub-units
Mental Health and Psychosocial Services (MHPSS)	8 regions, 249 volunteers 4,257 recipients	21 regions, 1,869 volunteers 321,831 recipients
Mobile Health Teams	4	126
Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment (BOCA)		
– facilitators	11	43
– sessions	30	62
Warehouses	17	30
Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting systems	HQ only	See the URCS Plan 2023–25 here: <a href="https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/urcsone-plan-2023-2025">https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/urcsone-plan-2023-2025</a> Data is collected through Kobo-toolbox. All data is available on the dashboard.
Number of international and local partnership MOUs signed	45	72

To respond to the latest escalation of armed conflict and resulting humanitarian crisis, URCS adapted its Strategic Plan 2021–2025 into its URCS One Plan 2023–2025, created with the active consultation of its 23 partners.

In order to adapt to the people's most urgent needs, URCS has focused on NSD investment activities that have strengthened its **proximity, visibility, legacy, reputation, and integrity**.

This case study describes how URCS and its partners customised its NSD work to meet the fluctuating needs of its external environment. It is now seen by a wide number of external stakeholders as a unified, trusted, principled, transparent and accountable territory-wide humanitarian organisation. Its NSD investments contributed to a much stronger institutional capacity, and a base on which its ongoing programmes and services have started to reach extended numbers of remote and highly vulnerable people affected by conflict and violence.

The organisation has been on a journey to provide, and be recognised for, humanitarian services offered in spaces others cannot reach, serving as a strong example in the Movement. This case study shows how URCS's NSD investments, with coordinated strategic Movement partner support in its conflict-sensitive environment, helped it:

- **transition from a 'top down' provider of national services to a community-engaging organisation** focussed on local community vulnerability assessments and sustainable, locally-led action models
- **rebuild public trust and confidence in local services demonstrating neutrality, impartiality and independence**, providing a strong platform to grow principled services from February 2022 onwards
- **mobilise neutral, impartial and independent staff and volunteer bases** which contribute to social cohesion and inclusion objectives in divided and tense social contexts
- **adapt Red Cross Red Crescent Movement tools such as the Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation (SMCC)<sup>4</sup>** process, originally meant to improve coordination before, during and after disasters, to provide coordinated NSD support
- **adapt its Strategic Plan 2021–2025 into URCS One Plan 2023–2025** to coordinate Movement support for its NSD goals
- **refresh volunteering, youth and branch development as integrated concepts** through strengthened policies, structures and integrated locally-led service development models
- **strengthen safer access to communities who need us**, through enhanced safety and security training for branch and coordination office staff and volunteers; risk assessment systems; community access and acceptance strategies
- **update transparency and accountability systems**, improving public and institutional trust and greater resource mobilisation for its neutral, impartial and independent services
- **deepen its localisation** through community-based planning of relevant local social services, exploring local social enterprise models for financial resilience, and collaborative models within auxiliary role and local external partnerships
- **develop and empower its human resources**, by investing in its people, particularly a skilled internal volunteer base, and encouraging decentralised decision-making to catalyse impactful action.



*Dnipro, Ukraine, December 2018. These children and parents had to leave their homes due to the armed conflict in the East of the country. Volunteers of the Ukrainian Red Cross Dnipropetrovsk branch are holding psychosocial sessions on a regular basis for internally displaced families to help them recover emotionally. During this particular masterclass, children prepared self-made ornaments for Christmas from scented soap.*

4 In 2015 the Council of Delegates adopted the 'Strengthening of Movement Coordination and Cooperation' (SMCC) resolution to improve coordination and cooperation between Movement components and better capitalize on their complementary strengths. (Council of Delegates, 2013, accessible at <http://smcctoolkit.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CoD-2013-Resolution.pdf>)



### 3. Humanitarian context

As the second largest country in Europe by landmass, Ukraine gained its independence with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Its population of 44.3 million people have since experienced sporadic moments of economic growth followed by deep recessions and hyperinflation which have generated sustained economic, political and social turbulence. In spite of being judged one of the poorest countries in Europe by the IMF, the Ukrainian people have shown great resilience. Humanitarian spirit and civil society organisations have grown, demonstrating a will among the people to support others.

The economy of Ukraine had been the second largest in Europe during the Soviet Union era, being an important industrial and agricultural component of the country's planned economy. With the collapse of the Soviet system in 1991, the country moved from a planned economy to a market economy. The transition process was very difficult for most of the population. Many people were plunged into poverty.

Ukraine is characterised as a middle-income country, is a significant producer of agriculture and food products and has a strong industrial base. However, a protracted conflict in the east of the country, which started in February 2014 between pro-Russian separatists and the new government, severely impacted the national economy. It placed a financial strain on social services, communities and the population in general, and resulted in loss of life and livelihoods.

More than 10,000 people were killed between 2014 and 2019. 1.6 million were displaced, and over 4 million people in the eastern Donbas region of the country had been directly affected by the continuing crisis. Severe humanitarian impacts remained, particularly in non-Government controlled areas and along the LoC. The immediate needs were increasingly accompanied by mid-to long-term development challenges as the conflict remained protracted.

Between 2014 and 2022 the armed conflict was characterised by daily skirmishes and numerous ceasefire violations that left thousands of civilians killed or wounded. The protracted humanitarian crisis severely increased vulnerabilities for millions of people both in the conflict-affected areas and across the whole country. Declining State budgets proved unable to meet people's needs, and there has been sporadic political and social unrest in communities challenged by scarce resources, particularly in communities hosting displaced people.

Before the escalation of the armed conflict in 2022, the population of Ukraine was 41,130,432 people (excluding Crimea and Sevastopol). It is estimated that the conflict has affected 24 million people in Ukraine, while the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has increased from 2.9 million before 24 February 2022 to 17.6 million in January 2023<sup>5</sup>. Humanitarian organisations in Ukraine have



*Dnipro, Ukraine – Ilona left her home in Toretsk, in the Donetsk region, by herself when she was 16.*

*Since then her family home has been destroyed and they now stay with her in Dnipro. She received hygiene supplies and diapers for her baby from URCS, which is working hard to provide emergency services to those affected by the ongoing fighting, while also supporting recovery and reconstruction efforts.*

*Its work is supported by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and more than a dozen partner Red Cross organisations*

also dramatically scaled up their operations, reaching over 15.8 million people through the end of 2023, including 1 million in areas under the temporary military control of the Russian forces, where access remains a challenge. The number of humanitarian organisations has increased five-fold, to over 700.

According to the IOM<sup>6</sup>, there are around 6 million internally displaced people in Ukraine and slightly over 5 million returnees (including the return of formerly displaced people from other locations within Ukraine, as well as self-reported returnees from abroad). The World Food Programme (WFP) has projected an exponential rise in food insecurity across all regions of Ukraine, and about 11.1 million people are estimated to need access to food and livelihood services (OCHA)<sup>7</sup>. According to WFP, 20% of people across the country are unable to put enough food on the table, while in eastern and southern Ukraine, it's one in every two, forcing some families to use negative coping strategies.

It's estimated by OCHA that about 8.3 million people are in need of shelter and essential household items to cover basic needs, while 14.6 million people need health and nutrition assistance and, UNICEF<sup>8</sup> estimates 2 million children under five and pregnant and breast-feeding women need life-saving nutrition services. Older people face severe income shortages due to low pension levels and difficulty accessing pension payment points due to discriminatory attitudes, lost governmental control over some territories and physical barriers.

Within this complex setting, URCS continued to be accepted and allowed access to reach the most vulnerable communities in the vast majority of areas. URCS's unique status as an organisation is its most precious feature, addressing daily challenges to a wider recognition in all parts of the country under government of Ukraine control.



*Armed conflict in Ukraine: refugees from Ukraine wait at a Polish-Ukrainian border checkpoint in Przemyśl. Children are covered with thermofoil blankets against the cold.*

6 [https://dtm.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1461/files/reports/IOM\\_Gen%20Pop%20Report\\_R11\\_IDP\\_ENG\\_0.pdf](https://dtm.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1461/files/reports/IOM_Gen%20Pop%20Report_R11_IDP_ENG_0.pdf)

7 <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-flash-appeal-march-de-cember-2022>

8 <https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/en/documents/ukraine-humanitarian-situation-report-26-april-2022>



## 4. Strengthening 'proximity'

The rapid changes in its external environment have challenged URCS as the largest national humanitarian institution. It has had to regularly redefine its mission, service profile, and sustainability model to develop relevant, localised services to meet new and growing humanitarian needs.

To transform itself and its structures to deliver more relevant, conflict-prepared, efficient, cost-effective, accountable and sustainable services in the years ahead, URCS's reform processes focussed on refreshing its organisational vision, identity, and service portfolio to adapt to changing circumstances. It focussed on restructuring the organisation as a whole, and transforming the way the organisation works and profiles itself as the largest local, neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian network in Ukrainian-controlled territory.

URCS had been challenged with re-building 'proximity' in all communities across the country after the 2016 allegations of fraud and subsequent withdrawal of all government funds for auxiliary services. The response of its new leadership from 2016 onwards was to rebuild its access and acceptance at community level, and across all Governmental and non-State armed actors and institutions.

These goals have been achieved through the following four key focus areas in strengthening locally-led humanitarian action. These strategically managed dimensions have served URCS in a very timely way when adapting and responding to the latest escalation of armed conflict in February 2022.

### (i) Localisation

Prior to 2016, URCS's branch network, with its Soviet era characteristics, had traditionally functioned in an autonomous top-down manner, with virtually no active member, volunteer or youth structures, and therefore no local ways of involving communities across the country to understand their different needs.

The reform process aimed to increase trust and respect for URCS as a national and local organisation working for all. It envisioned a more balanced model of sustainable national and local services. It sought to transition from a top-down, State-funded, health service-based model, radically re-positioning the organisation. The key goals were to both strengthen quality-approved national services to meet its auxiliary roles, but also to generate locally relevant services by listening to the voices of newly-mobilised members, volunteers, and young people, who could also help raise resources from local communities for these new, more relevant services.

URCS was fortunate to have partners who offered support as it developed a culture that welcomed community-generated ideas and resources within a framework of new, agreed, common quality standards.



*Lutsk, Ukraine – Vira Antropova demonstrates physiotherapy techniques during a skills workshop ahead of the URCS Rehabilitation programme launch.*

*There is a large need for rehabilitation in Ukraine right now. This programme is designed to provide services to patients and their families where they live, while raising awareness of the importance of rehabilitation and the needs and contributions of people with disabilities.*





However, in spite of the capacities URCS had developed through NSD investments since 2016, when responding to the escalation of armed conflict in 2022, international organisations, including wider Movement partners, missed several opportunities to deepen response localisation – as observed by internal URCS stakeholders below:

- there should have been a more consistent attempt at ‘customising’ the messages to the Government, civil society and NGO sectors around URCS’s neutrality as a local actor. In a full scale international armed conflict, the way in which neutrality is communicated is highly sensitive, especially when URCS is the only national or internationally-supported key local humanitarian actor present in many areas. Instead of running the risk of being misunderstood as supporting either party to the conflict, neutrality should have been communicated with a stronger accent on the Geneva Conventions and described as “covering the needs others could not cover”
- some international mechanisms were questioned. Funding was controlled by international actors and the cluster system, but local organisations and civil society systems were already strong and could have worked with donors directly rather than through intermediary mechanisms
- international humanitarian institutions showed little knowledge of the strength of local humanitarians in areas such as logistics, licensing, standards development, and human expertise –these do not always have to be supplemented by international assistance
- it would have been more helpful if the Movement support strategy to URCS had focussed on NSD investments in key sectors which are not so strong in Ukraine (such as social care and services).

However, the NSD investment activities in 2022 have nevertheless brought many new processes, programmatic approaches, and a refreshed profile for local personnel. In 2018 it would have unthinkable for URCS to have a unit dealing with strengthening leadership in country-wide programming. Now, a multitude of Departments are working on concepts that have moved from project-based funding in time-limited contexts to long-term service provision linked to innovative auxiliary roles with government services.

URCS has benefitted from supported approaches to strengthening locally-led action. NSD investments have led to diversified national and international partnerships, and a focus on generating independent local funds to protect and sustain its assets into the future (see Section 5 (iii) for more details on local sustainability strategies).

## **(ii) Adapting to regionalised contexts**

Such a fractured and divided set of internal and external contexts required a modernised structure with capacity to identify the very local needs of highly vulnerable communities and respond with life-saving and resilience-strengthening approaches. A new direction to build locally-led humanitarian action was needed.

After the Government’s withdrawal of staff and operational cost support in 2016, the loss of salary support for all of URCS’s 3,200 Home Nurses that year strengthened leadership’s commitment to transform the organisation’s accountability and transparency, based on completely new and modernised systems.

*“In 2016, breaking away from State funding was a good lesson. The State-funded nurses had also been serving as staff of our branches, and they were the legs and arms of our organisation. We had to change, or die as an organisation. Our biggest priority was developing the district branches. If they were strong, they would make their regions strong, and then HQ would be strong.”*

URCS interregional manager

At that time, URCS consisted of its HQ (National Committee), 24 oblasts (regions), one city branch (Kyiv), and 663 town and rayon (district) branches. Its regions and a large number of their respective sub-regional structures comprised of 180 legally separate registered entities. The National Committee is an executive structure, with national governance bodies being elected from the regions.

URCS initiated a restructuring process through a statutes revision which was finalised and approved by the National Assembly in 2021. It contained an updated branch structure to align to new Local Government decentralisation, as well as strengthened accountabilities at all levels. The structure envisioned consolidating and merging different types of branches into two major types: local and regional. Only 200 of the town and rayon branches had survived after the loss of state funding. As part of the statutes revision,



the National Committee opted for a decentralisation process by which all 24 regional branches remained, but to be served by decentralised support from five cluster offices. To date, three Cluster Officers have been appointed, with two more offices to be opened in 2024 and 2025 respectively. These offices were not designed to add a layer of governance, but instead to put paid staff in place to offer coordinated capacity building support in their regions and respective local branches.

One aim was to revitalise the local life of branches as consultative and interactive parts of their own communities, with strengthened local member and volunteer-led services across the country. Another was to enable greater organisational coherence, legal clarity, local resource mobilisation potential (particularly aligned to potential new auxiliary role partnerships with the newly decentralised Local Government structures), and consolidated cost-effective structures..

### **(iii) Customising vulnerability and risk assessment tools to conflict-affected contexts**

*“The most recent war of 2022 onwards pushed URCS to develop and more deeply respond to the critical needs of the people, whom it had traditionally served with general volunteering. The Fundamental Principles helped a lot to guide our values, finding people that no others can, or have, reached. We realised that with changing Government medical and social care systems, it was better to be independent if we wanted to advocate for people who are denied access to different parts of the Government system. Our Red Cross clients are up to 10 million people, out of the population of approximately 30 million. We need to help people to identify their own risks, solve problems, and develop skills to do so. We needed to start at the beginning, giving people humanitarian aid and organising safe spaces for them, and after that helping people to enter systems of support from Government and other services.”*

National Committee senior manager

URCS had added a local vulnerability assessment module to its original BOCA<sup>9</sup> assessment tool, which transitioned into its own branch assessment tool when merged with the Safer Access Framework (SAF)<sup>10</sup> tool in 2021 and piloted between 2021 and 2023. In 2019, to help scope relevant local services for highly vulnerable populations, the IFRC, Danish and Swedish Red Cross jointly promoted and disseminated Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) and Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI) tools, including national training in Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (PMER)/ Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (PMEAL) in 2019 to enhance the URCS’s capacities to identify and prepare to respond to local risks and vulnerabilities.

With the encouragement of the Danish Red Cross, URCS piloted a Needs Assessment tool and CEA approaches. With an amendment it following an evaluation of the pilot results, the Needs Assessment tool was finalised and has been used in all local branches annually since 2022/23. It is used as a base for annual planning and to launch relevant social services and activities based on local vulnerability assessments. These were supplemented by volunteer-friendly guidelines, needed to support the development of local member- or volunteer-led services, including simple budgeting and business planning templates.

Some emergency response teams (ERTs) have more recently received integrated psychosocial support (PSS) and Psychological First Aid (PFA) training, which is a welcome indication of cross-cutting capacity enhancement. Partners attempted to coordinate assistance to scale up a sustainable, well equipped ERT structure across all branches, prioritising those with predictable recurring disasters first. URCS needed to develop a multi-sectoral hazard, risk and vulnerability map of the country to prioritise a phased capacity building of regions and local branches in highly vulnerable areas.

But the recent escalation in conflict gave rise to new and previously unknown risks and vulnerabilities which needed new organisational services and directions. These also needed intensified NSD investments to help URCS to remain relevant and focussed on reducing new risks.

9 IFRC’s BOCA is a self-assessment tool developed for NS branches to identify and assess their strengths, limitations and challenges in relation to a wide range of organizational capacities. It is used as a first step in a branch development process.

10 The Safer Access Framework (SAF) was first developed by the ICRC in 2002/03, in consultation with National RCRC Societies and the IFRC. It aims to help NSs increase their capacities and preparedness to respond safely and effectively to humanitarian needs in sensitive and insecure contexts. <https://saferaccess.icrc.org/overview/>

*“After responding to the escalation of the conflict in 2022 onwards, we realised URCS has a unique experience and capacity to organise support, help and protection for people. But to be sustainable we need to involve communities, volunteers and local authorities to establish sustainable social services that respond to those identifying risks and vulnerabilities in their own contexts. We need to reassess our locations and choose the right place to support people affected by war. So we are developing a map of stakeholder services and shared roles. The national authorities are looking to URCS as a strong partner after the last two years of our work. They ask us for information, support and auxiliary role partnering opportunities to find new innovative approaches to supporting the most vulnerable people.”*

National Committee senior manager

#### **(iv) Branch and regional office development**

Prior to 2016–2019 URCS’s largely independent branches did not benefit from a clear branch development model. Internal guidelines attempted to keep consistent approaches to managing branch affairs, but there were no guides on how to explore, expand and deliver local, sustainable services, or build local capacities.

URCS needed to guide branches on provision and expansion of conflict-related services in eastern Ukraine. In particular it needed to enhance its branch, staff and volunteer capacities to strengthen services for conflict-affected communities. These include areas such as psychosocial support services (PSS), livelihoods, cash and voucher assistance, dissemination of information on International Humanitarian Law (IHL), and modernised and customised nursing services in conflict-sensitive areas.

After conflict escalation in 2014, ICRC recognised URCS’s need to deepen understanding of the Movement’s mandates, mission, operational communication, context and risk analysis, visibility and security management in conflict-affected branches in the east. ICRC began its SAF support to these branches in 2015 to strengthen their identity, acceptance, access, and operational safety and security. ICRC deployed a Branch Development/SAF Delegate in November 2018 for 22 months to assist branches in LoC areas. The Safer Access Framework (SAF) tool was implemented in the most affected branches first, with the longer-term aim of mainstreaming it into the wider working system of URCS.

ICRC sub-delegations provided financial support to a series of URCS local humanitarian centre (hub) managers to be liaisons between URCS and ICRC for volunteer management in joint operations. However, the Branch Development/ SAF Delegate served five ICRC sub-delegations and one office, and a large number of branches in both the NGCA and GCA areas, stretching his resources to the limit.

With no URCS SAF focal point in HQ until 2022, SAF was instead integrated into all URCS’s branch development tools. URCS invested in a number of trained trainers in SAF who deliver awareness sessions to all branches and volunteers across the country. These are coordinated by the Branch Development Unit at HQ. there is therefore no need for a SAF focal person.

ICRC’s substantial financial contribution to branch strengthening and development was contained in its financial support for its Branch Development Delegate. However, ICRC budgets for SAF support to branches declined from CHF 30,541 in 2016 to CHF 5,098 in 2019, which then represented 0.19% of the total operational cooperation budget including Non-Government Controlled Areas. SAF budgets were extremely limited given the scope of humanitarian needs that volunteers were facing, and the training they needed. However, after SAF became integrated into URCS’s branch development tools, there was no need for a specific budget as all SAF-related activities are now covered by the BraVo budget that was funded by 11 partner National Societies and ICRC.



*Ukrainian Red Cross Information Center, Rostyslav Karpenko Maryna Hryhorova, Ukraine.*



An NSD evaluation in 2021 noted that:

*"ICRC's future SAF and NSD allocations should include funds that enable 'outsourced' branch strengthening inputs to also be provided to SAF-supported branches. These might include options such as paying for Danish Red Cross or other partners' technical capacity enhancement training of SAF branches in technical areas such as resource mobilisation (RM) or Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (PMER), and paying for URCS HQ visits from technical units to build wider institutional capacities in branches receiving ICRC support."*

NSD in Ukrainian Red Cross Society evaluation, 2016-2019

ICRC's interventions were predictably limited to the delivery of relevant humanitarian assistance for as long as needed, while attempting to build branches' operational capacities and positioning in the process. ICRC's commendable SAF support to branches in the NGCA and GCA areas focussed on operational capacity building of volunteers and some branch infrastructure. However, it fell short of building the sustainable institutional capacities that would keep branches operational, after their support had been withdrawn, in areas such as planning, monitoring, resource mobilisation (RM), volunteer management and partnership development.

There were perceived initial limitations to ICRC's support before 2021 which included the below aspects. However, after URCS adopted BraVo as a nationwide branch development process in 2022 onwards, these issues have been addressed and improved:

- with strong ICRC funding, ownership for service development did not transfer to URCS branches
- lack of volunteer-friendly guidelines for implementation of each service
- non-integration and use of URCS existing Volunteer Management Manual and guidelines resulted in potential loss of long-term volunteers
- some branches in the east have paid 'specialists' (e.g. in PSS) but have no parallel support for local resource mobilisation to pay for such position in the longer term
- majority of branch positions are solely funded by ICRC, challenging long-term sustainability as a result of any integrated support from other relevant potential partners
- sometimes ICRC is perceived to involve branches in operations, and sometimes not – leading to inconsistent capacities being built
- no regular meetings between partners at sub-delegation level for operational coordination which could agree support required from multiple partners to each branch
- ICRC's programme support trainers were not familiar with URCS's existing guidelines
- ICRC not supporting URCS to customise existing internal guidelines to the needs of conflict-affected areas
- the results from scattered pilots across different branches are not being consolidated and evaluated to learn from and set future directions
- eastern branches' new knowledge areas were not shared with others across the country (e.g. on pilot learning from new modernised approaches to conflict-preparedness, ageing support/home nursing/care models, livelihood support, emergency response teams (ERTs), etc.)
- interregional managers focussed only on BOCA Branches with no support to conflict-affected branches deemed to be in "ICRC's operational areas"
- no Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) had reached branches in highly conflict-sensitive areas in the first phase, limiting their abilities to develop a full range of capacities.

ICRC needed to work with all Movement components to adopt a more active 'interoperability agenda' (i.e. an enhanced way of sharing information and services) so that their collective resources can generate the complementary NSD support required. However, this also required a variety of Movement partners to actively fund such needed technical support, otherwise the strategy would not succeed. URCS needed to develop and align all partners' support to a common, URCS-developed, customised and owned Branch Assessment Tool and capacity building map.



They could then manage supply and demand of a wider set of NSD support areas required to build strong branches. This needed to be complemented by multi-partner branch level meetings to synergise resources and future capacity-building plans, with branches facilitating the discussions.

With the support from ICRC, Danish Red Cross, and IFRC, URCS benefitted from two process tools: the Safer Access Framework (SAF) and the Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment (BOCA). The BOCA had 34 capacity assessment elements, usually prioritising 5–10 resulting actions in a follow-up plan. The SAF had eight elements, which can also be implemented in different appropriate customised combinations in a branch follow-up plan.

As of December 2021, both self-assessment tools aimed to strengthen branch functioning in specific circumstances across the Movement. BOCA was adopted as URCS's standard nationwide branch development tool, with an additional vulnerability assessment module added in 2019 and a SAF module added in 2021. At first it was only used in 27 eastern and southern branches who had benefitted from ICRC's ongoing Safer Access Framework (SAF) support. However, from January 2023, URCS merged the BOCA with the SAF and subsequently has been using the merged tool as the core of its branch development strategy all over Ukraine. It is known either as "BOCA with SAF component" or "BOCAF". In 2023 alone, URCS conducted 53 workshops using the merged tool.

ICRC acknowledged that SAF is not a comprehensive branch development tool in itself. To assist URCS to revitalise and modernise its branch network, the ICRC, Danish Red Cross and IFRC offered substantial and integrated support to help to explore and expand nationally consistent approaches to branch, volunteer and service development, supported by appropriate improved support systems at HQ and regional levels. A collective agreement with URCS in 2017 had led to the Danish Red Cross intensifying its role as technical lead in branch, volunteer, youth and service development. This technical lead role was supported with financial contributions from ICRC and IFRC for components such as BOCA, BraVo (see below), and pilot grants.

*"BraVo helped us a lot. If I agree an MoU with a Ministry to play a specific auxiliary role, I have to be sure it will be done. Regional Branches always had some resources but, from 2016, local Branches didn't. They lived in their local communities and after BraVo they saw themselves from the perspectives of beneficiaries and local authorities. These new perceptions led to ideas for more effectiveness and wanting change to be seen to be better."*

Maksym Dotsenko, URCS director general

The first Danish Red Cross-supported URCS Branch, Youth and Volunteer Development (BraVo) Project targeted four regional branches, with two more selected local branches in each. While the Danish Red Cross provided overall coordination, and delegate and technical expert support, ICRC covered activity costs and URCS provided in-kind support of volunteers, staff and offices.



*Tetiana Solovey, a facilitator at the Ukrainian Red Cross child-friendly space in Mykolaiv takes a photo of kids after their art project.*

*The space provides psychosocial support to children, and respite from the things happening outside their windows. Solovey said: "The spaces let kids come together and play with others, which is the first time for some of those born during the pandemic and then the conflict."*



A BraVo “Lessons learned” workshop in 2018 evaluated the first phase. The participants from URCS’s branches and National Committee recognised the need to strengthen the links between NSD investment activities and expanded numbers of people reached. The workshop identified the need to:

- strengthen needs assessment tools for identifying local vulnerabilities in communities
- move from project-oriented work to the overall development of URCS’s branches
- develop a branch development manual with supportive methodologies to implement it
- customise and adopt BOCA as the source of the new branch development approach
- identify core services to be delivered by all branches and a plan of action to achieve them
- customise and strengthen a volunteer development training and management system (records, database, etc.), including conflict-sensitive elements
- create a branch activity and financial plan with roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders
- expand the Schools of Social Activities (see below) and social services offered at Branch level
- improve social media and communications capacities
- establish a URCS ‘branch model’ with minimum structures and a financial sustainability plan.

With conflict worsening in the east, the second phase of BraVo focussed more on promoting protection, wellbeing, and social cohesion for vulnerable groups in Ukraine, supported by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA). The project was completed in 2021, and although URCS was preparing a next phase, to focus on strong branch, volunteer and youth development components, this was overtaken by the conflict escalation in 2022. These issues have been covered since by multiple partners, using the successful models developed in the first phase.

Acknowledging that branches were not traditionally used to developing local needs-based services, the two programmes expanded the concept of Schools of Social Activities, designed to encourage ideas for services from groups of people most likely to need them, such as older or socially isolated people, those with disabilities or experiencing loneliness or homelessness. These were initially to be run by the BraVo Project Manager, but to strengthen URCS’s internal technical branch development support capacities, two new positions called Interregional Managers were introduced, in the frame of the MoFA project, to conduct and offer follow-up support for branches attending the Schools of Social Activities. The schools were supplemented by a system of pilot grants to allow branches to explore services following the local needs assessments.

The two pilot Interregional Managers were placed to cover branch and volunteer development of 27 local Branches (under the BraVo pilot). The HQ Organisational Development (OD) Unit aimed to build a nationwide knowledge management system, gathering all the strongest branch materials in different topic areas on a shared online platform for all branches across the country. The aim was to create a sustainable internal peer support system between branches, and clarify the functions of Interregional Managers and MTTs who would be mobilised to provide targeted technical support. MTTs focussed on the mobilisation of technical experts, in a sustainable model of peer support.

URCS’s OD Steering Committee was established in 2018, not just as an information sharing platform, but to study and analyse different strategies, brainstorming, and generating decisions with the approval and involvement of all partners. The Committee functioned until the escalation in conflict in February 2022 and covered not only branch and volunteer development, but also the development of URCS’s resource mobilisation, HR, finance development, legal base development and other OD activity streams. After February 2022 it was restructured into two separate Committees as NSD priorities expanded significantly and one Committee was not enough to manage the organisational changes required. An NSD Steering Committee covers finance development, HR development, social services development, resource mobilisation development, and digital transformation (meeting twice a year). A separate BraVo Steering Committee covers Branch and Volunteer development (meeting quarterly).

URCS's Branch development approach has been systematic and well-monitored, as documented by the OD Steering Committee over a number of phases between 2017 and 2020 as mapped below:



The URCS Branch Assessment Tool (merging SAF and BOCA, and known either as “BOCA with SAF component” or “BOCAF”) was piloted in 27 branches with resulting plans of action (PoAs) for Branch strengthening between 2017-2021.

*“This new merged tool helped us provide new approaches to a wider number of local branches to undertake new needs assessments with support. As part of our localisation agenda it helped local branches to identify what they needed, leading to evidence-based budgeting.”*

National Committee senior manager

However, the PoAs were not fully aligned to the technical capacities of the Mobile Training Teams in the initial stages. Also, ICRC cooperation officers in five eastern sub-delegations and one office were not familiar with URCS tools such as volunteering guidelines or local vulnerability assessment tools. This initially undermined the ability of URCS to offer coordinated and consistent support to all its branches everywhere using the same support structures.

In 2019 a first issue (400 copies) of URCS’s Local Branch Handbook was printed and disseminated across all regional and district branches (the Handbook is available electronically as well). Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) started using it during their outreach activities. It is a guiding reference covering all aspects of branch activity (finance, resource mobilisation, volunteer management, communication and cooperation, work of Governance Bodies, etc.) It provided simple and concise explanations and reference to existing standards, policies and procedures, setting one standard for branch organisation across the country.

Before the current armed conflict in Ukraine, local branches generally had a lower operational and institutional capacity, with only 10% receiving support through the previous branch and volunteer development program (BraVo), launched in 2018. By the time it was concluded in 2021, the BraVo programme had succeeded in supporting 33 branches, primarily in the east of the country, to assess their capacity gaps, implement development plans, enhance volunteer management capacities, and implement new initiatives.

But with the second major escalation of armed conflict in 2022 it was clear that URCS needed new models for building local branch capacities. This involved transferring learning from those branches in the Donbas region, who had experienced conflict before. The learnings were merged into the previous BraVo branch development model and in April 2022, two months after the escalation of armed conflict, the updated BraVo in Emergencies (BraVoIE) was launched.



*“Before the war started in 2022 we had a strong, motivated team in our regional office, with functioning heads of branches in 16 out of 18 districts. We cooperated with public authorities, but before 2022, apart from German Red Cross support to build our infrastructure so we reached more beneficiaries, we didn't receive much interest. But war, and our experience of BraVo, changed all that. We scaled up our efforts massively and now have 656 trained personnel including 211 staff and 218 volunteers. We developed home-based care services for 220 very vulnerable elderly and disabled beneficiaries, with the German Red Cross helping us make payments so that people in rural areas with no heating could have fuel. Our local branches coordinate with local authorities to prioritise those needing the most assistance, and sending our Mobile Health Teams to areas with no other health services. We use psychosocial support events in 10 locations in libraries and schools where two professional psychologists give counselling. We have two physiotherapists who, since the war started, identify newly-disabled people and rehabilitate them and get them back into society. We also coordinate with State medical services to support TB patients as most are very poor.”*

Head of regional branch

After the escalation of the conflict in 2022 key NSD investment activities strengthened the branch network and its ability to respond to rapidly escalated new organisational and humanitarian needs. The number of Interregional Managers expanded, with BraVo support, from two to seven, each covering 3–4 regions. Out of 210 local Branches URCS identified 125 who were actively engaged in emergency conflict response operations, and thus expanded its branch development priority from the original 33 to eventually 156 local branches. They have collective monthly meetings with their regions, and in 2024 will be revising the MTT structure to make that more effective.

The objective was to ensure that all local branches would reach a functional operational level by developing basic institutional capacities over the first phase of BraVoiE, implemented from 2022 to 2023. As the majority of RCRC Movement partners, as conflict began, were working with the regional branches, supporting various response activities, the local branches were not getting the support needed to scale up. Strengthening local branches therefore became the focus of the BraVoiE, as these needed resources, knowledge and skills to continue operating. Early gains have included:

- ✓ the new enlarged Interregional Manager team being supported by the immediate recruitment of 125 OD specialists recruited from existing high performing volunteers, Governing board members, and active Red Cross supporters
- ✓ the URCS OD department organising onboarding induction training in June 2022
- ✓ developing a culture of community orientation first, performing community needs assessments with pilot grants to establish locally-led sustainable services
- ✓ local branches conducting 144 community needs assessments, which formed the basis for project applications and resulted in 167 mini-grant awards that have covered local needs by providing improved or new services for communities
- ✓ several national events such as volunteer management ‘training of trainers’, a National Volunteer Assembly, and SAF awareness and BOCAF training of facilitators, adapted to the URCS context
- ✓ branches have been provided with basic office equipment, hardware and software; and major renovation work has been carried out on branch premises
- ✓ a recent internal URCS consultation resulting in a concept of developing local sustainable services through “Community Service Centres” which involve some income-generating and social enterprise elements. URCS is in active collaboration with the Turkish Red Crescent and Austrian Red Cross to assess the appropriateness of their models for customisation to Ukraine's context.

URCS has experience of adapting support to branches in NGCAs – territories not under the control of the Ukrainian Government. With the annexation of Crimea in 2014, some branches immediately had to become branches of the Russian Red Cross for the safety of the people they helped, and to continue to access communities who needed them. For other branches in disputed territories, ICRC supported them with all required goods independently as part of their ongoing dialogue with local authorities in those regions. In this way both parties to the conflict would be able to work with the branches.



*“After the escalation in February 2022 we had to immediately change our approaches. The previous two-day BraVo training was too long. We turned the second day into a four-hour planning module and during the summer and autumn of 2022 we expanded it to 156 Branches while merging it with SAF training. We created a new set of standards for local branches taken from different documents such as BOCA, SAF and others. In 2023 we returned to our URCS Branch Assessment tool (BOCAF) and undertook a new wave of branch assessments, adding some updated activities, and supported by the Interregional Managers. However, we were also trying to maintain contact with some branches in territory occupied by the new Russian forces. They were continuing to stay and support all people, communicating with affected people and sending humanitarian assistance as a result of their previous capacities.”*

National Committee senior manager

#### **(iv) Adapting Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) to contexts sensitive to conflict**

*“We should have managed a better way of transferring the community-based DRR knowledge our eastern branches had gained in conflict-affected areas with wider internal URCS stakeholders and partners. We needed to prepare ourselves to have SOPs for all main hazards, risks and conflict scenarios, and then focus on building community preparedness as well.”*

National Committee senior manager

To address increasingly conflict-sensitive contexts, both BOCA and SAF-supported branches were using new vulnerability assessment tools in conjunction with relevant programming and service areas supported by partners. However, the inconsistent technical support available to each type of branch resulted in different abilities to use these new tools to provide local, sustainable and relevant services as intended.

Previously, with multiple partner-supported versions of vulnerability analysis tools and no common URCS version, there were gaps in local assessments, resulting in gaps in the delivery and consistency of some services, whether localised or nationwide.

This also resulted in a lack of understanding of the needs of some at-risk populations that had not yet been integrated into its services (e.g. relating to demobilised service personnel, Roma, LGBTQ groups, and displaced people).

This is why URCS's own multi-sectoral branch needs assessment tool came in, to draw on, and consolidate, best practices from the wide variety of existing assessment experiences to date. Once it was agreed, then came the systematic and planned training for local branch leadership, members, youth and volunteers on how to turn assessment data into local relevant services.



*Under ongoing violence across Ukraine, Ukrainian Red Cross volunteers are stepping up efforts to respond to humanitarian needs.*



*“URCS needed to transition from merely distribution of assistance to building community-based resilience, risk reduction, and preparedness.”*

Partner National Society

With its clear auxiliary roles in disaster Management (DM) set out in the URCS Law, in 2018, URCS achieved a new level of cooperation with the Ministry of Defence, the State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SES), and the Civil-Military Cooperation of the Armed forces of Ukraine (CIMIC). Its Emergency Response Teams (ERTs) were included for the first time in joint Emergency Control Room drills and refugee camp exercises. The URCS President is a member of the Government Disaster Commission, with heads of branches holding similar positions at their respective local levels.

When the Ministry of Internal Affairs was reforming the civil protection mechanism, URCS actively coordinated an increased role in the future emergency response system. This was part of a wider engagement strategy with the State authorities, strengthened by several collaborations such as with the Ministry of Youth and Sport, and Ministry of Education who have agreements with URCS for cooperation at national and regional levels.

The IFRC has an objective to strengthen URCS's capacity to support community-based disaster risk reduction, response and preparedness. A number of partners have supported DM capacity building, including in real time during operations such as the COVID-19 response, the combined flood assessments and response in west Ukraine with the Danish Red Cross, OFDA, and the British Embassy; and some small branch-level projects.

In 2017, following Cash Transfer training, URCS updated its internal operational guidelines, using lessons learned in the field, to guide future cash and livelihood operations as part of early recovery after response.

In 2018, SOPs for a restructured URCS DM Department were developed, with an emergency response plan and SOPs for ERTs confirmed. 500 ERT members were trained, and others could be mobilised when needed. Safer Access Framework (SAF) SOPs were also completed for ERTs who were subsequently deployed during the flood emergency in western Ukraine.

IFRC's Regional Disaster, Crisis Prevention, Response and Recovery (DCPRR) team and Regional CEA Advisor supported URCS to further undertake Regional Disaster Response Team (RDRT) training for staff and volunteers in 2019. The Danish Red Cross also assisted in introducing community-based Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) activities in 2019. Recommendations were made to align the ERT tools to the IFRC's National Disaster Response Team (NDRT) tools by integrating the curriculums.

Institutional preparedness and disaster response capacities were supported by the Luxembourg Red Cross (including in warehouse renovation and management), while the ICRC continues to support the operational budget of the URCS Emergency Response Teams (ERT) with assistance from the Austrian Red Cross.



*More than 660 protesters and members of the security forces received first aid treatment from Ukrainian Red Cross volunteers during protests in mid-February 2014. Injured people were transported to waiting ambulances or nearby field clinics and hospitals. One Ukrainian Red Cross Society volunteer was wounded while attempting to provide medical assistance.*



In July 2019, URCS completed the IFRC's Preparedness for Effective Response (PER)<sup>11</sup> self-assessment. A Plan of Action has been drawn up. Its recommendations were for URCS to strengthen its community engagement and accountability (CEA) systems for DM activities, risk monitoring, SOPs for different types of disasters, community-based early warning systems, and rapid response and rapid deployment systems.

Nevertheless, in spite of these NSD investments, by 2019 URCS had still not managed to integrate its DM and Mobile Health Units and Health in Emergencies plans to offer integrated services to affected populations both in high-risk conflict and non-conflict-affected areas. It also needed to ensure integration with the communications and RM Units to profile its activities and outcomes at community level and generate more support and resources for its work. More work was also needed in cooperation with the Volunteering unit to develop guidelines for branches on mobilising and managing spontaneous volunteers in emergencies, and properly orienting and training them.

The 2022 escalation of conflict brought new and enhanced NSD investments. These included:

- strengthened relations with Government civil protection services
- an MoU was signed with the State Emergency Services (SES) of Ukraine improving
  - o information sharing and communications
  - o capacities in response operations
  - o joint roundtable meetings to strengthen joint operations
  - o practical and tactical support to regional and sub-divisional SES counterparts through URCS's enhanced ERTs
- providing auxiliary role support to both SES structures and to the national Police, Defence, National Guard and Border Forces, reaching people others can't, through services including search and rescue, saving lives through first aid, and taking people to safe places for recovery.

*"In our overall NSD actions, our common disaster management activities are offered in a country-wide context. War is another emergency. We had agreed different defined categories of assistance with the SES, connected to the scale and location of needs. These included manufacturing or environmental disasters, but also combat actions and armed conflicts. In 2022, we strengthened the Disaster Management Department as a unified one, merging relief and emergency response systems in order to play better roles in the State's unified civil response system."*

National Committee senior manager

URCS's negotiated roles in the civil defence systems resulted from its longer-term capacities and improved internal systems. These can be further extended to offer services in two dimensions:

Functional	Geographical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Represented in approximately 20 State institutions and agencies</li> <li>→ Offering relevant areas it can contribute to where State gaps appear</li> <li>→ Exploring opportunities in, for example, the education system, where URCS could supplement with humanitarian education, dissemination about IHL, training in first aid and mine risk education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ URCS is already present in many areas and coordination mechanisms but these are not legislated or part of legal expectations yet (with opportunities to update the auxiliary roles in the next URCS law and statutes revision processes)</li> <li>→ Long-standing arrangements in many regional administrations for cooperation in relief distributions</li> <li>→ Long-term support for vulnerable groups and health and education training (but these are yet to be made more consistent nationwide services)</li> </ul>

<sup>11</sup> IFRC's PER is a self-assessment tool that enables NSs to systematically measure, analyse, prioritise and plan preparedness for response actions to ensure timely and effective humanitarian assistance in line with their auxiliary role and mandate. It considers all hazards (natural, biological, technological, among others) and is flexible to be used in different contexts.



URCS has expanded its mine risk education work as a specific area of risk reduction work to protect communities facing the dangers of unexploded ordinance. NSD investments in this have included:

- coordinating groups for mine action in affected regions
- warning signs for mine danger, providing signalling (marking) tapes to affected communities at risk of explosive devices
- collaborative information and awareness-raising sessions regarding the risks associated with explosive remnants for workers in specific at-risk businesses and locations
- expanding its Risk Awareness and Safer Behaviour Programme to 11 regions
- coordination with URCS's Mobile Medical Teams' visits to remote villages to provide information sessions about mine risks for older local residents by volunteer instructors specialising in mine awareness
- information and awareness-raising sessions in humanitarian centres (hubs) serving internally displaced people from affected regions.

It has also adapted other community-based risk reduction approaches and processes in conflict-sensitive areas with the support of the German, Danish and Austrian Red Cross Societies. A new Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Unit was formed to customise DRR to the different needs and reduction measures of specific regions. Regional risk reduction maps were developed following training and community-focussed work. The intention in 2024 is to hire more professional personnel to work at local community levels so that vulnerability and risk analysis can be consolidated from community to district, then regional and finally to national level.

Another, more human, aspect of risk reduction is framed in URCS's Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) work<sup>12</sup>. NSD investments to build staff and volunteer capacities in this area aimed to reduce the risk of an estimated 1 in 4 of the population – more than 10 million people – who are at risk of developing a mental health disorder. Its work has built organisational capacity to work with local communities and vulnerable groups exposed to stress and most in need, such as:

Target Group	MHPSS Intervention
<b>Children</b> affected by social isolation, worry, and difficulties being apart from family	<b>Recreational well-being activities</b> that help regulate stress through play and creative activities and increase confidence with new activities and social situations
<b>Teachers, parents and caregivers</b> who are concerned about children's well-being in times of crisis	<b>The children's Resilience Programme</b> – workshops designed to support children's inner strength and interactions with others
<b>Older adults</b> experiencing loneliness and worry	<b>Group activities focused on social connection</b> , building skills and opportunities for movement and creative
<b>Older adults</b> experiencing depression and anxiety	1:1 <b>counselling or group psychoeducation</b> sessions
<b>Adults</b> experiencing low mood or low levels of stress or the stress of children	<b>Social events</b> with family that build connections in new communities and give families opportunities to engage in playful and fun activities during stressful times
<b>Adults</b> experiencing anxiety, depression or trying to cope with painful and frightening memories	1:1 or group <b>counselling</b> and <b>group psychoeducation sessions</b>
<b>Families or veterans</b> and caregivers caring for people with disabilities	<b>Peer to peer counselling</b> and <b>group psychoeducation sessions</b>

The 2022 conflict escalation also led to new ways of supporting branches to deliver services in deeply conflict-affected areas. When security environments, road access, and mobile communications would allow, small hubs were established to facilitate a group, for example, of three regions and local branches to manage and provide critical medicines and humanitarian supplies.

URCS's long-term NSD investments in community-based first aid, first responder capacities in relation to bombings, explosions, and emergency services such as free ambulance services to all (where the Government doesn't have ambulances and has to rely on private ones) are part of its disaster risk reduction capacities in conflict-affected settings.

In July 2022, URCS also undertook the IFRC's Digital and Data Maturity Assessment, to help it use improved digital infrastructure and skills, locally and nationally, to speed up humanitarian risk assessments and responses. The following diagram shows how URCS, with the support of partners, focussed on strengthening humanitarian access, reach and data analysis to mitigate risks and vulnerabilities in populations affected by the escalated conflict..

### Digital & Data Maturity assessment framework



#	Category
1	Direction and Culture
2	Data & Digital Literacy Level
3	Communication and Engagement
4	Needs Assessment and Feedback Collection
5	Internal Collaboration
6	External Collaboration
7	Data Collection
8	Monitoring and Decision Making
9	Data Responsibility and Protection
10	Resource Mobilization
11	Data Standards and Interoperability
12	Connectivity
13	Digital & IT Infrastructure
14	Data management for volunteers
15	Data management for people affected
16	Disaster Data Management
17	Cybersecurity and Awareness
18	Storage and Knowledge Management
19	Adoption of new tools and processes
20	Innovation
21	Data/Information Analysis
22	Data Quality
23	HR

- 23 data and digital categories that are assessed in the National Society
- 6 levels for each of the 23 categories

LEVEL	DESCRIPTION OF THE LEVEL OF MATURITY
0	0. People affected register offline.
1	1. People affected increasingly register online.
2	2. People affected register online, for example through digital web forms or mobile data collection. A data management system is in place that offers the National Society basic functionality, such as editing data, and provides basic insights.
3	3. People affected register online. A data management system is in place that allows people affected to manage their own registration, identification and validation of data. They can access key information about humanitarian programs.
4	4. A data management system is in place that allows people affected to manage their own registration, identification and validation of data.
5	5. People affected have a multi-channel and mobile-first experience. Engagement of people affected is facilitated by algorithms, for example through chatbots, which enables better and scaled services.



Major cities in Ukraine, including the capital Kyiv, have been hit by missile attacks since February 2022. The Ukrainian Red Cross rapid response teams are working around the clock to provide critical support to people.



## 5. Strengthening ‘visibility’

### (i) Investments in volunteers and youth

*“Once we started our Bravo process, volunteers got more activated. With new resources they could see their ideas were listened to. Before the conflict escalated in 2022 the support was more for the eastern part of the country. Now we can use their experience in services such as supporting displaced people and PSS to intensify our programmes nationwide and respond to new opportunities such as spontaneous volunteers.”*

URCS city branch head

URCS’s consistent and conscious NSD investments to strengthen local volunteer-led and branch-supported action and services have given it unique access and acceptance across divided territories.

In 2012 there was little specific mention of volunteers, and civil society organisations had no strong tradition. An early American Red Cross-supported programme on HIV and AIDS awareness encouraged public speaking, dissemination and peer-to-peer support, but it wasn’t formally termed “volunteering”. However, it became a concept at branch level from 2013 onwards with the first mention of volunteering in educational institutions where young people were encouraged to participate in branches and governance.

The ‘Maidan revolution’ of 2013-2014 and the high level of civil unrest and violence forced many changes within URCS. It created Emergency Response Teams (ERTs), which involved many young volunteers (up to 35 years old) in a very engaging approach to conflict and disaster response. ICRC supported URCS with Safer Access Framework (SAF) training from 2014 to be better prepared and responsive to conflict. The escalation of armed conflict in the east of the country also meant awareness among URCS’s internal stakeholders at all levels needed deepening, particularly among growing numbers of volunteers. ICRC funded the first wave of Volunteer and Youth Assemblies to achieve some of these goals.

URCS initiated better induction programmes, covering the Fundamental Principles and first aid courses, but these were inconsistent across the branches depending how change-focussed branch governance was at the time. Some volunteers struggled with the concepts of neutrality and impartiality during the Maidan revolution. Some didn’t know they had to refrain from posting public opinions on social media during a time when there was intense monitoring of such posts by all parties to the violence. So new induction and onboarding processes were introduced to enable a deep understanding of them. In 2017, URCS appointed its first Youth Coordinator in HQ, and the first Youth Assembly was held to enable young representatives from different regions to meet annually and discuss important issues.

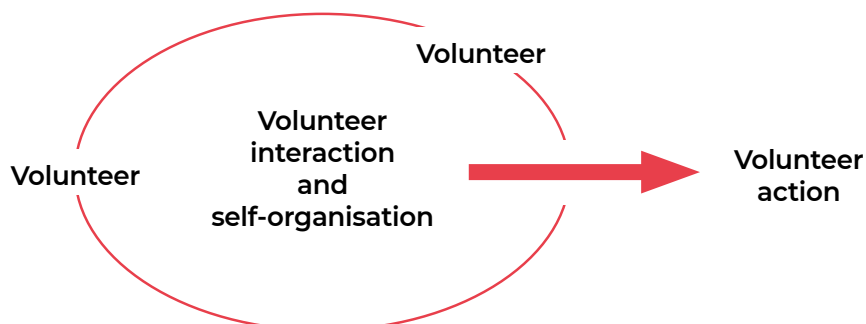
The national Youth Coordinator and other national committee staff were coached by international partners. In some regions this led to youth activities initiated by local youth coordinators.

The reputational crisis of 2016 proved to be another key turning point moment for URCS. A Code of Conduct was introduced for volunteers and staff in parallel to new domestic national legislation in the form of a Law on Volunteering. The National Society was much faster than any other organisation to adopt many aspects of the national law, including non-disclosure agreements and wider volunteer agreements. URCS’s statutes had to be revised and volunteer definitions were strengthened, supported by NSD investments in offline and online formal induction courses.

The terminology of “volunteer management” stems from a concept not uncommon in the Movement of volunteers delivering top-down designed, national services “to” vulnerable people. This can be interpreted as volunteers, coming from other communities, perform a time-bound task (e.g. training, delivery of humanitarian assistance, etc.), and then return to their own community, leaving no local sustainable volunteer capacity behind. Volunteer management systems in the Movement often stem from this need for volunteers to perform a pre-defined task or service as demonstrated by the following diagram:



However, a complementary tradition of volunteer, member and youth empowerment in the Movement seeks to create opportunities for them to identify people’s needs within their own communities and to encourage them to design a sustainable local service, with local resource mobilisation to support them, to increase community resilience and wellbeing.



URCS has embraced both traditions. The first tradition is more relevant to the delivery of a nationally consistent, quality-approved menu of services (e.g. ERTs, PSS services, IHL dissemination, RFL). The operational priorities of ICRC and some other partners led to hiring and training specific volunteers in eastern branches and paying them for eight hours a day. Although this recognises the need for people giving humanitarian assistance to also have a livelihood, URCS and ICRC were attempting to reclarify the confusion with the term “volunteer” and perhaps call them something different such as “community mobilisers” to keep the notion of volunteering as an unpaid act of free will. Otherwise this may undermine the longer-term prospects of free volunteering across the rest of the country in the long term.

However, the second tradition of local volunteering is wholly aligned to the concepts explored in the Danish Red Cross-supported branch, and volunteering and service development models contained in the BraVo programme. The national Unit was started to approach volunteering development as a complex mix of different activities rather than as a mechanism to respond to spontaneous needs.

Neither approach is superior to the other, but each needs different support systems which cannot be addressed in a generalised concept of volunteer management. Empowering members and volunteers who want to respond to local needs with local services requires a very different support system, including sensitised local leadership that encourages such creativity with sustainability planning skills.

In 2018 the URCS Governing Board adopted the first URCS Volunteering and Youth Policy and subsequently a Youth and Volunteer Engagement strategy to implement it from 2020 onwards. A Handbook on Volunteer development was also published in 2018 and disseminated to all branches, supported by regional training. The challenge, however, was that the BraVo project was restricted to a few branches and others could not benefit.

Some branches used the new approach to strengthen NSD investments in volunteer-led local action, which prepared them and their communities well for the escalation of conflict in 2022.

*“In 2018 we started a Youth Academy for First Aid, adapting materials to start with children aged five upwards. We also encouraged teenagers to propose good ideas for local humanitarian projects and, using an 18-month USAID grant, we could give them a small financial amount to start. Examples of successful ideas included peer youth support for Mental Health and Psychosocial support (MHPSS), helping older people to use their first aid kits, and disseminating materials to classmates on the Fundamental Principles. In 2023, one of the biggest local companies in our area gave us support to scale up these services.”*

URCS city branch head

BraVo remained highly appropriate to the diverse contexts across the country. Its approaches formed the backbone of URCS’s COVID-19 response activities, which also added psychosocial training support elements online. As ICRC had used a system of paid volunteers in the east, this was expanded during URCS’s scaled-up COVID-19 programmes. However, problems emerged after the COVID-19 funding stopped, and it was difficult to motivate people without a financial incentive. As a result, in 2021 URCS abandoned the paid incentive concept.



It was, however, reintroduced in 2022 as part of the spontaneous volunteer mobilisation needed to respond to the conflict, but with better tracking of volunteer hours, and branches can only receive the “incentive” payments if they can show a proper monitoring system.

By 2020, URCS had noted that the lack of a unified member, volunteer and youth database prevented it from mapping its human resources across the country, or undertaking a strategic training plan to build their skills in key areas. Although it upgraded to a volunteer database in Excel in 2024, its new ERP system Odoo will fully digitalise volunteer management and the database by the end of the year. URCS has decided to use Salesforce for Resource Mobilisation only, and Odoo for all the other functions.

*“We realised that if we need more progressive people, we needed to give them more freedom. We started to select from a menu of available profiles depending on what kinds of services we wanted to provide. We could tell how many educational courses volunteers needed or had completed, including areas such as safety and security training in preparations for ERT and other missions. Some of our volunteers were going to areas in the NGCAs that even ICRC couldn’t go to. The outcomes of the BraVo and BOCA processes led to much more funding from partners. In order to increase our access, acceptance and agility we refurbished more branches and upgraded the digital skills and technology of our volunteer base.”*

National Committee senior manager

Evidence in 2020, in programme planning and evaluation documents, as well as in the consultations with branches, showed that some of URCS’s tools had still not been implemented at all levels. However, 12 types of volunteers were identified in URCS, linked to different types of national service activities (ERTs, IHL, Humanitarian Aid distribution, PSS, etc.). These were given the standardised induction courses, and even follow-up options for weekly online courses too.

Although not every branch yet had capacity (or need) to sustain all categories, some had a Profile Coordinator who looked after volunteers in a specific sector. These roles were formalised and trained, as they provide essential support to volunteers. However, URCS continues to review volunteer profiles and update relevant thematic training.

## (ii) ‘Duty of care’ considerations

*“During the Maidan revolution of 2014 as well as the escalation of the armed conflict in the east, people across the country became more partial and patriotic. A wide range of organisational challenges arose to protect our auxiliary role and neutral, impartial and independent positioning. We had a lot of tension with ICRC who insisted that we should not use Ukrainian flags on or in our offices, and that we should take away all pro-Ukrainian material from our Facebook page. Although branches in the Non-Government Controlled Areas (NGCAs) of the east did not talk about politics, and concentrated on vulnerable people only, this neutral and impartial positioning enabled them to negotiate with armed combatants and have more access and acceptance than international stakeholders as a result.”*

Branch coordinator

In response to the roles expected of ERT volunteers in violent contexts, they received enhanced safety and security training. While they were trained in separate groups to other volunteers, URCS managed to integrate some of them into the increasing number of volunteer and youth assemblies so that their voices and experiences could be heard internally and influence safety and security training for all.

After the launch of BraVo and the ‘lessons learned’ workshop to evaluate early outcomes, a specific set of NSD needs were identified for branches in conflict-sensitive contexts:

1. Assessment of existing needs, including in resources and humanitarian aid, that require more intervention.
2. More sensitive positioning of URCS in relation to other organisations, to avoid confusion and increase public acceptance.
3. Training for volunteers and employees on the principles of neutrality, impartiality, safe access, humanitarian principles and advocacy.



4. *Implementation of new activities such as transportation of people from near combat areas.*
5. *Continued delivery of medical support by home visiting nurses and mobile health units.*
6. *Risk mitigation, e.g. at the crossing point in Luhansk region, assistance for wheelchair users is needed when crossing the bridge; also, after a change of guidance for State Emergency Services staff, they are not allowed to cross the bridge (it indicates the LoC).*
7. *Submission of grant applications to win grant support on projects.*
8. *Recruitment and training of fundraising specialists.*

*Branch, volunteer and youth development report on 'lessons learned' workshop, August 2018.*

When SAF training was first introduced in 2018, it was aimed more at managers and rarely reached volunteers. By 2020, although volunteers had to undergo a compulsory induction course, the uneven volunteer safety and security training offer across the country had not yet been fully addressed. Volunteers in SAF branches received safety and security training but URCS had not yet integrated the IFRC's Stay Safe course into its existing guidelines and induction courses for volunteers across the country, together with integrated PSS training for those likely to be responding to difficult conflict-sensitive situations.

*"To use the Fundamental Principles of Neutrality and Impartiality in fragile and conflict-sensitive situations requires diplomatic skills of the highest order. We needed to invest in NSD strategies to grow new leaders and help them gain skills on "how to behave impartially", not just on "being impartial". We needed training across the whole leadership. Although we had created our first ever induction for volunteers in 2015, it only included one slide to unpack Neutrality. We needed a deeper way to have a positive influence on impartial behaviour in volunteers and staff. It was an important investment as many are still in place."*

Ms Liliia Bilous, URCS director general 2017–2020

Only in 2023 did URCS finally run its own internal SAF sessions following the training of trainers, as this was previously the prerogative of ICRC alone. The training is now expanding to include a range of volunteer leaders elected by volunteers themselves. In 2024, IFRC's Stay Safe course is also in the final stage of adaptation. Although URCS paid for an adapted course in 2022, it has taken nearly two years for it to be completed. It will be compulsory for all volunteers as part of their onboarding and will also be compulsory for all existing volunteers.

As the context in Ukraine remains regularly challenging, with increasing numbers of conflict-sensitive areas as well as natural disasters, URCS needed to pay urgent attention to developing internal SOPs on managing spontaneous volunteers. Within the ProVoice project, supported by the Austrian Red Cross, an initial guideline was drafted. But apparently it was not properly communicated or applied, and volunteers were turned away in times of disaster, many of whom could have been retained with valuable skills. This painted a negative public image of URCS.



*Evacuation Lviv-Kyiv, ERT volunteers arriving at Kyiv railway station.*



By 2019, as well as those initial guidelines on spontaneous volunteer management in emergencies, the Danish Red Cross had also created training modules on volunteer management in emergencies, but neither had been used by URCS's disaster management or volunteering units.

During URCS's implementation of its new Youth and Volunteering Development Strategies in 2021, there were growing signs of escalating conflict in the east again. Guidelines on Spontaneous Volunteers were finalised, predicting a large number of applications if and when conflict broke out. Coincidentally the first day of dissemination of the new guidelines coincided with the first day of escalation in February 2022.

*"We really benefitted from the URCS Guidelines on Spontaneous Volunteers when approximately 200 volunteers approached us in February 2022 after the escalation in the conflict. We conducted the short intensive induction about the Fundamental Principles, the Movement, and what you can, and are prohibited to, do. We included safety and security training about what to do when air raid alarms sounded, and how to give MHPSS support afterwards to people in the shelters. Volunteers were registered on the URCS database and given ID numbers which covered them with insurance too. In local branches we don't need huge financial support. We just need support in how to do things and make them work."*

URCS city branch head

The new challenges and need to support volunteer safety and security led to the refreshed concept of BraVo in Emergencies (BraVoiE) to further roll out intensified training of new volunteers, hire new branch volunteer development specialists in all regions and branches. In 2024, URCS now has volunteer and youth specialists in all regional offices, and a national Volunteer Development Unit that has expanded from three to nine people. Its new Youth Development Sector, in the HQ Organisational Development Department, will start work later in 2024.

### **(iii) Dissemination and communications**

*"The seven Fundamental Principles must be saved and protected in any situation. Our basic strategy was to include this perspective when we undertook activities to protect people's lives, health and wellbeing. We needed to change the minds of every Ukrainian citizen that safety, social care and health are their main priorities, and that the Red Cross is their best partner in these."*

National Committee senior manager

URCS's long-term NSD investments had always addressed dissemination and communications opportunities at their core. NSD investments in information and awareness campaigns for the population on IHL had become active since the conflict in 2014. After that, URCS worked with the Ministry of Education to initiate IHL education programmes as part of the school curriculum. These included integrated first aid training covering different injuries and the classification of gunshot wounds in order to save lives.

The URCS Branch Communications Kit has supporting material on legal base and auxiliary role definitions, with Interregional Managers and MTTs continuing to strengthen understanding by training branch leaders on URCS's legal base and how to use it for advantage in clearer public positioning and negotiations with the authorities.

Given the strong connections between its public image, confidence in its transparency, and the overall humanitarian impact of its services, URCS used the opportunity of its 100th Anniversary Celebrations in April 2018 to boost its visibility. It even paired with the National Bank to mint a commemorative coin. URCS's leadership, staff, members and volunteers received many forms of public recognition. Its sustained online social media presence gained an increase of Facebook supporters from 6,534 in 2017 to 14,078 in 2019.

To mobilise new members and refresh its future governance base, URCS established an online membership database within its 2024 digital transformation project. People will now be able to join their local branches online.

Historically, URCS focussed on dissemination and communications in the east. But this changed in its strategic Plans of 2016–2020 and 2021–2025. Its vision statement shifted to position itself as “a powerful and socially recognised organisation that responds, with public participation, to humanitarian and social challenges, turning compassion into action. We help those who need it the most.”

In 2020 URCS reached an extraordinary 27 million people with its COVID-19 communications campaign. It proved a turning point when URCS started to be perceived by the population, as well as by local and national authorities, as a strong humanitarian player with efficient humanitarian responses, as opposed to the Soviet-style organisation with a number of reputational crises.

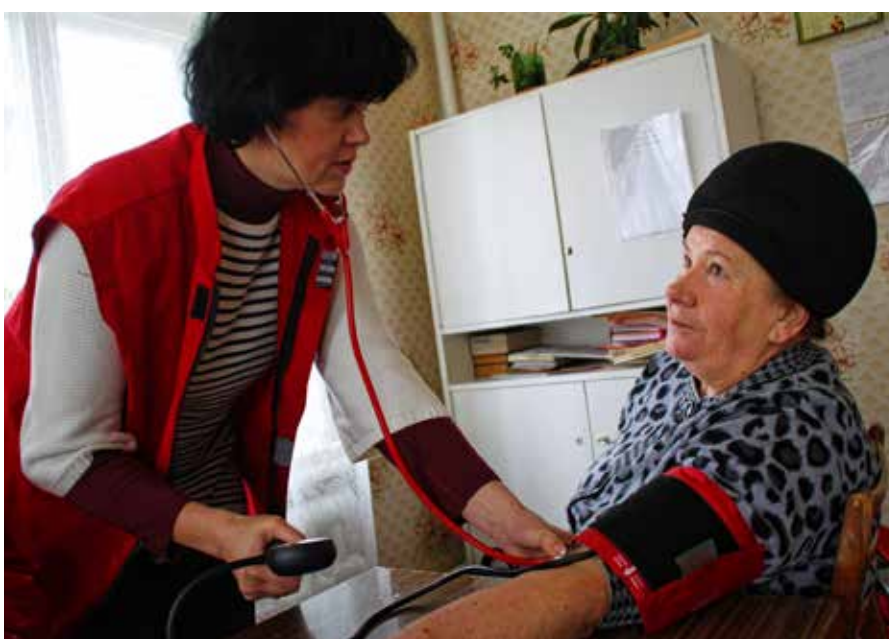
As a result of its longstanding work, and in spite of its reputational crisis in 2016, a 2023 market research survey confirmed URCS as the second most popular cause in the country. Scoring a 51% recognition rate and 74% in public confidence. This was a strong platform on which to base a reform process that could rely on public and institutional support for well-consulted and conceived local and national services. Its challenge, however, was how to further increase the visibility of its new emerging areas of national and community-based services.

*“The Fundamental Principles are the basis of our work. Social media is more active in times of conflict. URCS had accountability to the public to show that we have been independent from the Government since it withdrew its support. We needed to show how we implement our Fundamental Principles to build new independent relationships with the wider public and the corporate sector.”*

National Committee senior manager

The NSD investments included:

- ✓ branches using opportunities for first aid training in streets, transport companies and State institutions, demonstrating the Fundamental Principles and URCS’s roles and mandates
- ✓ recruiting younger members of ERTs and encouraging them to spread the word to their peers
- ✓ talking to young people about the promotion of peace, the Fundamental Principles, and especially neutrality in medical institutes, universities, and first aid classes in youth institutions
- ✓ attracting young audiences to URCS’s Facebook page, especially the Youth RC page, to promote local youth-led action



*Ukraine. Sidorovo, 2015. Red Cross nurse Alla Chepel, 49, is measuring the blood pressure of Ekaterina Ivleva, 67, who is internally displaced because of armed conflict. Alla is part of a mobile team which provides medical assistance.*



## 6. Strengthening 'legacy'

### (i) Building on past perceptions and access

*"URCS has always been committed to the Principle of Neutrality. But over two revolutions it was not easy to make it work. We demonstrated it through our activities. Our usual activities had been to react quickly to natural or human made disasters such the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. We worked closely with local and national authorities. After the escalation of the conflict in 2014, we received support from ICRC and IFRC and developed ERTs in different regions. This improved our response to different disasters, with more independent status at regional and city levels. We transferred more responsibility and freedom of decisions to them. Our attention turned from not just the security of staff and volunteers, but to their roles in conflict and their physical and social protection too."*

Dr Mykola Polishchuk, president of URCS

The transformation process launched in 2016 built on URCS's legacy to develop an even clearer stance as a neutral, impartial and independent local humanitarian actor, even under the severest challenges.

*"In 2014 the conflict challenged URCS to deepen public and Government understanding of its role and mandates. "Neutrality" had become a critical word – previously we just used the "Fundamental Principles". In order to play principled roles in the external environment and gain access and acceptance, we had to address internal issues. While the country engaged in a hot political debate about the future, branches had to remain very neutral. We could not use the Ukrainian flag or make political comments on social media. This was because some branches were visiting many internally displaced people who would not have trusted us if they saw Ukrainian symbols."*

Branch coordinator

NSD investments in its flagship health programmes have built a localised presence and sustained acceptance and access as neutral and impartial:

- **training more 1,000 military nurses** since World War II, with 15 nurses in ERTs working on the frontline of the 2022 escalated conflict onwards, scaling up plans to respond to government requests to work with war-wounded people, including transport to hospitals and safe places
- **establishing a Tracing Service (TS)** in 1992 which was added to URCS's revised auxiliary roles in its statutes. Working with ICRC to strengthen services for those missing in the Maidan revolution and escalated conflict of 2014, it processed over 1,000 requests that year alone. In 2022 it continued to integrate this service into the roles of its ERTs and since then it has received over 55,000 requests and information on 6,000 missing combatants. An expanded seven Restoring Family Links (RFL) Officers in HQ and seven in the regions continue, with British Red Cross support for three years. In 2023, 15,000 contacts were made with families of missing people and British Red Cross support was used to help relatives to meet and receive psychosocial support. The Danish Red Cross has also helped provide valuable psychosocial training and support for RFL staff and volunteers
- in 1995 **supporting a large disaster response** with German Red Cross support, building camp facilities for 2,500 affected people, which later led to retaining key volunteers who went on to benefit from IFRC Regional Disaster Response Team (RDRT) and other international training to establish a core response capacity
- **building Emergency Response Teams (ERTs)** since the Maidan revolution, when people saw URCS helping injured people on both sides of the barricades in neutral, impartial and independent roles, 8–10 people joined per day and the number of ERTs soon grew to 50. After the 2022 escalation of conflict the number grew to 21 ERTs and nine sub-units, with 500 volunteers and over 100 vehicles responding on front lines
- **building Mobile Health Teams** to reach remote communities, especially in rural areas without regional doctors, to deliver essential health services and even mobile X-ray units – by 2023 there were 131 MHTs in total)



- **providing mental health and psychosocial services** to ensure that people affected by conflict, displacement, social and economic crisis in all areas of Ukraine have improved wellbeing through community-based support
- **establishing regional social, physical and medical rehabilitation centres** over the years, to reach as many communities as possible, and be as close as possible to local people
- **establishing collaborative but independent relations with central and local authorities** so they experience URCS's auxiliary role, see its services, and develop supportive roles in a neutral and independent manner.

The human impact of the above services has strengthened public appreciation for URCS's work. For example, URCS has recently had access to the Central Tracing Agency to connect to Ukrainian refugees who may be in 50 other European countries. It has helped to reunite a growing number of people as evidenced in the following human impact story:

*"A mother and child were evacuated urgently due to shelling and lost contact with their 82-year-old aunt. After the mother contacted URCS they worked with the ERT in the area in close cooperation with the State Emergency Service, who had information on their database of all evacuees. The ERT found that the aunt had been taken to another region. URCS volunteers in that region searched all the temporary shelters and she was found in a hospital. URCS volunteers visited her, and made a call to connect her to the mother and child."*

National Committee senior manager

Based on these pre-existing capacities as a result of long-term NSD investments, in March 2022, following the escalation of the conflict, URCS convened coordination meetings with IFRC and ICRC to plan the first steps of response based on its existing capacities, public positioning, and strengths.

## (ii) Maintaining a Movement footprint

*"When it comes to maintaining a Movement footprint and managing coordination of Movement partners under the disaster management umbrella, we feel in the lead as the National Society, by 2022, after many NSD investments. All responses are aligned to URCS's Strategic and Operational Plans and developed procedures, and we need to sign off on every activity, particularly as we are linking to legally independent bodies in branches. Our national and Regional Emergency Operations Centres are effective decision-making bodies. For example, in March 2023 we facilitated a meeting between Regional Office Heads and ERT Commanders to agree key aspects of Emergency Operations Centres, knowledge sharing on international experiences, and strengthening interregional cooperation. We set new priorities based on these consultations – for example, search and rescue and safe relocation of civilians in the east; collective temporary shelter capacities in the west; and logistics crossroads in central areas."*

National Committee senior manager

Following the 2014 crisis, over 30 Movement partners mobilised humanitarian assistance and human resources to assist affected populations. Each was asked by URCS to focus on different programmes and areas. Many have continued to do so until today. Some partners also decided to expand support and forge partnerships with ICRC and IFRC to strengthen URCS's operational and organisational capacities at HQ and in directly-affected branches.

Early phases of humanitarian assistance from partners were often somewhat uncoordinated and ad hoc. The high local presence and profile of partners' direct assistance, as a result of weak branch delivery systems, sometimes caused confusion and undermined URCS's own identity and acceptance of its longer-term structures in the east. Branches close to the Line of Contact (LoC) also found themselves divided across separate territories – Government-controlled (GCAs) and non-Government-controlled (NGCAs).

IFRC started its operation in Ukraine on 12 May 2014 by launching an Emergency Appeal seeking CHF 1.38 million to support people affected by the conflict and prepare for potential escalation. At URCS's request, a scoping mission was conducted in March 2015 to assess the need for, and to define the scope of, up-scaled humanitarian assistance. The scoping mission strongly underlined serious concerns with URCS financial management and operational capacities.



In 2016, amid escalating economic and social crisis across the country, URCS's leadership requested Movement support to scope out new, innovative and diverse services that would better respond to the acute humanitarian needs of conflict-affected and other vulnerable populations.

Ukraine was selected as one of five test countries globally for the Strengthening Movement Cooperation and coordination (SMCC) process. The initiative, derived from Resolution 1 of the 2015 Council of Delegates, was designed to help the Movement in Ukraine find new ways to cooperate with each other. IFRC took the opportunity to mobilise all Movement partners together in their support of URCS's organisational development.

The IFRC and ICRC developed a unique proposal in which ICRC agreed to support two IFRC delegate positions. This acknowledged the strength of IFRC in organisational development and the necessity of a strong national society, which would ultimately benefit the work of the ICRC. This novel approach to Movement coordination and cooperation was largely attributed to the tenacity of the individuals in-country.

The development of the Organisational Development (OD) Concept Paper facilitated by IFRC convinced Movement partners, predominantly ICRC, to support the proposal financially with CHF 804,000. The Swedish, British and Finnish Red Cross also contributed in cash and in-kind support.

With a mentoring role provided by an ICRC Cooperation Delegate from May 2015, re-establishment of the IFRC Country Office in late 2016, and renewed URCS commitment to reform in 2017, there followed a quick succession of events. The OD Concept Paper and OD Workshop (facilitated by the same senior IFRC NSD Delegate), were developed with participatory inputs from branches, HQ and all partners, resulting in URCS's first consolidated strategic OD Roadmap in May 2017.

The OD Concept Paper and resulting establishment of the monthly SMCC Working Group, chaired by the URCS Director General and attended by all partners in country, led to multiple new ways of working.

*We also encouraged the 'shared leadership' approach and as a result the Movement in Ukraine established various operational mechanisms enabling the Movement Partners to work together:*

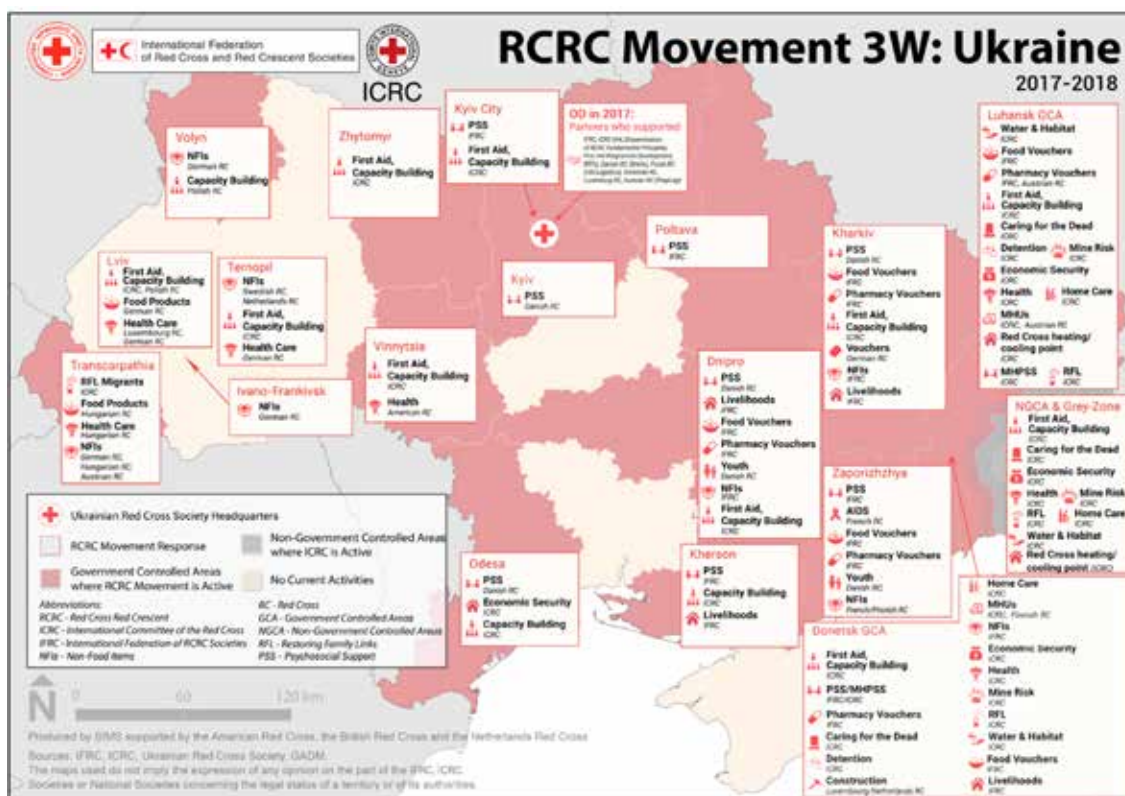
- *Mobile Health Units led by URCS, ICRC, IFRC, Finnish Red Cross*
- *Psychosocial support led by the Danish Red Cross and supported by IFRC*
- *Branch Development led by the Danish Red Cross and supported by ICRC*
- *International Humanitarian Law led by ICRC and supported by the Finnish Red Cross*
- *Volunteer Management led by the Danish Red Cross and supported by the Finish Red Cross and ICRC*
- *Home Care led by ICRC and the Swiss Red Cross*
- *Communications led by ICRC*
- *Organisational Development led by IFRC, supported by ICRC and partner National Societies*
- *Information Management System led by the French Red Cross*
- *Livelihood interventions led by IFRC*

*IFRC head of country office*



*A portion of warm soup on a cold day in May 2022 at the railway station in Lviv, Ukraine. There are trains bringing people from all over the country to the relative safety of the western part of Ukraine. The Red Cross is welcoming people with food and other support.*

URCS's resulting mapping of Movement contributions reduced duplication and built synergies:



A wide range of changes took place within URCS in the following months, including the appointment of new staff, and drafting of a Transition Strategy 2018–2020 (with the support of another IFRC NSD consultant). This contained four strategic objectives: emergency preparedness and response; improved healthcare and resilience to psychosocial challenges; strengthened cooperation and high-quality communication; and a strong, reliable and transparent National Society.

To build the trust and confidence of the public and institutions across the country, URCS continued to make NSD investments aimed at strengthening its neutral, impartial and independent characteristics. These included NSD investments in the following areas (see Section 7 (iii) for more details on HR development, finance development, transparency and accountability specifically). The agreed OD/ NSD plan was inserted as a whole into strategic objective four of its Strategic Plan 2021–2025, and contained 7 workstreams:

- Human resource development
- Finance development
- Increasing accountability and transparency
- Volunteer management
- Resource mobilisation
- Legal framework revision
- Branch development.



*When the water supply system in Mykolaiv was damaged by an explosion in April 2022, URCS stepped up, ensuring thousands of people's access to potable water. Pumping water from an old aquifer, URCS ran it through a purification system before connecting it to taps and filling trucks to deliver water around the city.*

An updated 'OD Masterplan' with activities, resources required, and implementation timelines was approved by URCS's leadership in 2018. Progress against its targets was checked by the OCAC at the end of 2019, and the OD Masterplan was fully implemented by 2020 onwards. It was then shared with all Movement partners via the Strengthening Movement Coordination and



Cooperation (SMCC) framework to seek coordinated assistance and mutual accountability for shared results. However, strategic resourcing issues remained:

*“By 2020 the contribution of partners was decreasing. We had an unbalanced focus on the Donbas region due to the sustained humanitarian crisis there. Only the Danish Red Cross tried to support a wider range of Regions through BraVo. But our COVID-19 response changed that approach by affecting everyone across the country. As a result of our NSD investments, the Government recognised the transformation within the URCS and realised it was less bureaucratic and more flexible, with opportunities to attract international funding and be proactive locally. It realised that URCS had foresight when it asked for and received public awareness posters, masks, protective uniforms, and ERT services.”*

National Committee senior manager

In 2022 more Movement partners arrived in Ukraine to offer support, building on its existing strengths and positioning. Learning from its past experiences in facilitating and leading Movement cooperation and coordination, URCS explored further enhanced mechanisms and synergetic deployment of resources.

*“We are working on a Movement footprint that covers many issues, from de-mining to programmes for the safety, security and social support for the affected populations, now included in our ‘One Plan’. Now we are focussing on a huge recovery programme, and are more actively participating in relevant European forums.”*

Dr Mykola Polishchuk, president of URCS

URCS's NSD challenge from February 2022 was how to balance its work across the different contexts of the east and west of the country. It engaged a Danish Red Cross expert on preparedness planning, which led to a structured set of NSD initiatives, including briefing sessions for staff and volunteers, SOPs on emergency communications, and repositioning emergency stocks.

URCS's NSD investments to strengthen Movement cooperation and coordination intensified, benefitting from the Movement Coordination Agreement and Security Framework completed before the 2022 escalation. On 24 February, the ICRC Head of Delegation requested a Movement Coordination Advisor. The previous Movement coordination Meetings and quarterly Steering Committee involving all partners were challenged by representatives suddenly travelling.



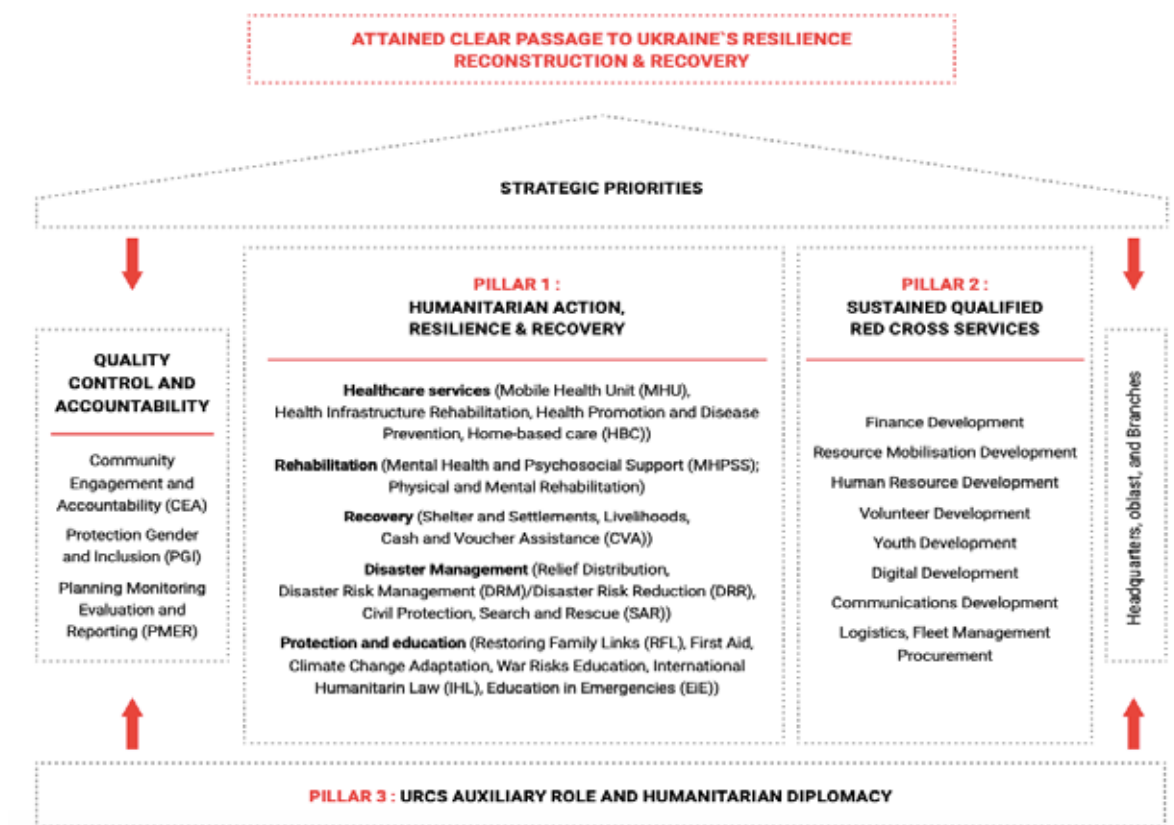
*After several rockets hit Ukrainian cities, emergency response teams from the State Emergency Service of Ukraine work alongside rapid response teams from the Ukrainian Red Cross at the sites. Tents were set up, providing first aid and psychological support to those in need.*





URCS had only two staff focussed on Movement coordination for the first half of 2022, with 24 Technical Working Groups (TWGs) covering sectoral areas. Even though the URCS Directors took over the TWGs, which were also moderated by URCS's PMER Department, the structure was not sustainable.

URCS's answer to merging new realities and needs with its Strategic Plan 2021–2025 was to launch an adapted version called the URCS One Plan 2023–2025. The One Plan built new strategic elements into the original plan by framing three new specific organisational goals brought about by the conflict. These were captured in the following diagrams that aligned these new responsive goals with its longer-term capacity strengthening and organisational development work:



To maintain transparency and accountability and show progress against One Plan, six-monthly progress reports detail the work achieved and the resources used by all partners in each sector. The NSD investments in TWGs and other mechanisms to implement One Plan will be reviewed in 2024 to resolve any issues identified in the Movement-wide implementation modalities, which have assisted URCS in several ways:

*“The One Plan process left us feeling empowered. We had been concerned that all Movement support should be to support URCS to grow in strength and not invest in parallel processes and structures. Although it is difficult to predict success, with the third revision in process now, it is a challenge for our partners as they needed to align and follow the same rules. We published a localisation paper to help partners understand our vision of localisation and sustainability. We have modified level two (Movement Emergency Operations Platform) to show how we separate strategic ex-country partners from operational in-country partners. We will conduct a localisation review after the first year of operationalising One Plan, to identify barriers and opportunities for partners to more practically follow URCS's localisation agenda. Our overall aim is to ensure that all partners at all levels can understand our larger strategic goals, and can therefore optimise Movement-wide resources to strengthen the National Society.”*

National Committee senior manager



Importantly, however, URCS continues to monitor very carefully the appropriate allocation to specific regions and branches according to needs. It maintains a clear coordination of partners' resources to support them in meeting URCS's targets, as the following updated mapping of response to conflict-affected populations with new services shows.

**BRaVO 2023 Budget**  
**Regions Coverage, CHF**

Region	Local Branches	Budget, CHF	Available funds
		<b>ICRC</b>	
Sumy	5	403 997	
Kharkiv	10	703 547	
Donetsk	7	517 869	3 136 027
Luhansk	5	300 000	
Zaporizhzhia	7	515 952	
Kherson	8	694 662	
		<b>Luxembourg RC</b>	
Dnipro	8	620 000	550 000
		<b>British RC</b>	
Chernihiv	5	397 750	
Kyiv oblast	7	589 140	0 (TBC)
Kyiv city	9	675 473	
		<b>IFRC</b>	
Vinnitsia	6	500 811	*2 100 000 (was available but redirected to other program)
Zhitomir	5	396 583	
Ternopil	8	660 083	
Lviv	7	521 747	
Zakarpattia	8	605 535	
		<b>Danish RC</b>	
Mykolaiv	7	533 680	
Khmelnytskyi	5	428 463	1 630 000
Chernivtsi	4	358 991	
Kirovohrad	5	398 737	
		<b>Swiss RC</b>	
Ivano-Frankivsk	6	420 000	-420 000
		<b>German RC</b>	
Volyn	7	447 795	
Odesa	6	340 058	1 355 610
Rivne	7	465 959	
		<b>Canadian RC</b>	
Cherkasy	4	339 539	740 000
Poltava	5	403 997	
<b>Total for RII/LB</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>12 240 387</b>	<b>7 831 637</b>



4 408 730 CHF deficit

### (iii) A new form of organisational development and sustainability for conflict-affected contexts

*"Pre-2016 there wasn't much thought given to strategies or thinking of the future. URCS was satisfied with what it had and was not very prepared for different challenges in the world such as increasing social issues, digitalisation, and technology. We had faced the 2014 escalation of conflict in the east with manual systems. Before any further escalation in conflict and other issues, we wanted to build a network of locally-led action, but wondered how much capacity branches had to deliver without National Committee support. Some of our existing partners at that time didn't understand and we suffered from a lack of funding. Nevertheless between 2016 and 2018 our new leadership focussed on systematisation, institutionalisation, and attracting new personnel with a reformist approach. We needed a quicker corporate culture based on effectiveness, principles in action, and accountability to beneficiaries. Now, after the more recent escalation, we saw a massive change – no matter which capacities you have, you have to mobilise all resources. Many new young people, volunteers and others have influenced our heads of branches with new ideas."*

Maksym Dotsenko, URCS director general

The State's termination of the majority of its funding to URCS in 2016 precipitated an accelerated interest in new ways of achieving sustainability at all levels. When the new leadership of 2017 commissioned the review that led to the OD Concept Paper, it was a new strategic roadmap for change at all levels.

URCS's collective assessments contained a number of cross-cutting recommendations for modernising systems and becoming relevant to the changing external humanitarian context. Assessments included:

- Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC)<sup>13</sup> Self-assessment – 2012
- Safer Access Framework (SAF) Self-assessment – 2014
- STAR Self-assessment – 2015
- IFRC Scoping Mission – 2015

<sup>13</sup> IFRC's OCAC is an assessment process that supports National Societies to review all the elements that make up a strong organisation by looking at their capacity and performance indicators, assessing strengths and weaknesses, and providing focus in their efforts to become strong and sustainable service providers.



- IFRC Needs assessment – 2016
- Ukrainian State Accounting Chamber Audit – 2016 IFRC Independent International Audit – 2016 OCAC – 2019
- Preparedness for Emergency Response (PER) – 2019
- Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment (BOCA) with 33 BOCA workshops from 2017 to 2021; 53 in 2023; with plans for 55 local branches in 2024
- The Due Diligence Mission assessing URCS's Financial Systems by the Norwegian Red Cross in 2021, launching new Finance Development and Digital Transformation Projects.

IFRC's Scoping Mission in 2014 was conducted without the presence of a Country Office, but once the 2016 reputational crisis resulted in OD and NSD recommendations, a much closer collaboration between the Federation and ICRC was formed (as identified in (i) above).

*"Our learning was that in 2014 URCS's crisis response was mainly a project approach. The community didn't end up 'owning' the National Society as 'theirs', and we missed the opportunity to deliver holistic outcomes in communities. The centre of our work is the Fundamental Principles, and we need to implement these by listening to communities about their needs and support them through a holistic approach."*

Ms Liliia Bilous, URCS director general 2017–2020

With more coordinated inputs from partners, URCS achieved a remarkable range of organisational improvements between 2016 and 2019. New policies, procedures, guidelines, handbooks, systems, SOPs, minimum standards, and toolkits, all aimed to provide greater national level coherence and strengthen HQ and branch level operational capacities.

There were growing signs of a new organisational culture. The regular participation of branches, volunteers, members and HQ personnel in the development of new materials strengthened internal cohesion and understanding. These started to build ownership, commitment, and an internal critical mass for change.

Interest in new ways of working grew, including previously change-resistant leadership welcoming improved knowledge sharing and peer support mechanisms to scale up successful new service development ideas, volunteering approaches, learning, and examples of humanitarian impact for replication across branches. Capacity and service strengthening experiences were shared across conflict and non-conflict affected branches for addressing common humanitarian needs.

In November 2019, URCS undertook the IFRC's Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC) process for a second time. Out of 85 organisational indicators, two were rated as A (lowest), 14 at B, 28 at C, 27 at D, and 14 at E (the highest level). URCS therefore met the benchmark level in 82% of attributes, while 18% were outlined for capacity enhancement prioritisation. These development areas were: RM, HR, youth and volunteers, fleet management, relevance of services and sustainability, and governance. These were prioritised in URCS's 2021–2025 strategy.

The collective analysis of all the above assessments coherently summarised major capacity gaps. Needing an urgent approach to strengthening its own organisational stability from 2016 onwards, URCS has made strategic NSD investments in new Branch Resource Mobilisation and Fundraising guidelines, and SOPs and toolkits have been developed. Its MTTs were expected to provide training in RM areas, and Danish Red Cross-supported mini grants have generated interesting pilot Income Generation Activities (IGAs) since 2019. IFRC's IGA training materials were adapted, but the MTTs were unlikely to have technical skills in specific RM areas, which requires a different type of branch peer support, or direct HQ RM team training. In addition to stronger business planning guidelines and regional RM tools (partially available now through BraVo, RedPreneur of the Austrian Red Cross, and URCS's national RM expertise in decentralised Cluster Offices), URCS is still working on the legal and accounting guidelines for branches. This will strengthen their business activities, which remain a challenge because of the complexity of Ukrainian legislation on NGO income generation. URCS is now working with Audit Firm KPMG to produce these guidelines in 2024.

URCS made significant NSD investments to strengthen its independent income to deliver neutral, impartial services, and not be bound by the support of its partners only.



*"URCS has transformed itself into an extremely effective delivery machine, but its longer-term sustainability is challenging!"*

URCS branch leader

At the moment, 80-90% of NGO fundraising in Ukraine comes from grant and proposal writing, with little coming from individual giving or structured corporate fundraising. Although grant writing has a traditionally high return on investment, its benefits typically only last 1–2 years until the funding ceases, and therefore does not allow for sustained growth or activities.

In 2017 URCS hired its first RM Officer. By 2020, a full-fledged URCS RM Unit covering corporate and individual giving, as well as institutional resource mobilisation, had been established with National Society Investment Alliance (NSIA) and Swiss Red Cross support. NSD investment led to extremely successful activities that established an RM infrastructure, tools, CRM, and guidelines. By the second day of the escalated conflict in February 2022, URCS had more than 55 emergency appeals using various fundraising platforms. In the two following weeks it raised more than CHF 10 million from individuals and corporates alone. In 2022–2023, URCS's RM Team raised more than CHF 77 million in private sector contributions. 40% of its annual response budget is generated by its own fundraising, and for the first time since 2014 it is less dependent on external funding.

Recognising the increasing humanitarian needs, social impact and conflict-sensitive threats stemming from the persistent conflict in the east, the URCS Strategic Plan 2018–2020 focused on four key areas: emergency preparedness and response, physical health and resilience to psychosocial challenges, strengthening cooperation and quality communication, and building a strong, reliable, transparent National Society.

Challenged by URCS law and statutes limiting its ability to raise certain categories of funds, URCS nevertheless took a number of steps to modernise and diversify its streams of income.

In 2019 URCS succeeded in establishing a First Aid LLC (semi-commercial enterprise) which is now working in regional and local branches across the country to legally raise funds through paid first aid training.

In January 2020, URCS changed the title of its previous International Relations and Cooperation Department to just Cooperation Department, signalling a strategic interest in growing domestic partnerships with Government Ministries and companies, as well as its traditional international Movement partners. A closer collaboration between the Cooperation and Communications Departments enable URCS to better communicate the impact of its work to build longer-term support. The Department's name changed again to reflect this, to Strategic Partnerships and International Department. It also covers humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy in Ukraine and internationally, in close collaboration with the communications Department.



*Distribution of humanitarian aid in Ivano-Frankivsk region.*



RM and fundraising support have come from URCS's partners under multiple sources:

- IFRC's Capacity Building Fund (CBF) allocation of CHF 17,000 (2015-2017)
- IFRC and ICRC's joint National Societies Investment Alliance (NSIA) Fund of CHF 368,271 (2019 – 2022)
- Swiss Red Cross remote technical support and mentoring and in-country training
- French Red Cross support on Corporate Social Responsibility Strategies and Commercial First Aid
- The Swedish, German, Luxembourg, French and Austrian Red Cross all integrated local RM support within their respective programmes to build branch sustainability models
- IFRC's Regional RM Advisor gave technical support and mentoring in-country and remotely.

URCS used the IFRC's CBF between 2017 and 2019 to develop:

- ✓ financial management and reporting systems
- ✓ public image surveys with analysis and baselines against which to improve public communications
- ✓ awareness raising/image building campaigns
- ✓ recruiting fundraising specialists from time to time.

The initial outcomes from the CBF resulted in promising possibilities to build on, which included:

- recruiting a professional RM focal point
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) donations such as a Mobile Health Unit Ambulance to provide healthcare to people living in remote areas, clothes for highly vulnerable people, medical equipment for hospitals, sale of URCS first aid kits for car sales outlets, and donations of a percentage of goods sold in selected commercial outlets
- fundraising donation box disbursement in public places
- a Market Review of Ukraine, supported by IFRC's Regional Fundraising Adviser, which resulted in a first ever URCS RM Strategy (2019–2023), approved by the Governing Board in December 2019.

As part of a consecutive set of NSD Investments, URCS used Joint IFRC/ICRC NSIA funds in 2019–2022 to:

- develop and finalise a five-year RM/fundraising strategy/plan with returns on investment projection, with key steps and resources required
- establish URCS's fully-fledged professional RM and Fundraising Team
- set operational activities to increase its financial sustainability
- develop strategic and operational documents for national and branch levels
  - add the 'Donate' button to URCS's website
  - launch Red Cross souvenirs and online shop products in 2021
  - implement the Salesforce Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system that offered a unified database merging data on fundraising, automated communication, and relationship management with corporate and individual donors, communications, and public relations.

The three-year NSIA Accelerator Grant (2020–2022) aimed to build on the above achievements, responding to the urgent needs of branches to grow sustainable local fundraising to support their very fragile infrastructure and local service development. The NSIA contained three phases:

- Strategic documents and tools setup – first year
- Corporate and Institutional fundraising – first, second and third years
- Individual fundraising – second and third years.

Swiss Red Cross support for the newly-established RM Department started in 2020, with a four-year planning timeframe to provide RM development support even after its NSIA grant expires in 2022. Its primary component was piloting a modernised approach to URCS's traditional Ageing Care/Home Visiting



Care service in the east. The programme enabled local branches to pilot and explore new forms of RM that could make such services sustainable, drawing also from examples of sustainable funds included in the IFRC's global Guidelines on Home Help Services.

In 2019 the Swiss Red Cross also supported URCS to hold a national RM Workshop to operationalise its new strategy in line with NSIA targets. The IFRC's European Regional RM Advisor, a Russian speaker who could reach different local levels of the National Society, advised on a very valuable range of issues including corporate relationship development strategies (e.g. linking with 20,000 Directors of small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs)), negotiating with external PR and fundraising platform agencies, and providing best practices from other National Societies (e.g. learning from the Lithuanian Red Cross model of SME engagement, and the Georgian Red Cross on CRM solutions).

At a more programmatic and local level, branches are requesting more mentoring support to implement two other types of local RM activities, but this time focussed on their ability to assist very vulnerable people with their own Income Generation Activity (IGA) skills to build local sustainable livelihoods. Skill building in branches to help with such IGA training is not well supported, but branches are nevertheless assumed to be able to deliver capacity building training at community levels in the two following programmes:

- URCS's Livelihood Grant support to vulnerable communities (supported by IFRC and its multilateral partners), based on assumed training to vulnerable people to start entrepreneurial IGAs to raise sustainable income for themselves
- ICRC's similar ECOSEC programme, supporting IGAs through small pilot grants, which also requires mentoring support to branches to develop better project proposals.

The escalation of the conflict in 2022 and the resulting new humanitarian services expected from branches required new forms of support and a change in organisational development strategy. It is best described in the following diagram, which forms the basis of the URCS's NSD strategies that underpin One Plan implementation.



Acknowledging that it needed to develop strategies to replace such a high level of international assistance with more dependable local income streams, URCS needed to adapt quickly.

*"In 2021 our branch started activities to respond to COVID-19. We weren't so stable and had financial problems, but we needed to plan to respond. Our few volunteers responded very strongly and we won a USAID grant to respond to TB. We achieved a lot in a short time, but then on 7 March 2022 we were asked to organise "green corridors" to evacuate civilians from the areas which the war had suddenly affected. I personally organised seven green corridor evacuations, driving in our Red Cross car with our Emblem and 156 school buses full of people behind us. Although we faced very dangerous security incidents with soldiers questioning us, we showed our Red Cross ID cards and eventually they let us pass. We experienced hundreds of spontaneous volunteers offering services such as transport, accountancy to deal with donations transparently, baking and cooking, and distributing vouchers to facilitate services. Although all volunteers needed to take the obligatory course to follow the Fundamental Principles and other rules, we picked many volunteers that we wanted to work with long-term and gave them special roles. Our five Mobile Health Teams are led by people who have themselves been displaced who came with those special skills. We benefitted a lot from the BraVoiE after 2022, raising many funds and with improved offices, visibility and reporting capacities. We now have 180 stable volunteers, not spontaneous, and our services now include psychosocial support to both beneficiaries and volunteers."*

URCS head of branch



To better respond to local needs, URCS's Organisational Development (OD) Department was divided into three inter-related units to achieve clearer outcomes as follows:

Branch Development Unit	To help develop organisational sustainability, develop potential to grow, be relevant to local needs, and oversee the development of branch heads.
Social Services Development Unit	To prioritise branches in areas of high need (identified by BraVoIE assessments), help branches to develop critical social services, support in service development methodologies, and facilitate replication of successful results.
Volunteer and Youth Development Unit	Develop volunteering and youth service capacities that respond to local needs, strengthen volunteering development and support systems, and share volunteer training resources.

The above approach aims to link needs identification systems to volunteering, branch and service development in a seamless concept. The overall goal is to use humanitarian advocacy to show how innovative and responsive social services can be used as successful models for local authorities to expand and meet the rights of the most vulnerable people in society.

The overall outcomes of this phase of NSD investments in longer-term neutral and independent sustainable services have brought very strategic new collaborations with the corporate sector too.

*"We were the first to sign an MoU with URCS 13 years ago. We signed a new one two weeks before the war started in 2022 after being happy and proud to see the transformation in the National Society over the past several years. From its dedicated neutral and impartial work helping evacuees in subway stations, to having the most developed network of volunteers in place nationally, we are proud to partner with such a reputable humanitarian organisation. Through their principled leadership and transparent and accountable business structures we have provided over \$10 million over the past few years. During the COVID-19 response, we provided equipment for five to seven central hospitals after the MoH and URCS listed the equipment needed, and gave \$3 million to support communities. URCS's digitalisation and simplification have made them very rapid responders. More recently we provided 5,000 sleeping kits for refugees and displaced people, have joint ventures like rebuilding kindergartens, and distributed 1 million special products last Christmas, together with hygiene kits, blankets and some cash. URCS has also received grants from the Coca Cola Foundation for the economic empowerment of displaced people, providing drinking water to 700,000 people after the dam collapse and installing water purification systems, and providing 37 mobile heating stations in schools, kindergartens and shelters where outside temperatures were sometimes minus 25°C. We are thinking of future support in non-traditional areas with high demands after the war. These include support for de-mining, help for veterans, reconstruction efforts, scaling up URCS's national healthcare model and rapid response teams, and facilitating partnerships with banks. We have promoted URCS in different corporate forums we attend, such as the Chamber of Commerce and the European Business Association. Our partnerships encourage other corporates to follow. We see URCS developing as a centre for global expertise in the Movement!"*

Andriy Bublik, Public and Government Relations Director of Coca-Cola Ukraine.

URCS's domestic and international resource mobilisation grew to unprecedented levels in the immediate aftermath of the escalation of conflict in February 2022, benefitting from the NSD investments from the NSIA fund and other partners over the past 10 years. The three-person RM team had raised CHF 67 million during 2022 from 122,000 individuals and over 500 companies.



*Pavlograd, Ukraine, December 2018. Ekaterina (35) had to leave her small manicure studio behind when she fled the city of Donetsk at the beginning of the armed conflict in 2014. With her 10-year-old daughter, she found a new home in Pavlograd, and started to rebuild her business. Through the URCS livelihoods programme, she received financial support to enrol in professional training and buy new equipment, so she can provide for her daughter.*

While pressing humanitarian needs were answered immediately through these funds, discussions began with the British Red Cross and other strategic partners on the option to invest some income in an Endowment Fund, to enable URCS to provide for its own services and institutional costs over the next 3-4 years. Options are being scoped to use an outsourced non-Ukrainian professional investment company to generate perpetual income for future generations. Decisions are expected in 2024.



## 7. Strengthening ‘reputation’

### (i) Legal base foundations

*“URCS has continuously been trying to strengthen our law and auxiliary roles further since we started amendments in 1992. We are working on digitalisation of all our legal base documents and our history over 105 years as evidence to the Government. It contains significant lessons and humanitarian achievements. These will be beneficial for future upgrading of laws, but also as information that will assist the regions and our 250 branches to see and build on our history.”*

Dr Mykola Polishchuk, president of URCS

URCS was founded in 1918 as an independent National Red Cross Society. Four years later it became part of the Soviet Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Since 1991, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it has been functioning as an independent National Society. In October 1992, the President of Ukraine issued a decree recognising the Society as the only National Red Cross Society authorised to assist the authorities in their humanitarian activities. In 1993, the Society was recognised by both the ICRC and IFRC, becoming a member of the International Federation the same year.

In July 1999, the Supreme Council of Ukraine (Parliament) passed a law on the Red Cross and Red Crescent Emblem in Ukraine, giving sole use of the emblem to the URCS. In 2002, the Parliament of Ukraine adopted the law on the “Ukrainian Red Cross Society”, acknowledging its auxiliary status and role.

As a result of its NSD investments and alignment to Movement-wide standards, URCS has remained free of politicisation since its foundation.

When conflict in 2014 left many branches divided along the line of government control, they had to deal with inconsistent legal status and challenges to acceptance and perceptions of their neutrality, impartiality and independence. In 2016, URCS’s Reform process recognised a need for a revised Red Cross Law and accompanying modernised statutes to achieve internal unity and cohesion.

Recognising the challenges to increasing internal cohesion across 180 different legal entities, URCS worked to reinstate discussions and advocacy with key counterpart Ministries to upgrade its URCS law and then develop an independently aligned set of statutes. In an attempt to reinstate some Government funding for its structures, in 2018, a draft Bill was developed with the Ministry of Social Policy to secure State funding for key regional positions, but although it was accepted by the assigned Parliamentary legislative working group, it was declined during the hearing. A second attempt was made in the second half of 2021. There was a positive resolution to give State funding for the national home-based care program (restoring the State funding URCS had lost in 2017), but with modernised home-based care. The proposal included the active roles of local branches and financial coverage of their structures. However, the escalated conflict of 2022 interrupted the plans, which remain suspended.

ICRC’s support through SAF in the eastern branches has strengthened their identity, perception, access and acceptance, although the legal bases on which many branches function in the NGCAs cannot be reunified within the wider URCS structures while the conflict-sensitivity persists. An interim understanding has been reached between parties to the conflict, with the Ministry for Temporarily Occupied Territories.

The respect that URCS has gained from all public authorities has given it credibility and access.

*“When we next strengthen our law, we should first strengthen our internal systems and then take the opportunity to update URCS’s auxiliary roles to play a clearer part in the State’s unified civil protection system.”*

National Committee senior manager

Since the 2022 conflict escalation, the clarification of the legal base of branches in contested territories has become more challenging. In NGCAs, regional branches remain operational but under the status of Red Cross entities, due to security and confusion of which authorities they are auxiliary to. Some have to work with Russian authorities to continue their mission of providing humanitarian services. Where feasible these branches are encouraged to avail of ICRC support.





URCS's Humanitarian Diplomacy (HD) work on acceptance has been challenging in everyday environments where huge numbers of Ukrainians feel nationalistic. It has continued to demonstrate to local authorities that it is neutral, while still supporting populations on the borders of the country. Improved HD skills were not so necessary over the years before 2022, but have been critically needed since.

As a result of lessons learned over past conflicts, an NSD investment in future revision of URCS's statutes aims to strengthen a number of elements including:

- an internal optimisation of URCS's governance system with a refreshed approach to rotation in governance and accountabilities from local to national levels
- strengthening of aspects related to transparency and accountability in areas such as the establishment and reporting line of an Internal Audit Department, Risk, Audit and Ethics Committee, and roles of external advisors in areas such as risk management frameworks
- updated resource mobilisation and fund generation and management authorisation at different levels to strengthen sustainability management mechanisms
- refreshing of the by-laws through which URCS can regulate branches in a unitary framework, clarifying their roles, purpose and mandates within harmonised regulatory frameworks.

## (ii) The auxiliary role and its interpretation

*"We are neutral and impartial when we provide services to people in territories controlled by the Government, but we face some misunderstanding as well when the Government doesn't fully understand neutrality. They believe that our auxiliary role means that we extend our services to people in Ukrainian controlled territory only. It is a very tense issue which ICRC discusses with the authorities, and we try hard to protect ICRC's responsibilities and reputation with the Government. Our strategy has been to present URCS, ICRC and IFRC as one Movement."*

National Committee senior manager

Needing to strengthen understanding of its neutral, impartial and independent positioning, URCS has worked tirelessly with the mass media to explain its roles, mandates, programmes, and services (for example the evacuation of people from territories in conflict). It also worked on strategic and operational levels to explain to Government counterparts the different mandates of the components of the Movement, helping them develop a clearer understanding of the Fundamental Principles and that they could not issue operational instructions to URCS.

URCS's NSD investments to strengthen its positioning in increasingly conflict-sensitive contexts across the country have built on work done and skills present across the National Society for years, including:

- ✓ MoUs with the Ministry of Health (pre-2016) on home-based care provision; and the Ministry of Social Policy on humanitarian aid distributions
- ✓ transitioning from its traditional home-based Nursing Services in 2014 to supporting the needs of people displaced by the escalating conflict in the east, including first aid, medical assistance, and food vouchers
- ✓ introducing new Psychosocial Support services (PSS) to support beneficiaries as well as staff and volunteers affected by the conflict, including new skills in rehabilitation to enable branches to respond to changing community needs
- ✓ developing its Local Branch Handbook in 2019 containing chapters on its legal base, mandates and auxiliary roles
- ✓ using the Movement's Revised Guidance for National Society statutes (2018), which contains important minimum elements for revised statutes to adhere to. These include a range of issues already being strengthened in URCS's ongoing reform work, especially in the areas of transparency and accountability, volunteering and membership empowerment, youth development, and integrity



- ✓ establishing a URCS Statutory Commission which functioned from 2018 until 2021 when the revised URCS statutes were adopted by the National General Assembly. The commission engaged the expertise of a Ukrainian law firm and liaised with the Joint IFRC/ICRC statutes commission in Geneva to ensure all minimum standards were covered, including the internal mechanisms (commissions, governance and management complementarity, etc.) to protect National Society integrity
- ✓ establishing a range of MoUs with key Governmental Ministries and institutions. These included MoUs with the Armed forces (2017, agreed with ICRC) to engage in joint simulations; State Emergency Services (SES) and their local structures; Ministries of Youth, Foreign Affairs, Social Policy, Temporarily Occupied Territories and Veterans; and agreeing roles with key Ministries and state structures in health and disasters.

There have been promising individual examples of branches negotiating new auxiliary role partnerships while responding to the escalated conflict of 2022 onwards.

*“Our branch has very good relations with all local authorities in recognition of the neutral, impartial and independent social services we are offering. Our local authorities have agreed to finance our core project for expanding home-based care. We provide the aid to people and the authorities provide free transport. Sometimes the government also pays organisations for special services such as support to displaced people and provision of Mobile Health teams. We have examples of some official reimbursements for such services, but these are not consistent. We also experience challenges arising from a lack of dissemination, and misunderstanding as a result. For example, when a local authority asked us to give them the aid for distribution we refused, quoting our Fundamental Principles. The community realised that URCS and the Movement are one, and different from local government.”*

URCS head of branch

However, in spite of URCS's NSD investments in ongoing humanitarian advocacy, to strengthen its overall legal base, its existing law still needed strengthening in parts. These include refreshing auxiliary roles and cooperation with State structures and institutions in health and disasters; encouragement to all Local Government Offices to form auxiliary role MoUs with their URCS branches to access funding for “public humanitarian services”; and clarifying tax exemption from all sources of income.

*“We have focussed our advocacy agenda on different positional papers, reminding all authorities of the roles and mandates of URCS within a wider Movement. We frame URCS's work with evidence and data collection tools to position ourselves as a positive humanitarian actor. The auxiliary roles will need to be adapted fast, to also position URCS in relation to recovery and reconstruction roles, with capacities to deliver these. We need to advocate for changes in the URCS law and national volunteering laws to be positioned as a partner of choice for the Government. We therefore need to be seen to be merging these roles within a mix of national and international needs across countries and across all sectors.”*

National Committee senior manager



*A patient during a consultation at the URCS clinic in Mykolaiv, which provides services to displaced people and vulnerable residents of the city. They see about 50 to 60 people a day for issues including skin infections, diabetes, and depression.*



The Danish Red Cross MoFA programme support for 2018–2021 contained an important HD capacity enhancement component. URCS will need to advocate for ongoing auxiliary role support from national and local Government Ministries in a strategic and professional manner.

The organisation will need to use its enhanced Governmental credibility and auxiliary roles to advocate for people whose voices are not being heard. Whether it is to improve branch capacities to advocate on behalf of displaced people, or enhance the overall reputation of URCS as a credible humanitarian partner, URCS has used its neutral, impartial and independent positioning to gather compelling humanitarian evidence and advocate for appropriate policy changes to meet the needs of people made most vulnerable.

URCS has learned from its successful initial Humanitarian Diplomacy (HD) pilot work in a number of programmes to build new relationships and partnerships with local Government bodies as well as some national level Ministries. Using the lessons learned from a variety of programmes, it has taken opportunities to develop and disseminate practical HD guidelines to its HQ and branches on how to better communicate and advocate for new auxiliary partnerships as part of its overall sustainability strategy. The results of some innovative NSD investments are yet to come, but some have been measurable in new humanitarian access and acceptance of services delivered:

- ✓ in its COVID-19 response, URCS was the first to use IFRC's information and awareness materials (based on WHO materials), adapting and preparing 800,000 as URCS materials. As soon as the MoH signed the order to start national communications campaigns, URCS contacted the National President's Office and National Ombudsman for Volunteers and agreed immediate distribution. This demonstrated its added value to UN and other organisations who asked it for its materials
- ✓ URCS designed its own digitalised CASH programme and distribution system and paid for the design of the Government system so that communities could be linked to URCS and Government services seamlessly
- ✓ URCS's DM system will interface with Government hubs to link it to Government registers of vulnerable people to avoid duplication and optimise efficiency
- ✓ URCS has developed Mobile Health Units with diagnostic capacities for displaced people and temporary camps, which are linked to the government's primary healthcare system, so that family doctors can make further diagnoses
- ✓ URCS's improved capacities in shelter, WASH, physical and mental rehabilitation are well-received and the aim is for them to be integrated with similar government services
- ✓ new civil protection MoUs include refurbishment of equipment needed for URCS to play its designated roles.

The above NSD investments positioned URCS strongly so its relations with key ministries were already strong when the escalation of armed conflict started in 2022.

During this current conflict it is important for URCS to nurture and grow its connections between communities and the Red Cross. The deeper these are, the better we can respond to community needs in areas such as psychosocial support, strengthening social cohesion, revitalising resilience and sustainability, and providing longer-term relief and recovery support.

*"We don't aim to duplicate Government services, but instead choose the right place to help the Government find a model for sustainable services. For example, when we met people fleeing the 2022 conflict in railway stations, we gave them first aid, clothes, food and safe premises. Through this first connection our volunteers built their own map of needs and support needed from medical systems. This led to integrated work with other institutions. We are now helping displaced people to find local jobs or to become URCS volunteers themselves. Through this we are building practices which help to register people, respect their rights, and ensure that no one is neglected. But we cannot be a service provider for everyone everywhere and that is where we help government to change its systems to take over with the general population while URCS targets the most vulnerable people and those who are still too isolated to benefit from other services."*

National Committee senior manager



Acknowledging that URCS will stay with communities whenever the current armed conflict and relief activities end, it is already considering NSD investments that will give it capacities to support recovery and reconstruction. This might require further, scaled-up funding. Such auxiliary role expansion, and the capacity enhancement that will require institutional funding, would be limited by more donor strategies and mandates. Nevertheless, NSD investments in local volunteer-led services have attracted the attention and support of local authorities, providing a significant opportunity to pursue this kind of expansion.

*"In 2018, the Danish Red Cross started funding a Young Humanitarian Leaders of Ukraine initiative. Five participants were mentored by the Head of Branch and encouraged to develop local services within the Fundamental Principles. Examples included supporting the rehabilitation of veterans and ex-combatants, helping children and families to reach social services when they needed them, and organising a local clothing bank for those in need. Our branch building had originally been 10m<sup>2</sup>, and from there we were coordinating mine risk education, first aid training, home-based care and PSS services. The city government appreciated these services and, through partnerships to expand programmes like providing PSS for young people, they gave us another room, in the central hospital, of 37m<sup>2</sup>. However, when we expanded to 22 trained volunteers after the escalation of the conflict in 2022, they then refurbished a 300m<sup>2</sup> building for our branch activities to help us expand. The young person in charge of the clothing bank has become a Volunteer Leader, another has become an Interregional Coordinator."*

URCS city branch head

URCS will need flexible funds to build better sustainable auxiliary role capacities into the future – for example more Mobile Health Units to conduct free diagnostics for scattered populations, and funds to pay for government doctors to join such services. With lack of clarity and assurance that Movement partners will be able to source such funding, URCS is expanding its capacities to mobilise more sustainable local funding to support its envisaged future auxiliary roles (see Section 5 (ii) for more details).

### **(iii) Building social inclusion and peace**

*"Everything we do, every footprint, even if it's not visible now, has an impact for the future. Our main aim is not just to support people now, but to build a culture of peace and volunteerism, not just to use volunteers as a resource, but to build that culture from seeds in schools and communities. From this, we can have a big impact on strengthening social cohesion. Our volunteers are a big influence in their communities. A lot of beneficiaries have joined us as volunteers. What we do and provide is close to their hearts. Volunteers have much more influence in decision-making in their communities. URCS's leadership before 2014 didn't have much vision about recruiting the younger generations who are more in touch with the realities of a changing world. We needed to choose strategies to respond to future challenges, using technologies and new skills to strengthen our transparency and accountability too. The more you show these, the more you attract people to be a social force for change."*

Maksym Dotsenko, URCS director general

Between 2016 and 2018 URCS used the IFRC's Youth as Agents of Behavioural Change (YABC) programme to train young people. It targeted young people up to the age of 30, but also those in the youth and volunteer commissions. The methodology encourages young people to promote a culture of non-violence and peace – a strategic contribution to Ukraine at a time when social cohesion is under strain.

By 2020, URCS had held 171 YABC sessions in which 2,489 youth representatives were given the opportunity to become leaders of change in their communities and to show, by their own example, what respect for diversity, gender equality, intercultural dialogue and social inclusion means. Sadly, though lots of new volunteers joined because of YABC, since they appreciated the focus on promoting non-violent behaviour, URCS had to scale down the process due to a lack of funds from partners.

YABC-trained young people tried to use the Fundamental Principles in their everyday lives, and it could have boosted positive organisational and volunteer development, as there was also a need in peacetime to create opportunities for youth-led local humanitarian action.

There was also confusion around responsibilities for some aspects of youth mobilisation and training, which were shared between the PSS and Volunteering Units. A Social Cohesion Framework drafted by Danish Red Cross in 2018/19 did not define clear activities – but when merged as a concept with YABC it had a powerful effect, proving popular in more liberal branches, which until then had only had traditional services.

*“The YABC-trained young people in our branch developed many social cohesion projects, interacting with their student peers. These included local environmental activities, partnering with a local Centre for Rehabilitation to provide PSS for children, helping to do shopping for older people, and collecting and distributing household items to those in need. They also mobilised 300 blood donors, each donating three to six times a year, which became a critical service after the 2022 conflict escalation. We are planning new activities for 2024 such as training ‘healthy lifestyle trainers’, cooperating with employment centres to find people jobs, and expanding volunteers to manage the 20,000 requests we have had for humanitarian aid. We are also considering some income generation from renting out 50 wheelchairs, crutches and other equipment to those who can pay, and collecting and distributing household items. In 2021, one of our YABC-trained volunteers was nominated Youth Leader of the Year.”*

URCS city branch head

This activity also led to a second project on promoting protection, wellbeing, and social cohesion for vulnerable groups in Ukraine. That ended in 2021, in order to further consolidate and diversify the intervention in Ukraine, and align to URCS’s 2021-2025 strategy.

Acknowledging that branches were not traditionally used to developing local needs-based services, the two programmes introduced the concept of Schools of Social Activities, which were initially to be run by the BraVo Project Manager.

URCS had reports from communities that local YABC-trained volunteers had had a positive impact, reporting that social cohesion, tolerance and acceptance had increased in their communities. With this encouragement, and as a further response to the escalation of armed conflict in 2022, in 2023, the Danish Red Cross started supporting the intensification of the YABC process. With Life Skills Training development supported by Danish Red Cross Youth, it is being expanded to include tutoring in conflict management, which will also be integrated into general branch and volunteer development activities.

URCS recognises that young people are essential agents for principled, locally-led action in their communities and families, and also create a pipeline for current and future principled leadership as well.

URCS’s home-based care systems from before 2022 have opened up opportunities for scaling up social cohesion work in a conflict-affected society. With swathes of people leaving the country, social relations have been broken, with those left behind feeling insecure. Many people have lost their carers and relatives. In 2023, URCS started focussing on groups of people isolated from Government or other services. It aims to build community-oriented services with people who trust in its values, including bringing youth volunteers into roles to visit isolated older people, perhaps helping them to use mobile phones to keep in touch with distant relatives.



Ukrainian Red Cross volunteers preparing to provide first aid.



In order to focus its work on social cohesion, URCS and the Danish Red Cross commissioned a Social Cohesion Assessment between September and December 2023. Its findings confirmed the value of past NSD investments in YABC, and in local community-based assessment mechanisms to identify the needs of the most marginalised and excluded groups. However, it raised important challenges in relation to new social exclusion factors that have been intensified by the 2022 escalated conflict. Addressing specific questions such as “Are there any conflict-related issues affecting social cohesion in the target communities? If yes, which ones?” the results show that URCS’s legacy of work in this area needed to be further strengthened:

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has significantly reshaped the demographic landscape, **exacerbating challenges faced by various excluded and marginalised groups**. These groups, including internally displaced, older, Roma and LGBTQI+ individuals, youth, and linguistic minorities, each confront unique hurdles influenced by their specific contexts and regional differences.

**Key challenges and needs** of excluded and marginalised groups across the three oblasts covered by the assessment include:

- **access to services:** Marginalised groups struggle to access essential services like healthcare, education, and employment. This is due to disruptions caused by the conflict, shortages in resources, and societal barriers. Healthcare challenges are particularly acute, with shortages of medicines, limited mental health support, and overwhelmed infrastructure.
- **social and community services:** Inconsistent availability of psychosocial support and community services, especially in rural and conflict-impacted areas, negatively impacts marginalised groups.
- **documentation and legal rights:** Groups like the Roma, LGBTQI+, and displaced people face difficulties in obtaining essential legal documents, affecting their rights and access to services.
- **humanitarian aid and government support:** Complex aid systems and a lack of transparent information hinder access to aid, leading to perceptions of bias and inequality in distribution.
- **language and religious discrimination:** Discrimination based on language and religion, particularly against Roma and Russian-speaking communities, contributes to social exclusion.
- **stigmatisation:** Communities like LGBTQI+ and Roma experience intense stigmatisation and discrimination, impacting on their social connection and access to services.
- **youth participation:** Young people face barriers in representation and engagement due to bureaucratic challenges and a lack of accessible platforms for civic participation.

The above require an intensified set of NSD investments to strengthen its further work from 2024 onwards. Stakeholders recognise the relevance of URCS’s advocacy and social cohesion and inclusion, leveraging its visibility and community presence for local policy and behavioural change. However, challenges like data scarcity, variable government collaboration, and messaging risks call for a strategic and sensitive approach to advocacy, and to NSD investments on which to build credible community-driven data and evidence, which can then be used to call for further change.

A recent URCS and Danish Red Cross case study on branch development in conflict-sensitive environments also highlighted the importance of gender- and diversity-sensitive leadership as a key factor in the success of humanitarian leadership. URCS’s NSD investments in principled and reform-focused leadership skills and competencies had laid the foundation for what were perceived to be attractive elements to new spontaneous volunteers who offered to join URCS after the escalation of conflict in 2022:

*“Staff, community members and volunteers at both branch and HQ identified inclusive leaders as very important for developing and maintaining a strong branch. Discussions on this issue were often highly correlated with discussion on the importance of inclusive and diverse teams. This inclusive leadership style prioritised including staff and volunteers in the planning and decision-making of the branch, including in both strategic and longer-term planning and the day-to-day activities, as well as encouraging new ways of doing things.”*

URCS Branch case study on success factors for Branch development in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, Danish Red Cross, 2023.



## 8. Strengthening ‘integrity’

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### (i) The role of URCS’s statutes

When completed in 2014, the Ukrainian State reform process recognised 24 regions, plus Kyiv City with special status, plus 131 Districts (reduced from 490), and 1,500 communities across the country. It is acknowledged that URCS has a larger number of existing district branches, and in its internal reform process some will be allowed to remain due to their active humanitarian initiatives, resources and loyalty to URCS. At community level, URCS foresees a future set of ‘Red Cross Rooms’ for activities based on local needs, and ‘Red Cross Centres’ for implementation of a wider set of activities.

URCS’s prime goal in the next phase of its law revision advocacy and statutes development is to re-establish an appropriate auxiliary relationship with key State Ministries and institutions, and to unify its internal structures and branches in alignment with newly decentralised Local Government systems.

To achieve this, URCS established its Statutory Commission in 2018 to guide the development of its revised statutes and law. In autumn 2021, the commission started preparing a proposed revision to URCS’s law but this was suspended with the escalation of the conflict in February 2022.

However, URCS also took the opportunity to agree and pilot a new branch model, with the support of the Danish Red Cross, which integrated branch, volunteering and service development programmes. New internal legal base strengthening chapters in the Local Branch Handbook, and subsequent branch training sessions by Interregional Managers and MTTs, have strengthened URCS’s legal identity in selected branches.

ICRC’s support through SAF in the eastern branches has strengthened their identity, perception, access and acceptance, although the legal bases on which many branches function in the NGCAs cannot be reunified within the wider URCS structures while the conflict-sensitivity persists.

### (ii) Refreshing governance at all levels to oversee a decentralised branch network

In 2017, URCS’s Board approved a new concept of membership, with a newly branded membership card to replace the old membership stamp. Whereas the old system sold a stamp as a token of support for URCS, the new system aims to personalise membership and strengthen awareness raising in new members. The figure of 1.5 million members registered under the previous stamp system was expected to drop significantly, but new membership categories were adopted as follows from April 2024:

- Privileged membership, 200 UAH (CHF 5) – cheaper option for beneficiaries
- Standard membership, 500 UAH (CHF 11) – default option for those who wish to be a part of the Red Cross Movement
- Online membership will be launched on a new platform as one of the projects of URCS’s Digital Transformation Team. This will be developed in 2024, piloted in specific regional branches in 2025, and rolled out in all regions from January 2026.

URCS aims to deepen its understanding of members’ sense of ownership over the National Society, both as funders (through membership fees), governance (through elected entitlement), and as connectors or knowledge-brokers with communities (where members build URCS’s insight into the needs of local people, especially those who are most vulnerable, and generate ideas for serving their communities, using some of their membership income collectively to do so).

Members act as ambassadors of humanitarian values in their communities, and build social cohesion and peace and appreciation of locally-led neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian action. SOPs for holding URCS Governance Assemblies for local and regional branches, and for the General Assembly set for 2021, were developed and validated over the course of 2019.



In parallel, URCS accepted mentoring support as part of its leadership development strategy. Strategic level mentoring has been complemented by programmatic and branch level mentoring. Whereas the earlier forms of mentoring were provided by external partners, it is impressive to note URCS's internal approach to peer mentoring between branches, between Interregional Managers and respective branch leaders. These more sustainable forms of mentoring will be critical elements of URCS's future self-sustaining strategies.

In late 2016 and early 2017, URCS's new Director General requested and welcomed mentoring assistance. Her request was for support to her, as well as a range of newly appointed senior management staff in HQ, to develop a change strategy to reform the culture and functioning of the National Society.

ICRC's new, non-traditional Embedded Cooperation Delegate played a highly strategic role between May 2015 and June 2018 in helping URCS governance and management start to modernise HQ structures and systems in HR, finance and logistics. The support aimed at strengthening strategic reorganisation of some key national functions, and operational management capacities to support branches in the east responding to the conflict.

With the re-establishment of its Country Office in 2016, IFRC worked jointly with ICRC to sponsor three senior leaders to attend the Movement Induction Course in 2018. The important newly appointed Head of OD Unit in 2018 was invited for a week of discussions and capacity enhancement in Geneva to familiarise herself with IFRC, ICRC and Movement tools that support and accelerate NSD outcomes.

As a result of the above initiatives URCS prioritised NSD investments in the following ways to strengthen its induction process for national, regional and local governance:

- ✓ a new induction package was developed and implemented for all branch governance, staff and volunteers in 2019–2021
- ✓ the Local Branch Handbook was created in 2019 for local branch governance, staff and volunteers, covering all areas of Branch functioning, URCS's history and legal base, and a range of minimum standards in expected technical areas
- ✓ the modernised updated system for induction in branches, through the MTTs and Interregional Managers.

Nevertheless, branches had additional requests to ensure the full functionality of the system. The following needs are all incorporated and ensured under the BraVo programme:

- inter-personal mentoring and training for different stakeholders from experienced Interregional Managers (appointed because they have senior and successful branch operational experience)
- an upgraded HQ and branch leadership orientation package, with training modules, case study/material-based learning on successful approaches (videos, branch peer visits)
- an inter-branch mentoring system managed by Interregional Managers (including across regions so that eastern branches can exchange learning mutually with others)
- use of the URCS Branch Assessment Tool as an opportunity to include inductions for all those branch personnel (governance, volunteers and staff) who attend the exercise
- development of online leadership development modules with inspiring case studies and videos of change and new services, to be developed and promoted across all URCS internal stakeholders.

### **(iii) Strengthening transparency and accountability**

*"We have developed good relations with Government and the public after the reputational crisis of 2016, but we want to be continuously positioned based on the Fundamental Principles. We need to build ourselves so that we are recognised by all as a reliable and equal partner to Government. In parallel, the Ukrainian public and communities are intelligent, educated and not indifferent to failures. Our services and support are well recognised, but they continuously need to see our strengths and expertise delivered in an accountable manner if we are to continue to have access and acceptance."*

National Committee senior manager





Following its damaging public reputational crisis in 2016, the ensuing Government and IFRC independent audits, and Government directives to institutions to strengthen accountability in general, increasing accountability and transparency became a central and consistent part of URCS's NSD and reform process.

As a key part of its OD Roadmap and Strategy 2018–2020 from the very outset, its integrated approach has included finance development; internal and external audit development; strengthening logistics, procurement and warehousing systems and Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (PMER) and Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA).

A range of partners have been supporting this area, including ICRC and Danish, Finnish, Luxembourg and Norwegian Red Cross Societies with improved procurement, logistics and warehousing capacities, and IFRC under its Operational Plan objective of ensuring URCS has necessary corporate infrastructure and systems in place.

URCS made the following NSD investments as inter-related components:

#### **Finance development and Internal Audit development:**

In 2016-2017 the American Red Cross, before its departure from Ukraine, assisted URCS to install a centralised accounting and warehouse management system. The software enabled a single consolidated accounting and financial reporting system, with administrative and warehousing processes included. It was installed in HQ, Kyiv City Branch and all 24 regional branches. Two finance staff, together with an external consultant, provided implementation support to the branches. However, due to the demands of donors such as ECHO, USAID, MoFAs etc, some partners were required to insist on different financial budgeting and reporting formats, meaning financial accountants in HQ and Branches ran systems that didn't integrate with URCS's centralised system.

In 2021, URCS further prioritised finance development. The official Finance Development Project, supported by ICRC and the Norwegian Red Cross, benefits from mentorship and technical expertise from NorCross Global Finance Advisors Team, with additional support from the British and Danish Red Cross Societies. The support has enabled URCS to

- conduct annual external financial audits with Deloitte
- establish an Internal Audit Department in 2024 following the Internal Audit Charter approval by URCS Governing Board
- re-establish internal audit in URCS in a more professional way with KPMG support
- establish a Compliance Function
- start Digital Transformation from this Finance Development Project consisting in the new ERP Odoo implementation for finance, logistics, procurement, warehouse and fleet management, e-archive, Electronic Docflow, HR and volunteer management
- implement a URCS Integrity Line outsourced with EthicControl
- establish an external Risks, Audit and Ethics Committee advising its Governing Board and President
- establish a Risk Management Department and hire a Chief Risk Officer (CRO)
- adopt a range of revised policies and documents including an Anti-fraud and Corruption Policy, amended Code of Conduct, and Whistleblower Policy
- change the structure of its Finance Department from project-based to functions-based
- perform finance development plans for branches
- transition to the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS)
- develop a URCS Risks Assessment, Risk Management Strategy and Risks Registry
- redesign the URCS Security Framework and strengthen implementation of internal controls.

#### **Logistics, procurement and warehousing systems:**

The development of logistics capacity was supported by the Finnish and Luxembourg Red Cross, with contributions from GIZ to renovate the central warehouse. Stronger national and branch accountability and transparency outputs were a result of strategic inputs by its partners.

#### **PMER and community engagement and accountability:**

CEA surveys were introduced in 2016–17 in PSS and cash transfer and livelihoods programmes with beneficiary surveys showing a 97% satisfaction rate. By 2020 URCS's lessons learned in post-distribution monitoring (PDM) as part of Cash Transfer programming led to training to make this a regular part of programme adjustment and lessons-learned culture.



URCS undertook the IFRC's Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC) process in 2019. Out of 85 organisational characteristics, two were rated as A (the lowest) level, 14 at B level, 28 at C, 27 at D and 14 at E (the highest) level. The National Society met the benchmark level in 82% of attributes, while 18% were defined as below benchmark.

Noting that all staff needed to meet its strictly neutral, impartial and independent as well as professional standards, URCS made significant NSD investments in improving its transparent and accountable **human resource recruitment and development** practices.

URCS's OD Roadmap of 2017 onwards included clear milestones to achieve a modernised, professional HR development system. There was a coordinated support strategy, with early support from ICRC's Embedded Cooperation Delegate (May 2015–June 2018) who assisted with an initial restructure and establishment of an HR Unit. The IFRC's Programme/OD Coordinator continued to add support from 2017, followed by specific technical support by the Finnish Red Cross.

The HR development plan was framed in IFRC's objective for URCS to have the necessary corporate infrastructure and systems in place. The URCS HR Manager was hired in May 2017 and analysed existing systems and drafted key new HR documents (see timeline below).

In October 2017 the Finnish Red Cross's Head of International HR visited URCS after a bilateral MoU was signed in March 2017. The MoU covered a number of areas of cooperation including HR development support. The first plan focussed on working jointly with URCS's HR Manager to:

- analyse the URCS HQ HR system and the direction of regional HR development and management
- discuss and advise on capacity development needs and plans in the field of HR both at URCS HQ and across the National Society in general
- advise on prioritised implementation of steps already included in URCS's HR development plan (which had been drafted in response to the OD Concept Paper, OD workshop recommendations, and OD Roadmap). This included the following areas (which have now been implemented at national level, and will be rolled out to regions and branches through URCS's Interregional Managers):
  - o HR systems and structures
  - o HR policies and procedures
  - o Recruitment and selection system
  - o Orientation and induction
  - o Performance appraisal process
  - o Staff motivation
  - o Training and development.

The outcomes of the enhanced HR systems can be felt in higher levels of community trust.

Recovering from accusations of misappropriation in 2016 and needing to demonstrate its neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian services, URCS needed to invest in a clear Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (PMER) structure across HQ and branches. The two drivers were firstly to lift its image and build further public and institutional confidence, and secondly to consolidate consistent humanitarian reporting across all programme areas. It made NSD investments that built local capacities to ensure transparent and accountable PMER systems for reporting its services, performance, and accountable use of resources to stakeholders supporting its work.

PMER and the ability of branches to report transparently on their activities and impact were central to strengthening URCS's credibility at all levels with all stakeholders. URCS and all partners needed to ensure the structured dissemination and systematic use of URCS's internal PMER guidelines across all programmes and branch services.

IFRC's PMER Delegate joined in July 2017 and began working on a joint assessment with URCS to strengthen its management, project and finance staff skills in planning and budgeting. Meanwhile, after a successful humanitarian funding bid in 2016, Swedish SIDA's encouragement to strengthen monitoring capacities led the Swedish Red Cross to offer support from that year onwards to URCS's workstreams on OD, transparency and accountability, PMER, and external audits.

The PMER capacity enhancement objective, supported by the Swedish Red Cross and the IFRC PMER Delegate and Officer, are captured IFRC's Operational Plans' Objectives from 2017–2020 under "URCS has the necessary corporate infrastructure and systems in place". In 2018, the Swedish Red Cross supported the participation of URCS PMER personnel in a European NS workshop to strengthen PMER, CEA and PGI perspectives and accountability to people served. In 2019, with the URCS HQ PMER Unit established and a three-year plan in place, the Swedish Red Cross shifted its support to strengthening branches with the CEA and PGI training.

Needs assessment processes – the start of all effective programme planning and monitoring against baselines – were conducted on project-by-project basis by sector. Without clear external vulnerability analyses, branches could not argue for prioritisation of capacity building and service development support (e.g. those with the highest concentration of displaced people). However, since 2022–2023, BraVoIE has established this tool for use by all branches.

As a contribution to lifting its image and building further public and institutional confidence, URCS needed to invest in a clear PMER structure across HQ and branches to consolidate humanitarian reporting across all programme areas. Several programme evaluations (PSS, livelihoods and health (LHH), and MHU) showed that branch level monitoring of beneficiary wellbeing over time as a result of services was not consistent.

Before 2019, CEA and protection, gender and inclusion (PGI) systems had not yet been operationalised at branch level, nor turned into effective internal URCS guidelines. CEA and PGI training was only provided in late 2018, initially supported by Swedish and Danish Red Cross Societies and IFRC. The Danish Red Cross also supported the first URCS CEA and PGI focal person (50% MoFA Programme coordinator, and 50% PGI/CEA focal point) which resulted in action plans. The focal person also developed a Child Protection Policy, Data Protection Policy and Gender Protection Policy, draft Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy and URCS Feedback Policy, which are still effective today.



20 May 2015. Volunteers distribute non-food relief items, including household cleaning material to internally displaced people at a collective centre in Kharkiv city. Photo: Stephen Ryan / IFRC



In 2019 a five-day URCS workshop was organised, by the Danish Red Cross and Save the Children, on child protection and gender-based violence prevention and their application to URCS. These were critical areas in which URCS needed to adopt early guidelines and ensure they were operationalised across all areas of its service provision at all levels, through phased, standardised training sessions that were to be acknowledged in performance review systems (linking to its HR development plans).

However, the 2022 conflict escalation accelerated URCS's implementation of enhanced CEA and PGI objectives that had already been included in its Strategic Plan 2021–2025. In 2023, significantly scaled-up NSD investments in these areas included:

#### **Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA):**

- Integration of the new Coding Framework into complaints management, with active contribution from the Feedback Manager in developing feedback reports
- Conducting the URCS CEA Workshop in March 2023 with the participation of 19 individuals from nine departments, including the Interregional Office and Zakarpattia Branch
- Support to cash and volunteer assistance and PMER units for Shelter Programme Post Distribution Monitoring (PDM) activities and integration of CEA into CBH volunteer training in Kyiv for cross-sectoral capacity strengthening
- Developing CEA guidance tools, integrated into Detailed Sector Plan templates supported by the PMER Working Group
- Successful recruitment and induction of the new head of URCS's CEA Unit
- Integration of CEA into detailed sector plans for hygiene promotion and disease prevention, education in emergencies, and NSD (in the IFRC plan)
- Integration of CEA into strategies and guidelines for Mobile Health Unit Operational Guidelines with the support of the Austrian Red Cross.

#### **Protection, Gender, and Inclusion (PGI):**

- Development and sharing of PGI and Safeguarding Sectoral-Thematic Plan under One Plan, along with training on PGI for URCS staff and volunteers
- PGI and CEA collaboration in developing a tool with a checklist to support URCS sectoral leads in mainstreaming PGI and CEA into their sectoral plan development processes
- Conducting briefings on IFRC PGI Minimum Standards on livelihoods for the Livelihoods TWG
- Revision of the job description for recruitment of a URCS Head of PGI Unit

The overall strengthening of disaggregated gender and diversity statistics on beneficiaries, volunteers, and people reached is a welcome improvement. Such data needed to be more visible across all URCS's programme reports. Given the high vulnerability experienced by diverse populations in different parts of the country, the gathering of properly disaggregated gender and diversity statistics was supposed to be the foundation of relevant programming to reach those in most need in the 2021–2025 Strategy.

However, the 2022 escalation of conflict accelerated URCS's commitment to strong transparency and accountability management through additional NSD investments in digitalisation. Aiming at a comprehensive system, its objectives have been absorbed into One Plan<sup>14</sup>.

The strategic aim in URCS Digital Transformation is to build one, people-centric system allowing:

- project management: yearly planning of the national committee and branch activities (macro planning) and assignment of tasks to the proper people internally (micro planning)
- activity management: the ability to define what resources are required for an activity in human terms (time and skills) and material terms – and target the right people in the database; track donations to beneficiaries; and calculate results when the activity is finalised

- volunteer profile: volunteers to manage their profile, skills and expectations, and interact with the branches through a direct digital channel, their activity being trackable
- volunteer management: branches to be able to manage the database of the volunteers, identify active vs. inactive, and contact volunteers
- member management
- beneficiary management: management of beneficiaries throughout their lifecycle with URCS; eventual extraction of beneficiary lists to apply for specific projects
- donor management
- the maintenance of a register of any other people interacting with URCS
- internal communication and e-learning for staff and volunteers: provision of a place to share information with branches (top-down, bottom-up or peer-to-peer)
- reporting and business intelligence: the monitoring team to build dashboards based on the data collected by the system.



*Blood Donation, Kyiv, Ukraine*



## 9. Strengthening Movement cooperation and coordination – building complementarity and collective impact

### (i) Using and adapting existing Movement mechanisms to enhance overall cooperation and coordination in-country

*“For the 7–10 years before the escalation of the conflict in February 2022, we had far fewer partners working with us in Ukraine. In 2022, many new partners came to provide and scale up international support. Initially it was very complex to get partnership relations strategies right. We worked on new mechanisms and structures to use new support effectively to support our people. But we were able to use a new Movement cooperation structure, established just in time. This built on our lessons learned from our important history with key Movement components over the years.”*

National Committee senior manager

### ICRC roles

From the beginning of the urgent humanitarian response in 2014, while performing its traditional humanitarian assistance in protection, ECOSEC, Wathab, health, emergency response, and IHL dissemination roles, ICRC recognised the need for urgent capacity enhancement of URCS HQ and affected branches to expand a joint humanitarian reach in a safer manner.

To strategically strengthen URCS's humanitarian response capacities, ICRC chose to activate three extraordinary, non-traditional types of OD and capacity building support to URCS. These laid the basis for the very positive processes that have evolved since then:

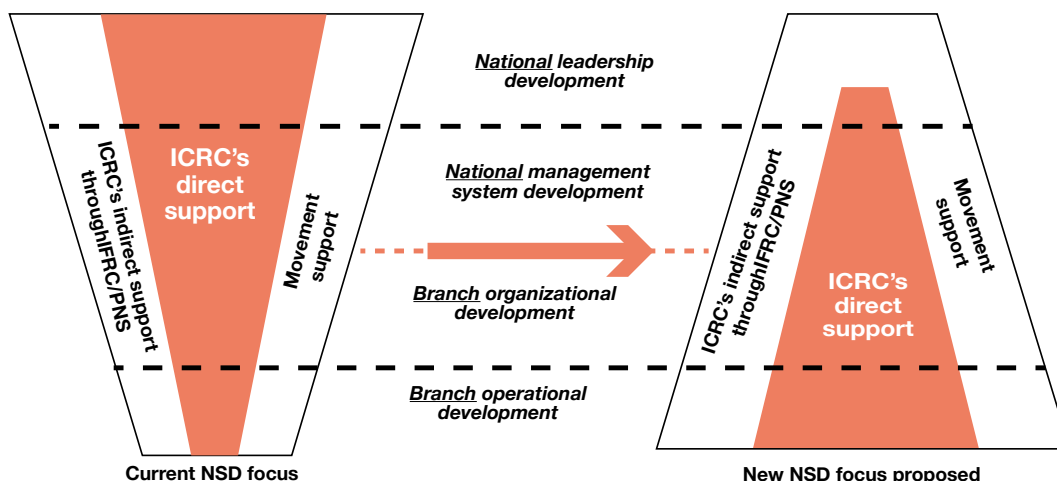
**May 2015–June 2018: an ‘Embedded’ ICRC Cooperation Delegate** to assist URCS HQ and conflict-affected branches to build critical capacities. This resulted in early restructuring of departments, HR development, finance development, and strengthening of transparency and accountability.

**2016–2020: financial support for two IFRC international delegates in OD and PMER, and from IFRC’s NSD budget** (CHF 385,000 in 2017; CHF 220,000 in 2018; CHF 200,000 in 2019; CHF 200,000 in 2020) to enable coordinated, multi-partner NSD support in the areas of HR, finance, DM, logistics, accountability, transparency and leadership, RM and partnerships and branch development, and revision of legal frameworks.

**November 2018–September 2020: deployment of a Branch Development/SAF Delegate** to scale up the direct capacity building assistance to a prioritised larger number of branches in the Government-controlled and non-Government-controlled areas of the east.

ICRC’s objective was to enable IFRC to establish its role and support coordinated NSD strategies and resources. ICRC also contributed NSD support through IFRC, also engaging in a close coordination with the Danish Red Cross, who consistently committed to URCS’s reform process over multiple years.

The following diagram illustrates ICRC’s NSD support strategy, which transitioned after three years from HQ-centred support (through the Embedded ICRC Cooperation Delegate from May 2015 to June 2018) to increased emphasis on building branch operational support in the east (maintaining ICRC support to HQ and Movement coordination, but adding a Branch Development/SAF Delegate from November 2018 to September 2020).



Between 2016 and 2019, ICRC's primary NSD objectives focussed on:

- Financial support (HR and activities), including partial support for the OD and PMER positions in IFRC
- Proposing a complementarity approach to ICRC's support in branch development, with other partners' support contributing to wider inputs than SAF capacity building
- Linking funding to building clearer URCS sustainability (e.g. support to finance, communications)
- Identifying an exit strategy from paying for URCS core positions and running costs (service development, fundraising, cost analysis)
- Coordination with partner NSs to lead thematic support sustainability initiatives:
  - o Strengthening current, and building new partnerships with authorities
  - o Income generation activities and/or sustaining current core services in
    - First aid, PSS and home-visiting nurses in conflict-affected areas
    - Fundraising and membership development
- Replicating pilots from eastern branches in other regions
- Encouraging IFRC to support URCS long-term service development (e.g. first aid, PSS, and home visiting/social care services).

## IFRC roles

An IFRC 'scoping mission' following the outbreak of violence in 2014 led to the establishment of an IFRC Country Office. In October 2016, IFRC's newly appointed Head of Country Office prioritised strengthening Movement coordination, consolidating Movement NSD support, and long-term service development support to URCS, in the east and across the country. The new OD and PMER Delegates who joined in 2017 built on the early gains achieved by the ICRC's Embedded Cooperation Delegate, and IFRC's Operational Plans for 2017–2020 aligned support from multi-lateral partner contributions to URCS's 2018-2020 Strategy, including its OD Roadmap.

Recognising the confused manner in which partnering was taking place, often without central coordination, URCS adopted the Movement's SMCC process to improve the sharing of information and selected resources across all Movement partners. Although SMCC had originally been designed to strengthen coordinated disaster preparedness and response mechanisms, URCS and its partners agreed to modify the Movement-wide cooperation and coordination tools to achieve better structured, more effective NSD support.



As there had been some examples of partner NSs working almost unilaterally until 2016, an SMCC Meeting of all Movement partners was convened in November 2017 to:

- Establish a common analysis of needs and humanitarian priorities across the country
- Put URCS and the Movement's work in the context of Government and other actors' humanitarian strategies
- Refresh understanding of URCS's history to date Reconfirm the elements of URCS's new reform process Map the existing range of partners' support in 2017
- Plan the next phase of partnerships and partners' interests in supporting URCS's new priorities.

URCS's leadership used the SMCC meeting to set out its reform goals, consult partners on their respective offers of expertise and resources, and begin a mapping process of existing and future partners' commitments to 2020. Sections five, six and seven of this case study show how a range of key partner inputs enabled URCS to achieve results against its OD Roadmap.

The SMCC approach resulted in the use, strengthening, and operationalisation of the following Movement tools:

#### **Movement Coordination Mechanisms in Ukraine**

- Implementing a three-tier Movement Coordination Mechanism comprising of
  - o Strategic level (Heads of URCS, IFRC, ICRC)
  - o Operational Management coordination (Heads of all Movement components to monitor overall cross-sectoral progress against URCS's Strategy/One Plan) and monthly MEOPS meetings
  - o NSD Coordination – bi-annual NSD Steering Committee
  - o Technical Working Groups (TWGs) (sectoral leads from URCS and all partners in specific technical areas – for example, the OD Steering Committee before 2021, maintained by URCS as a strategic coordination platform. There are now more than 20 TWGs in areas such as winterisation, shelter, logistics, PMER, finance development, etc.)

#### **Movement Cooperation Agreements (MCA)**

- Signed by six out of the seven partners NSs present in Ukraine

#### **Harmonised NS Capacity Building**

- Based on mapping of partners' contributions to URCS's OD Masterplans and Roadmaps 2018–2020

#### **Movement Security Framework**

- Framed and managed by ICRC, signed by all Movement partners

#### **Movement Capacity Mapping**

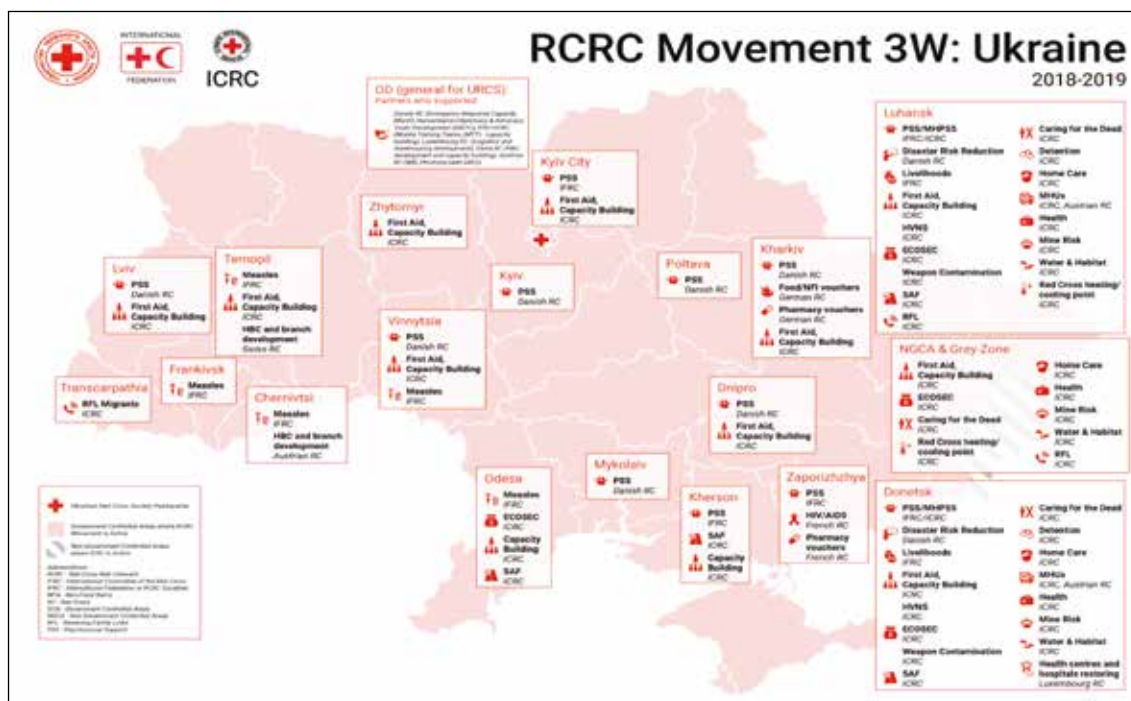
- Updated data mapping to promote Movement-coordinated planning and action
- An Information Management system (IMS), supported by the American Red Cross in 2017 but not yet used for operational planning – and an IMS database to integrate all data on branch human and financial resources, activities and programmes, supported by the French Red Cross
- Further exploring interoperability in logistics systems between Movement components.

Although the several attempts at mapping URCS and Movement-wide programmes and capacities are to be welcomed, they have not yet been integrated into one common collectively agreed platform.

Nevertheless, the 2017 SMCC Meeting saw URCS transition into a strong leader of its own Movement cooperation and coordination. The clear articulation of its reform process to build new services at national and local levels, as well as improve transparency, accountability, modernised capacities, and sustainable resources into the future, won the appreciation and support of all partners.



The following version of a '3W' mapping tool demonstrates a positive first step in improved information exchange which could, if used operationally, enable partners to achieve greater complementarity by knowing who was supporting what and where.



The early implementation of SMCC mechanisms undoubtedly improved coordinated information, shared funding mechanisms, and shared resources. However, after three years of implementation, the majority of Movement partnerships had continued to work in parallel with one another. There was a need to deepen synergy and achieve greater collective Movement impact.

Once achieved, such synergy should enable partners to be interoperable, sharing resources to fill strategic gaps. For example, support needed in specific technical capacity enhancement areas in eastern branches, which are beyond the ability of ICRC to offer, could be mobilised by multiple partners in a coordinated manner against a branch development dashboard coordinated by URCS.

ICRC had been leading the process of developing a Movement Security Framework (MSF) up to 2021. The MSF (for 2021–2023) between Movement partners was signed at the beginning of 2021. Currently URCS and ICRC are jointly working on the new MSF and new Movement Coordination Agreement.

In 2021, the development of a Movement Contingency Plan (MCP) was on the agenda. In February 2022 the MCP was finalised and piloted during the full-scale escalation of armed conflict. URCS's own contingency plan was also developed in early 2022 and since that time has been annually revised due to the constant change of operational environments and new threats.

In 2021, URCS and its Movement partners committed to jointly develop a Movement Country Plan. The Plan was finalised in early February 2022 and aimed to reinforce better synergies between Movement partners, to strengthen collective efforts to support NSD, increase coordination and operational complementarity and shift from investments in short-term projects to long-term sustainable projects.



The **MCP had intended** to transition from an existing state, characterised by parallel partnerships, to a future state of greater interoperability and collective impact reporting:

Existing state	Future state in Movement Country Plan
Independent vulnerability assessments	Common country-wide analysis of situation and needs
Individual partners' programme strategies	Movement identity and operational strategies based on each component's added value
No mechanisms to mobilise integrated partner support to address capacity-building gaps	Collective mobilisation of additional partners with complementary skills and resources to provide integrated support
Independent sectoral reviews and evaluations	Joint field assessments, reviews and evaluations
Inconsistent Movement representation and advocacy initiatives	Coordinated Movement presence in external humanitarian coordination meetings
Fractured reporting on humanitarian impact	Key joint messages and updates

However, the Movement Country Plan did not become the official strategic guiding document for the Movement in Ukraine due to the significant changes in operational contexts and challenges and the adoption of Seville 2.0<sup>15</sup>. Since 2022 a Joint Statement on contextualisation of Seville 2.0 for the Ukrainian context has been the main baseline for SMCC in the country.

In spite of the above sustained NSD investments in Movement cooperation and coordination, the early phases of response to the February 2022 escalation of armed conflict left some internal URCS stakeholders perceiving that the coordinated Movement response could have been stronger.

*“At times of conflict the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement becomes a big reference point for the Government, communities, civil society organisations and humanitarian missions. For the first six months we were extremely operational in managing Movement cooperation and coordination. We missed the chance to convey to the Government the real needs of the people. In spite of the auxiliary role, there’s sometimes a lack of strategy in the Movement to move beyond technical area support to a more strategic way of positioning the Movement in the first stages of response. As we continued to grow to address huge challenges, while we were supported with funds and technical support, we were not part of Movement-wide conversations on cross-border strategies, assistance to refugees, or even how resources would be split between Movement partners. Partner National Societies could have worked with us differently on understanding compliance processes, for example, so that we could bring ERUs and other resources more smoothly into the country through advocacy with our own Government.”*

National Committee senior manager



*Every week, thousands of people from the eastern part of Ukraine continue to arrive in Chernivtsi in search of safety. URCS volunteers support those who are internally displaced through regular distributions of basic but critical supplies such as hygiene items and food. With the support of the Danish Red Cross, they also provide people with information, psychosocial support, and support for those with mobility issues.*

15 The Agreement on the Organisation of the International Activities of the Components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the 'Seville Agreement') has been superseded by the new 'Movement Coordination for Collective Impact Agreement' (Seville agreement 2.0). This places clearer emphasis on the Host National Society's leading role as 'Convenor' of coordinated Movement response, with IFRC supporting the Host National Society in the development and coordination of NSD support (Article 8.5), and ICRC supporting NSD mainly in the areas related to its mandate and expertise (Article 8.6).



URCS felt there was competition among Movement cooperation and coordination roles, which did not help it implement its visions coherently. ICRC invested significantly in NSD, in particular organisational development, not normally an area of focus for the ICRC, adapting its support to URCS needs as the organisation grew. The perceived competition between ICRC and IFRC was compounded by their respective interpretation of the new Seville 2.0 collective impact agreement, which was seen by some within the Movement as competing for the lead, notwithstanding the joint statement signed on 29 July 2022 between URCS, ICRC and IFRC contextualising Seville 2.0.

*“Given the rapid scale-up of their own humanitarian operations and the number of partner National Societies arriving in the country, neither the ICRC nor the IFRC were initially able to provide an adequate framework for operational support for them in country. Consequently, URCS had to lead negotiations on its own, as partner NSs had no legal status to have delegations or operate in-country. Multilateral mechanisms failed and even the humanitarian supply chain operated bilaterally, with URCS having to coordinate, as no common mobilisation table was agreed between IFRC and ICRC. A lot of new delegates from non-Movement sources arrived without proper briefing. Many were on two- or three-week rotations with URCS having to conduct all briefings! Some delegates were not interested in briefings – the short-term nature of their mission deployment meant they were not interested in the overall NSD of URCS and its longer-term positioning.”*

National Committee senior manager

## **(ii) Harmonising Movement support for its own NSD priorities**

*“After the initial confusion caused by the rapid scale-up of international humanitarian assistance in 2022, URCS grew in confidence, working with more partners on more complex programmatic areas. As a result of previous NSD investments in strengthening Movement cooperation and coordination, we knew our strengths and could lead partners. We had assessed our needs, priorities and the most efficient ways to implement programmes and we could present proposals to them, instead of having to accept theirs.”*

National Committee senior manager

Since the establishment of the IFRC Country Office in 2016, partners had been channelling multi-lateral funds through IFRC's Operational Plan, which in turn reflected the NSD workstreams of URCS's Strategy on harmonised resources. This was supplemented in some key areas by remote and in-country partner technical personnel to enhance capacity. This was well coordinated by IFRC, who played a consistent facilitator role throughout (e.g. the complementary missions of technical personnel from Finnish and Luxembourg Red Cross Societies supported the modernisation of the logistics and warehouse capacities of URCS).

ICRC consistently blended partner support into a capacity enhancement agenda for URCS eastern branches, facilitating environments in which they could pilot with partners' new approaches to home visiting and nursing services, new livelihood and cash voucher grant systems, mobile health units (MHUs), PSS, IHL dissemination, and ERT support services. The intention was for such services to become nationally consistent and available to all branches, as per URCS's 2021–2025 Strategy.

In 2023, URCS reorganised its OD Steering Committee function, shifting to a biannual NSD Steering Committee and a separate BraVo Steering Committee (quarterly) as part of its Movement coordination mechanisms. Its membership comprised of more long-term partners who were more invested in NSD and had displayed longer-term commitments since before the 2022 conflict escalation – namely the IFRC, ICRC and the Danish, German, Norwegian, Swiss, Canadian and British Red Cross Societies. From 2022 onwards, the previous NSD Master Plan was used to guide the significantly scaled-up funding of \$15 million to strengthen key capacities in governance, bylaws, digitalisation, volunteering, human resource mobilisation and development, branch development and finance development. In response to new crises, the aim was to launch new capacities, supported by new bylaws, to help branches have more agile systems unified as one National Society.

Recognising the traditional use of separate tools by separate partners, several attempts had been made to integrate tools at both community and institutional level. Three branches who had conducted both a BOCA and a SAF reported positive outcomes, enabling them to have better access, acceptance and safety while also prioritising a much wider capacity enhancement plan across areas which the traditional SAF did not include (PMER, RM, finance development, etc).



Other diverse tools were prioritised for harmonisation, including:

- a unified beneficiary assessment tool which allows a multi-sectoral assessment and subsequent monitoring of a beneficiary's progress against a baseline
- a BOCAF tool, combining BOCA and SAF into a unified URCS branch assessment and development tool customised to the needs and targets of the reform process
- a unified vulnerability assessment tool for branches to undertake local assessments linked to local service development ideas (which should be aligned to URCS auxiliary role service areas).

With the partners enhancing Movement coordination from 2016 onwards, URCS has tried to allocate both service development and capacity enhancement roles to partners. Partners played a variety of positive roles, with NSD investments managed by URCS, including:

- ✓ the Danish Red Cross played lead technical roles in areas such as branch and volunteering development and PSS development, enabling other partners and ICRC and IFRC to benefit from successful outcomes and more sustainable new models
- ✓ the Swiss, Swedish and Austrian Red Cross Societies have been working on different models to modernise the Home Nursing Service – these are yet to be harmonised with URCS into a consistent nationally sustainable new service model
- ✓ the Swedish, German and Austrian Red Cross Societies have supported varied livelihood support strategies – shared learning with URCS and across partners on common approaches to income generation activities and community grants is yet to be optimised
- ✓ the Finnish, Luxembourg, and Danish Red Cross Societies have contributed logistics development support to URCS, building on each other's inputs, but without clarity on lead or coordination roles
- ✓ the Swiss and French Red Cross Societies have provided RM support, but learning and technical support at branch level, on CSR for example, has not always been harmonised with national URCS initiatives.

A wide range of partnering support modalities have also been used, including:

- ICRC funding support for IFRC Delegates and NSD budget support to URCS through IFRC
- in-country delegate-based technical assistance
- leadership and senior staff mentoring
- ex-country distance/remote technical support
- short-term consultancy missions
- review and evaluation support
- branch twinning and knowledge exchange visits with other NS
- specific NSD support and budget lines as integrated components of wider service development programme support.

Under One Plan, work continues to harmonise all support for different URCS activities, switching from project to programme planning (for example, forming one approach to emergency response programming).

*“Before the war we had prioritised what we could do, and where. After it became evident that war had come in 2022, we kept some basic aspects of developing priorities as fundamental pillars, but the Plan was adjusted to include new priorities such as shelter and voucher support, and also unified some services to be more relevant to people affected by conflict and displacement. These were rapidly expanded, but built on previous capacities.”*

National Committee senior manager

URCS launched its One Plan 2023–2025 to set out revised strategic objectives around “reaching people, covering gaps, empowering communities and local organisations, complimenting the government, building a strong URCS, and setting out an ‘Attained clear pathway to Ukraine’s Resilience, Reconstruction and Recovery’”.<sup>16</sup> It is founded on three pillars, namely: humanitarian action, resilience and recovery; sustainable development and qualified services; and auxiliary roles and humanitarian diplomacy. It is also framed against three further objectives: improving the Movement’s complementarity; coordination with other humanitarian actors; and locally-led capacity building.

However, in spite of IFRC’s ‘NSD Compact’, which asserts the need for “Aligned effective NSD support that must also be of the right quality, aligned and avoiding duplication” there was concern about the profiles of some Movement-wide personnel who had been deployed to support URCS’s scaled up responses.

*“We expected people who would understand the importance of local laws but we received people with a lot of different practical and theoretical ideas who would say “It worked in Asia, why doesn’t it work here?”. Some came with a very project-oriented mindset, different to URCS’s approach to innovation and future sustainability.”*

National Committee senior manager



Red Cross volunteers at work in a distribution centre in Uzhhorod, west Ukraine, in April 2022.



## 10. Lessons learned on NSD strategies to adapt organisational relevance and capacities in fragile, complex, protracted conflict and violence-affected contexts

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*"We need to spend more time as a Movement focussing on transition thinking. At the peak of activities that respond to conflict and crises we need to avoid NSD and operations departments being in silos. To prepare itself for future similar or other crises, URCS needs to think about standardising services, operationalising NSD at regional branch level, and longer-term advocacy on fresh auxiliary roles. For example, how should Mobile Health Units be sustained after the emergency? Does URCS use its significant funds at present to facilitate MoUs with Government Ministries to agree longer-term sustainable roles?"*

Partner National Society

URCS has consistently prioritised the need to strengthen its coordination of NSD strategies and investments from its partners to align to its own need to deepen its neutral, impartial and independent positioning. These have resulted in a number of very positive strengths that have given it unique positioning to respond to individuals and populations affected by different forms of violence and conflict. However, the process also contains dangers which require strategic management measures including:

- making sure URCS can negotiate refreshed auxiliary roles, with expanded services and capacities to guarantee its future sustainability
- transitioning to more holistic integrated service planning and implementation, avoiding partner pressure to remain in project-type silos
- providing clarity to the Movement on where to focus resources, with joint risk management
- addressing "rightsizing" and sustainability scenarios for the current CHF 10 million/400 staff NSD structure in HQ and branches, which has grown 10-fold over the last two years
- ensuring that all partners impartially support URCS's own branch and volunteer development models, as a key part of the organisation-wide transformation process in the north and west of the country, not just in the east and south
- partners sourcing experienced NSD delegates who can contribute to URCS's strategic senior leadership conversations, for example helping address high turnover in non-leadership roles and the challenge of balancing centralised with decentralised decision-making
- replacing partner NS country representatives who are focused on short-term emergency-focussed concerns, with personnel who promote longer-term development
- linking with partners interested in working in 'non-escalation' scenarios and considering more embedded models of support from partners resulting in senior technical delegates who do not undermine local capacity enhancement but take an advisory rather than operational role
- checking how URCS and its Movement partners balance short-term versus long-term support to organisational transformation – envisioning beyond a five-year Strategic period
- investing in new principled leadership streams emerging from youth leaders engaged in URCS's enhanced social cohesion and inclusion work
- continuing to use the conflict and recovery times to transform from purely disaster and crisis response to community-based, owned, and led humanitarian services, contributing to resilience of communities and the building of social inclusion and peace by mitigating tensions and negotiating solutions owned by communities
- using its auxiliary role to local public authorities to promote its neutral, impartial and independent humanitarian and vulnerability criteria to select affected people in communities divided by hostility and tension
- strengthening investments in transparency and accountability, including through digitalisation, enabling clear evidence-based data gathering; reporting that corroborates its neutral, impartial, independent status; and providing a safe, attractive platform for expanded humanitarian financing
- enhanced stakeholder and risk mapping capacities at all levels to contribute to sustainable recovery and resilience building strategies at community level.

# **THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT**

## **Humanity**

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

## **Impartiality**

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

## **Neutrality**

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

## **Independence**

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

## **Voluntary service**

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

## **Unity**

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

## **Universality**

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.



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