



# **RED CROSS VOLUNTEERING IN CRISIS SITUATIONS**

## **BALTPREP PROJECT**

ENHANCING REGIONAL PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE CAPACITY  
FOR MAJOR ACCIDENTS IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION



Funded by  
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Civil Protection

## **WELCOME TO THE RED CROSS**

Thank you for joining the Red Cross as a volunteer to help others in a time of need. This folder gives basic information on volunteering with the Red Cross as well as a brief introduction to tasks and responsibilities of volunteers. We will do our best to help you fulfill the role of a volunteer and make you feel part of the community of volunteers. If for any reason, you decide that volunteering with the Red Cross is not for you, then please let the team leader know.

## **SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS**

A spontaneous volunteer is someone, who is not affiliated with a response or voluntary organization who offers support to the response to, and recovery from an incident without extensive pre-planning. Spontaneous volunteers are often from the affected community. Knowing the situation on the ground, is a great asset in responses to crisis. At the same time, it is important to note that such crisis events may affect volunteers more than anticipated as they happen in the local communities.

## **7 FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES**

Red Cross is the world's largest volunteer organization. 191 countries have a Red Cross or Red Crescent National Society who assist those in need in everyday life and crisis situations. The Red Cross Red Crescent mandate is to assist the states while also maintaining their independence. Volunteers may thus work with the public authorities.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems are protected. When wearing it, volunteers are obliged to uphold the seven principles of: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality. Red Cross volunteers must be clearly identifiable by wearing a Red Cross vest, cap or ID badge and must be over 18 years of age. Volunteers usually work in pairs or teams under the guidance of a volunteer team leader.

### **FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES**

**Humanity**  
**Impartiality**  
**Neutrality**  
**Independence**  
**Voluntary service**  
**Unity**  
**Universality**

## **RESPECT INSTRUCTIONS**

To help in any current crisis event, volunteers are obliged to respect and follow the instructions given by the authorities such as the police, civil protection services as well as the Red Cross. These parties are trained to assess the situation and decide on the best course of action. Not following instructions may compromise safety and complicate the aid operation. Volunteers are expected to follow and respect a certain chain of command. Make sure it is clear who is the team leader before engaging in activities.

## **SAFETY**

Safety is a main concern as it is vital to be able to help others. Don't take risks that may compromise your safety, or the safety of others, as this can have serious consequences. In case a situation seems or feels unsafe, don't hesitate to bring this to the attention of the team leader and team members.

## **BRIEFING**

Red Cross volunteers will receive a briefing before taking on a set of tasks. The volunteer team leader will explain what should be done, where, whom and how to assist, when and where to meet to report

back and hand in materials. It is recommended to take notes during the briefing and note down key phone numbers on the mobile and on this folder.

## **ASSIGNING TASKS AND THE RIGHT TO DECLINE**

The volunteer team leader will assign tasks to the group of volunteers. When signing up as a volunteer, it is a good idea to let the leaders know about useful skills and capacities that you may have. Volunteers should never be asked to intervene if there are risks of violence or danger and have the right to decline a task.

Take selfcare seriously; there are good reason to decline a task if:

- A volunteer is close to those needing support or is in a similar situation
- A volunteer doesn't feel well or needs rest
- The work situation and conditions are too demanding
- The tasks assigned exceed capacities and competencies

## **CHILD PROTECTION**

Child protection is very important in crisis situations especially since children (any person under 18 years), face many risks when crises occur. Taking good care of children and ensuring not to do harm is vital. Red Cross volunteers are obliged not to abuse, exploit or injure a child. Being alone with children should be avoided although if a child needs to speak with volunteers in confidence, steps like being out of hearing but in sight, or having two volunteers present, can be used. This has the dual function of ensuring the safety of both parties. If there are any concerns for the well-being of a child, volunteers should report to the team leader and the authorities.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Confidentiality must be upheld during and after volunteering work and this includes everything the volunteer has seen, heard and read. In a crisis situation a volunteer may be told private stories and these must be kept confidential and not shared with those outside the Red Cross or with the media. Consent from the involved parties must always be obtained if taking photos and video etc. Special rules apply for those under 18, where consent from caregivers is needed for photos etc. If a volunteer is told about unlawful behaviours, harm or risks to those under 18, there is an obligation to report this concern to the authorities. When in doubt, consult the team leader.

## **TEAM SUPPORT**

Volunteers will often work in pairs even when sent out as part of a team. Keeping an eye out for the well-being of other team members is a priority. Caring for others and for yourself is important for any operation to be successful. Remember to take breaks, drink and eat during the operation. Taking even short breaks will ensure that the team members have the capacity to go on for longer.

## **MEDIA**

In times of crisis and emergency situations, the media will be interested in what is going on. It is important to uphold the dignity of the portrayed, especially the dignity of children. Volunteers can talk to media about what they are doing with the approval from the team leader, but cannot discuss any cases, as those involved could be identified. Discuss with the team leader if, and how, the use of social media is allowed, and be mindful that under no circumstances are volunteers allowed to take photos or film for private uses. Consent must be given to take photos, films and for interviews etc. and for children, consent has to be granted by their caregivers.

## **DO NO HARM**

The principle of 'do no harm' must be upheld. Volunteers will constantly be mindful of securing the dignity of those they assist. They will also think about and discuss if their interventions benefit those in need or if there could be personal motives that may cloud their judgement.

## **DUTY TO INFORM AND REPORT**

After an intervention is over, Red Cross volunteers must report back, to let the team leader know that they have finished the tasks, how the assignment went, what was done, if they encountered problems and if there are any situation of concern where further support is needed. They can also report if they need support for their own well-being.

## **PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT IN CRISIS SITUATIONS**

After distressing events, social support is very important. Therefore, show others that you care!

Offer the following advice to anyone affected:

- Spend time with others you feel comfortable with
- Show interest and concern for others – especially for children, elderly and youth
- Help each other by talking about good and bad experiences
- Respect if you or anyone else does not feel like talking about what happened
- Be physically active and maintain eating and sleeping routines as much as possible
- Follow the instructions by the authorities and avoid getting too caught up in the media coverage of the events
- Family and friends, who are not in the area, may be very concerned and will often send constant messages of concern. Arrange to let them know you are well at agreed times so their worry doesn't distress unnecessarily

## **SUPPORT TO CHILDREN**

Offer the following advice to those involved in children's well-being:

- Children need to be physically and emotionally near their family and friends in times of distress
- Be as calm as possible in word and action in order to create a safe environment for children
- Spend extra time with children doing things they like
- When asking about the situation, children need simple and concrete answers
- Be honest and truthful yet avoid giving children overwhelming or scary information
- Be careful not to let your own worry distress children so they make the worry their own
- Don't let young children watch distressing things on tv or social media. Take time to explain the situation to them in a way that is adapted to their age and developmental level.

## **NOTES**

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