



# CODE OF CONDUCT

FOR EMPLOYEES OF  
THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE  
OF THE RED CROSS

**Disclaimer**

The photographs in this booklet are for illustrative purposes only. No connection between the people or places depicted and any actual misconduct case is intended or should be inferred.



**The ICRC Code of Conduct:  
A cornerstone of a culture of integrity**

The ICRC's licence to operate is anchored in trust. Without the trust of all, we simply cannot succeed in our mission. A crucial aspect of earning and maintaining trust is to demonstrate integrity at all levels – operational, individual and institutional. It is not just what we do that matters, but how we do it.

In our day-to-day operations, we need to unequivocally commit to protecting and making responsible use of our resources, as well as to creating a safe and respectful environment for our staff, our partners and, above all, the people we protect and assist. It is our culture of integrity that enables us to fully honour those commitments.

The nature of the ICRC's mission, the places where we operate and the scale of our operations inevitably give rise to serious risks, including those related to staff conduct, in particular fraud, corruption and sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH). It is essential that all staff are aware of these risks and that we all equip ourselves to “do the right thing”.

The ICRC Code of Conduct helps to spell out what “doing the right thing” means in practice. It contains the basic standards of behaviour – and related rights and obligations – expected from everybody working for the ICRC. Together with the ICRC's values and fundamental principles, it helps us to navigate the complex situations we face in our daily work.

A culture of integrity cannot evolve on its own. It requires investment from all of you, at all levels of the hierarchy. Colleagues need to be willing to speak up and to listen, and have the means to support each other. Above all, we need to recognize that fostering a culture of integrity is key to achieving sustainable and impactful humanitarian action.

I count on each and every one of you to promote and uphold the ICRC's culture of integrity – for each other and for the people we serve.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. Mardini', written in a cursive style.

Robert Mardini  
Director-General



## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The ICRC is an organization with an exclusively humanitarian mission. Its credibility, ability to gain acceptance for its operations and capacity to act are underpinned by observance of the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the “Movement”) and the trust vouchsafed it by governments, all parties to armed conflicts and other situations of violence, and the victims in these situations, whom it seeks to protect and assist.
2. This Code of Conduct (the “Code”)<sup>1</sup> applies to all ICRC employees. For the purposes of the Code, anyone who works for the ICRC under an employment contract or on another basis (such as a secondment agreement with a National Society or another employer, a consultancy contract or as a volunteer) is considered an employee.

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<sup>1</sup> The original French will be considered the authentic text.



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3. The rules set forth in the Code are intended to promote safety, to ensure respect for the people with whom the ICRC comes into contact, to protect employees and to project a positive image of the ICRC so as to guarantee the effectiveness and integrity of its work.

4. More specific rules also apply to employees depending on the context in which they work, their area of activity and their job. Employees are required to comply with the Code and the specific rules insofar as they apply; any violations thereof are likely to entail consequences for the employee(s) concerned. In the event of a conflict between the Code and the specific rules, the latter shall take precedence.

# INTEGRITY RESPECT LOYALTY

## II. RULES OF CONDUCT

### A. General rules

1. The conduct of ICRC employees must be consistent with the Fundamental Principles of the Movement.
2. ICRC employees must respect the dignity of the people with whom they come into contact, in particular the beneficiaries of the ICRC's work, and must carry out their duties for the ICRC ever mindful that each of their actions in this context can have repercussions for the fate of many human beings.
3. ICRC employees' conduct must be characterized by integrity, respect and loyalty to the ICRC's interests and must not in any way harm or compromise the ICRC's reputation. Supervisory staff and managers have a particular responsibility for ensuring that the Code is observed. Their conduct must set an example for all their colleagues.
4. In operational contexts in particular, employees must, during both working and non-working hours and in their private lives, abstain from any conduct that they know or should know to be or to appear inappropriate, particularly in the specific context they are in.
5. Employees must show due respect, particularly through their conduct, dress and language, for the religious beliefs, usages and customs, rules, practices and habits of the people of the country or context they are in and of their place of work (e.g. a hospital or prison).



6. Employees must obey the law of the countries in which they work, including bilateral agreements between that country's authorities and the ICRC.
7. Employees must comply with the safety rules to which they are subject. They must at all times demonstrate such self-restraint and discipline as the circumstances require, especially in situations of armed conflict and other situations of violence in which the ICRC operates.
8. Fraud in any form is strictly prohibited. Fraud is defined as any action aimed at obtaining an unauthorized benefit, such as money, goods, services or other personal or commercial advantages, regardless of whether such advantage benefits the employee(s) concerned, the ICRC or a third party.
9. Employees are prohibited from using their position to obtain advantages or favours and from accepting such advantages, favours or gifts in cash or in kind, promises of gifts, and any other advantage other than token presents in keeping with accepted custom, particularly in exchange for the assistance and/or protection provided by the ICRC.
10. Employees may not engage in outside activities, whether paid or unpaid, except where such activities are in no way prejudicial to the work and are not inconsistent with the interests of the ICRC.

## **B. Specific rules**

1. Employees must comply with the rules that govern the use of the red cross, red crescent and red crystal emblems.
2. Employees must refrain from wearing the official ICRC insignia when not officially on duty.
3. Consuming, purchasing, selling, possessing and distributing narcotic drugs are all strictly prohibited.
4. Employees must refrain from using or carrying about their person or in their luggage any weapon or ammunition.
5. Employees are prohibited from taking photographs, filming or making audio recordings in the course of their duties, irrespective of the medium used, unless their work so requires or they obtain express approval from the ICRC.
6. Any employee who wishes to stand for public office must obtain the ICRC's prior approval.





### III. HARASSMENT, ABUSE OF POWER AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

1. Harassment in any form, including sexual harassment, is strictly prohibited. In general, harassment refers to a pattern of hostile language or actions expressed or carried out against an employee over time. Sexual harassment refers to any sexual or gender-related behaviour that is not desired by the person who is the victim of it and that violates his or her dignity.
2. The purchase of sexual services and the practice of sexual exploitation are prohibited. Sexual exploitation is understood as abuse of authority, trust or a situation of vulnerability for sexual ends in exchange for money, work, goods or services.
3. Entering into a sexual relationship with a direct beneficiary of the ICRC's assistance and protection programmes or with a member of his or her immediate family, and using one's position to solicit sexual services in exchange for assistance and/or protection provided by the ICRC, are prohibited.

4. Entering into a sexual relationship with a child (a girl or boy under 18 years of age) or inciting or forcing a child to take part in activities of a sexual nature, whether or not he or she is aware of the act committed and irrespective of consent is prohibited. This prohibition also covers pornographic activities (photos, videos, games, etc.) that do not involve sexual contact with the child, as well as acquiring, storing or circulating documents of a paedophilic nature, irrespective of the medium used.
5. Abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence against children (boys or girls below 18 years of age) is prohibited. Employees must ensure that children's safety and well-being is protected at all times, and must prevent and respond to child abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence. In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.



## IV. DUTY OF DISCRETION

1. Employees must maintain the utmost discretion towards third parties, including other components of the Movement, with regard to information acquired in the course of their work at the ICRC concerning matters that they are dealing with or that come to their attention. They must treat this information confidentially, and in this regard they are bound by an obligation analogous to that of professional secrecy. In particular, unless their work so requires or they obtain express approval from the ICRC, employees are prohibited from commenting on allegations concerning facts or situations that they know or learn of through their work for the ICRC, even if these facts or situations are of a public nature, and from lending them credibility which could harm the ICRC's work.
2. Unless they have obtained the express prior consent of the ICRC, employees are also prohibited, in the context of legal proceedings, public inquiries, fact-finding proceedings and the like, from giving evidence relating to facts learned in the course of their work at the ICRC and from revealing confidential information that they have gathered in the course of their duties.

3. Employees must refrain from producing or publishing in their private capacity writings, images, photographs, films, sounds or recordings concerning professional aspects of their work or circumstances related thereto, irrespective of the medium (paper, radio or electronic format, including email, blogs, social media and websites). Information and facts that the ICRC explicitly considers not to be covered by the duty of discretion and regarding which it communicates openly are not subject to the prohibition in this paragraph. Employees who plan to produce or publish a work (e.g. an article, book or blog) containing information covered by this paragraph must request prior written authorization from the Director of the Department of Communication and Information Management.
4. Unless their work so requires or they obtain express approval from the ICRC, employees must refrain from taking a public stance on situations or events and from referring to political or military situations in their communications with third parties.
5. Employees must refrain from associating any political positions they may take after leaving the ICRC with their duties while employed by the ICRC.
6. Employees must not permanently store outside the workplace documents and images, including in electronic format, that were created in the course of their work for the ICRC, and must return them to the ICRC once they no longer have any use for them and no later than the end of their employment with the ICRC.
7. The rules set forth in this section continue to apply after employment with the ICRC ends.



## V. USE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FACILITIES

1. Employees must use ICRC information technology (IT) facilities for professional purposes. The use of IT facilities for private purposes is permitted as long as such use:
  - does not affect professional activities or imply any additional cost for the ICRC;
  - does not involve downloading any software, images, sound or video;
  - does not involve excessive storage of private data or messages or management of private files on ICRC systems; and
  - does not violate this Code.
2. Employees must use only those IT tools provided or authorized by the ICRC for all electronic exchange of information that commits the ICRC. It is forbidden to send or store information requiring special handling using IT facilities whose security is not guaranteed by the ICRC.

# WHERE TO GO FOR HELP?

The **Code of Conduct** and details of how **employees and people outside the ICRC** can report potential misconduct or any other compliance-related matter can be found on the ICRC's website: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/code-conduct-employees-icrc>

Several reporting channels are available:

- the online form<sup>2</sup> on the confidential reporting platform
- letter:  
Global Compliance Office  
International Committee of the Red Cross  
19 Avenue de la Paix  
1202 Geneva  
Switzerland
- email: [code\\_of\\_conduct@icrc.org](mailto:code_of_conduct@icrc.org)

**ICRC employees** can also make a complaint in person, by letter or by phone to one of the people listed below:

- line manager
- HR manager or finance & administration manager
- head of delegation or regional director
- general counsel
- any member of the Global Compliance Office based in Geneva.

Please consult the ICRC's intranet page on reporting potential misconduct<sup>3</sup> for more information.

ICRC employees who report potential misconduct or who provide information or otherwise assist in an inquiry or investigation of potential misconduct will be protected against retaliation.

The ICRC may take disciplinary measures against employees found to have violated the Code of Conduct, including termination of employment.

## **Other places for ICRC employees to seek help or advice:**

- Ombuds Office based at headquarters: [ombuds@icrc.org](mailto:ombuds@icrc.org)
- worldwide ombuds network.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/code-conduct-employees-icrc>

<sup>3</sup> <https://intranet.ext.icrc.org/structure/dirgen/global-compliance-office/dir-gen-global-compliance-office-reporting-potential-misconduct.html>



A. Romenzi/ICRC

We help people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything we can to protect their dignity and relieve their suffering, often with our Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. We also seek to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.

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