



Annual report 2024



RED CROSS
EU OFFICE

Message from the Red Cross EU Office

2024 was a year of transition in the EU institutional landscape, with important implications for our work with our members – National Red Cross Societies in the EU, the Norwegian Red Cross, the Icelandic Red Cross, as well as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) – for the coming years. The European elections in June saw a significant shift in the political makeup of the European Parliament. The new European Commission's priorities and structure are likely to pose different opportunities and challenges for our efforts to promote EU action that puts people at its centre, both within the Union and externally.

In addition to being the hottest year on record, many European countries experienced historic floods in 2024 with devastating human and material impacts. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine international armed conflict continued to have grave humanitarian consequences in Ukraine and across Europe. Despite significant resources mobilised by the EU and Member States to support people displaced from Ukraine, many are struggling to access essential services, such as healthcare, housing and education. At the same time, rising living costs have put greater numbers of people under strain across the EU: Eurostat figures show that more than one fifth of the population is at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The housing crisis is also driving homelessness and housing insecurity, especially for marginalised people.

The European Commission's [political guidelines](#) shared in the summer outline how the EU intends to deal with these and other challenges. Furthermore, two important reports were published in 2024 to guide how the Commission can translate some of its ambitions into action. The [Draghi report](#) on the future of European Competitiveness provides recommendations on how the EU can move towards inclusive economic growth and sustainable prosperity. While the [Niinistö report](#) 'Safer together: A path towards a fully prepared Union' advises on ways to enhance the EU's civilian and military preparedness and readiness for future crises. As such, the report has a direct impact on the roles and responsibilities of National Red Cross Societies in the EU.

With the adoption of the European Pact on Migration and Asylum in May, the focus shifted to preparing for its implementation. Again, many of our member Red Cross societies are key actors in national reception systems and provide a wide range of services to people in migration, regardless of their legal status. Based on this experience, we have been working with them to promote a [humane implementation](#) of the new rules that is in line with fundamental rights.

During the year, we reached out to new decision-makers to kick-start collaboration for this new legislature, while strengthening our evidence-based advocacy, and engaging in conversations about how to improve preparedness. We also worked with our members to support the implementation of the IFRC network's largest ever programme, the Pilot Programmatic Partnership with the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), and exchange on how we will engage with the process to develop the next long-term EU budget. Finally, we enhanced and diversified the humanitarian diplomacy training we offer to members, while continuing our collaboration with the EU Presidencies through a coordinated approach.

The examples gathered in this report contribute to reaching our three interlinked and mutually reinforcing goals: to heighten Red Cross influence on EU policy, to increase access to EU resources for our domestic and international work, and to serve our members on EU-related issues.

We hope you enjoy the read.

Cover photo:

In response to the flash floods caused by the 'DANA' phenomenon in October 2024, the Spanish Red Cross' immediate support included accommodating people in temporary shelters and distributing essential items like toiletries and blankets. Additionally, the Spanish Red Cross has developed a three-year plan to mitigate the long-term consequences of the floods. © Spanish Red Cross



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In focus: Positioning the Red Cross with new EU decision-makers

Given the changes in the EU institutional landscape, 2024 was an

important year to position our expertise towards new decision-makers and start to analyse the possible implications of this changing environment on our work for the years to come. Amid growing inequalities, a climate crisis and multiple humanitarian emergencies, the EU finds itself at a turning point for its future. During the year, we worked with our members to set the foundations to collaborate with EU actors to promote human dignity and the well-being of all members of society in EU policies and programmes in this new legislature.

Following the European elections in June and the composition of Parliament Committees later in the summer, we mapped the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) of interest to our work. Many of our member Red Cross societies contributed their knowledge and insight from the national level and co-signed a letter addressing MEPs from their countries. Together, we reached out to over 200 MEPs sitting on the most relevant Committees, including Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Justice and Civil Liberties, Development and Public Health. The outreach aimed to explain the role of the Red Cross EU Office and how to work with us and our members, while sharing our [five key calls](#) to new EU decision-makers at the beginning of their mandate. We hope that working with EU leaders early on will allow us to participate in shaping policies that strengthen solidarity and align with humanitarian principles.

Based on the European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen's [political guidelines](#) for the next five years, the final mission letters to European Commissioners provide more details on the priorities and structure of the new Commission. With stronger emphasis overall on competitiveness, investments and security, it is important that the EU does not lose sight of the impact on people and ensures community engagement. In an [interview](#) with Euronews, we welcomed the increased focus on EU preparedness – we must be better equipped to prevent and reduce disaster risks and effectively respond to lessen the impacts of shocks and hazards. However, we stressed the need to continue to promote principled humanitarian action, while

paying adequate attention to major global humanitarian emergencies, as well as forgotten and protracted crises. With an estimated [1.3 million people experiencing homelessness](#) across Europe, and many more [struggling to find decent, affordable housing](#), we were also encouraged by the nomination of a first European Commissioner to highlight the importance of addressing housing inequalities. In an [opinion piece](#) in EUObserver, we called on the EU to push for a way out of the housing crisis by reinforcing the social value of housing and ensuring access for marginalised communities.

We continued to engage with MEPs for the rest of the year, including through bilateral meetings on priority files in collaboration with our colleagues from Red Cross societies. To put our issues on the agenda and build working relations with targeted MEPs and their assistants, we suggested questions for the hearings of the Commissioners-designate which took place in November. Our questions covered a wide range of topics, including health, housing, material assistance and food aid, migration, localisation, climate adaptation, civil protection, humanitarian principles and International Humanitarian Law. Finally, we joined the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Medecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and NGO Voice for an exchange of views with the European Parliament's Committee on Development about key humanitarian priorities in the current global context. During our intervention, we underlined how the climate crisis is a critical driver of humanitarian needs and stressed the importance of investing in locally led climate action, focussing on the communities and countries facing heightened risk.

The EU currently faces significant societal challenges impacting millions in Europe and beyond, including climate change, environmental degradation, increasing humanitarian needs, and the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on health, healthcare and social services. Additionally, the needs of migrants are growing in all phases of the migration process, and evermore people are affected by poverty and violence. In this critical moment, the EU must reaffirm its commitment to universal rights, humanitarian law and leaving no one behind. As challenges intensify, decision-makers must lead in safeguarding all people and the planet by building the foundations of more resilient societies. Going forward, we will continue to work with our members to engage with EU decision-makers to promote humane policies that support a more inclusive and equitable future.

Heightening Red Cross influence

Enhancing our skills in evidence-based humanitarian diplomacy

In 2024, we continued to strengthen Red Cross capacities in evidence-based policy making through two important EU-funded projects to support people displaced from Ukraine.

Firstly, the 'Safe Homes' programme which concluded in June, garnered a breath of knowledge on private hosting as an option for reception and temporary accommodation for people without a home. Red Cross societies in nine EU countries conducted research at the local level using diverse methodologies such as surveys, focus groups and interviews. Drawing on an analysis of cross-country findings, desk research and additional expert interviews, the Red Cross EU Office produced a [report](#) outlining 15 key lessons from the programme's implementation. The report offers vital insights into the long-term institutional preparedness that public authorities should put in place to make hosting a potential option for the future. These findings were deliberated with Commission staff and representatives from several EU Member States at the 40th Solidarity Platform in April, contributing to informed policy reflections and knowledge-sharing. Following this we hosted a public [event](#) to further explore critical aspects in transitioning from emergency to long-term accommodation. Discussions highlighted the persistent bottlenecks in achieving more permanent housing solutions and emphasised the importance of developing durable and evolving partnerships to respond to societal challenges – insights which have informed our priorities for 2025 to help foster community-driven solutions for housing and the inclusion of newcomers.

Secondly, the 'Provision of quality and timely psychological first aid to people affected by the Ukraine crisis in impacted countries' programme set to run until October 2025, has served as a platform to monitor the evolving needs of a community affected by conflict and scale up solutions to improve mental health and well-being. Implemented in 28 European countries, the programme emphasises close coordination with government partners and the European Commission to bridge gaps between operational practices and policy frameworks. In this context, a Red Cross working group has been exchanging and articulating learnings from the field to inform future programming and broader policy initiatives. In April, the IFRC and the European



Under the EU4Health programme, the Czech Red Cross supported around 1,000 children displaced from Ukraine with various activities during the summer of 2023. © IFRC Europe

Commission co-organised an [event](#) in Brussels to stress the vital importance of ensuring early access to mental health services for people impacted by conflict and disasters. Jointly opened by the European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety and the IFRC Under-Secretary General for National Society Development and Operations Coordination, the event provided an opportunity to reflect on key programme's challenges and achievements linked to implementation. Red Cross practitioners from across Europe shared their insights, emphasising how critical it is to address mental health continuously and comprehensively, as needs evolve over time. Leveraging these kinds of practical evidence and expertise is key to shaping effective, long-term strategies for people experiencing vulnerability.

Contributing to discussions to improve preparedness

The [European Civil Protection Forum](#) took place in Brussels in June, bringing national and EU civil protection actors together at a critical time for the future of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) in context of an increasingly complex and changing risk landscape. Under the overarching theme of 'Shaping a disaster-resilient union', representatives from the Hungarian Red Cross, Polish Red Cross and the IFRC Secretariat contributed to panels addressing the behavioural dimensions of disaster prevention, as well as on bridging disaster resilience and climate adaptation strategies. Our booth in the civil protection village 'PrepaRED Fostering Resilience aCROSS Communities' showcased how Red Cross activities and services, such as search and



Representatives from National Red Cross Societies in Europe attended the European Civil Protection Forum to contribute to discussions about disaster prevention, disaster resilience and climate adaptation strategies.
© Red Cross EU Office

rescue, first aid training or psycho-social support, can serve as the different items in a comprehensive ‘disaster preparedness kit’. The Italian Red Cross also exhibited its ‘PPRD East 3’ project, which aims to increase resilience to natural and human-induced disasters in the Eastern Partnership Countries. The day before the Forum, colleagues working on disaster management across the EU gathered at the Red Cross EU Office to exchange on key policy updates and joint priorities. Given the growing number of activations of the state-based UCPM within and outside the EU, members deliberated the involvement of Red Cross societies as key independent and neutral civil protection actors. In this regard, they also discussed the way forward in operationalising the ‘IFRC Civil Protection Guidance for National Societies and Federation Secretariat Relations with EU Actors’.

As part of the Red Cross’ overarching efforts on global regulatory frameworks for improved preparedness, we worked with the Belgian Red Cross and the IFRC Secretariat to organise a high-level webinar on the International Law Commission (ILC) Draft Articles on the ‘Protection of Persons in the Event of Disasters’ in March. Opened by the Belgian Chair of the Council of the EU Working Party on Public International Law (COJUR), the event brought together government representatives from 20 countries to exchange on the ongoing diplomatic process around the Draft Articles to better protect affected people.

In the wake of the publication of the Niinistö report, we joined colleagues from the Hungarian Red Cross

at a meeting of the Council of the EU Working Party on Civil Protection (PROCIV) in December. The session aimed to steer discussions on societal preparedness by offering learnings from past operational experiences. Our key recommendations included: 1) emphasising principled action and IHL as central components of the forthcoming EU preparedness strategy; 2) ensuring civil society’s active participation in decision-making within a whole-of-government approach; and 3) adopting a bottom-up risk management strategy that prioritises individuals in preparedness and response efforts.

Increasing access to EU resources

Joining forces to increase collective impact at community level

2024 was a critical year for the IFRC Pilot Programmatic Partnership: ‘Supporting Local Action in Addressing humanitarian and health crises’ funded by the European Commission. This three-year global preparedness and response programme supporting 24 countries, involves 24 host National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 12 Red Cross societies in the EU and the IFRC Secretariat. Officially launching its roll-out phase on 1 April 2022, the programme will run until 31 March 2025 with a budget of up to EUR 210 million. Last year saw full-speed implementation and the programme benefited from the findings and recommendations from its mid-term review. The review aimed to complement reporting on the programme’s reach and assess mid-term progress made towards achieving specific elements of the Theory of Change which are

not easily captured in current data collection and narrative reporting – namely localisation, network harmonisation, coordination, communication and global partnership leveraging. Among its key finding, the review highlighted the added value of the partnership between the IFRC and the European Commission for strategic influence, collective reach, and potentially long-lasting change in how the IFRC and its network works together through the development and testing of this comprehensive model.

In July, the programme launched its final campaign: ‘Stronger, Faster, Safer, Closer’. Linked to the Olympic and Paralympics Games taking place in Paris during the summer, the campaign shared stories, insights and activities that concretely show how the programme is having a tangible impact on communities by reinforcing capacities at local level: making the good better and the safe safer. A series of videos, infographics and social media cards achieved 65.5 million impressions, potentially reaching 17.2 million people. The campaign was also displayed on EasyJet boarding passes and at the arrival gate in Brussels airport. In addition, the exhibition ‘Echos from the Jungle’ was held in Geneva from September to December; shedding light on the harrowing experiences of hundreds of thousands of migrants who risk their lives crossing the Darién Gap. Thanks to the PPP, the Red Cross has strengthened its Humanitarian Service Points (HSPs) throughout the route – offering safe spaces where people can access protection services and trusted information during this treacherous journey. Through photographs, video stories, personal items and maps, the exhibit aims to shed light on unseen human stories and raise awareness of a crisis that is often overshadowed by other migration issues.

Between March and May 2025, the exhibit will also be displayed at Geopolis in Brussels.

Preparing to engage with the next MFF

During the year, we did the groundwork with our members to shape our engagement in the upcoming process that the European Commission will launch in 2025 to develop the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), which will run from 2028 to 2034.

Long-term EU budgets are of critical importance for the EU institutions and for all the organisations working in partnership with and/or within the Union. Providing a stable framework, the MFF aims to align spending with the EU’s political priorities, increasing the predictability of EU finances for co-financers and beneficiaries and making it easier to adopt the annual EU budgets. The current MFF covers a seven-year period from 2021 to 2027. When it was adopted in 2020, the MFF was accompanied by the COVID-19 Recovery Instrument (called “Next Generation EU”) – an EU loan for which repayments are expected as of 2028. The combined funds reached EUR 1.88 trillion.

Long and extensive negotiations are expected to start in 2025, especially since many EU Member States are facing recessions or difficult economic times, while others are politically less inclined than previously to support the EU agenda and its budget. Additionally, the budget is under pressure because of the payment of interest on the COVID-19 recovery instrument loans and increasing defence expenditure in Member States.

The Annual Meeting of the Red Cross EU Office in December provided a unique opportunity to explore how to jointly engage with our member Red

The IFRC Programmatic Partnership supported community engagement activities in Mullamir, one of the most remote regions of Tajikistan. Local Red Crescent volunteers spread knowledge about the zoonotic diseases and their first symptoms to help detect the disease at the very beginning. © Yulia Bilenko / IFRC



Cross societies in advocacy around the next MFF at national and European levels. The findings of a survey we ran before the exchange confirmed the will to collectively advocate for an ambitious, fair and principled MFF, while providing an overview of existing engagement capacities and contacts at national level. The discussion also helped to clarify the direction and overarching objectives we should pursue considering the wide range of relevant areas that may fall under competing budget envelopes and touched on the need to join forces with like-minded organisations throughout the negotiation phases. Ultimately, members agreed that we should call for:

- » An MFF that puts people at the centre of its action and leaves no one behind – critical attention is needed for the EU budget to serve the most marginalised people inside and outside the EU, i.e. a budget for solidarity.
- » An MFF that values partnership with CSOs and organisations like the Red Cross, who can connect the EU institutions, EU citizens and communities experiencing heightened vulnerability around the world.
- » An MFF that provides long-term predictability while foreseeing the need to prepare, anticipate and stand ready to face new challenges and crises – inside the EU, at its borders and worldwide. Balancing an ambitious and predictable EU budget, while securing sufficient reserve and flexibility in the MFF is a must!

Serving members on EU issues

Developing and diversifying our EU humanitarian diplomacy training

In 2024, we solidified and further improved the 'EU Humanitarian Diplomacy training' modules that we developed in 2023. The Red Cross EU Office is committed to delivering two general EU humanitarian diplomacy trainings per year to our members to improve their knowledge of the EU institutional setting and of the opportunities to influence EU policy, legislation and funding frameworks so that they better reflect the needs of the people accessing our members' services. The first training of 2024 took place on 16-17 January and the second on 23-25 September. Since 2023, we have trained 61 participants from the IFRC Secretariat and 26 National Societies across three training sessions. The two and a half day training course is anchored in the Red Cross EU Humanitarian Diplomacy Framework – a tool which aims to help us work with our members towards

the advocacy related objectives in the Red Cross EU Strategy 2022-2027 by leveraging our respective roles at local, national, EU and international levels. The training combines practical exercises with theory, while drawing on the Red Cross' previous experience and engagement with the EU institutions.

Additionally, we delivered three adapted EU humanitarian diplomacy training sessions outside Brussels upon request from our members. A training in Stockholm addressed Nordic members, including the specific avenues for engagement with the EU for Red Cross societies from European Free Trade Association (EFTA)-European Economic Area (EEA) countries. Another thematic training focussed on EU external action took place in Berlin in November. This training was attended by representatives from the IFRC Secretariat and 11 Red Cross societies who are responsible for the EU in their respective partnership departments. It zoomed in on advocacy towards the EU on external action issues, highlighting the most relevant processes, stakeholders and case studies. Similarly, a specific training was offered to 35 Spanish Red Cross HQ staff and international delegates working in the International Cooperation department. Overall, 84 representatives from 12 of our member organisations participated in the special humanitarian diplomacy sessions organised in Spain, Sweden and Germany.

These tailored training sessions have allowed us to go more in depth into context specific themes and to increase the number of participants who are able to strengthen their EU humanitarian diplomacy skills and understanding. They were made possible by the eight dedicated Red Cross EU Office staff who form the pool of trainers, taking turns to prepare and deliver the training sessions and ensuring

On 4-6 November 2024, we held our EU Humanitarian Diplomacy training in Stockholm for participants who work for the National Societies in nordic countries.
© Susanne Lindberg Elmgren / Swedish Red Cross



coherence and continual improvement of the modules. Satisfaction surveys run with participants after the training show great appreciation for the content, methodology and practical examples.

“Comprehensive, lively formats and excellent trainers – it all demonstrated the advantages of working together in a coordinated manner. What I’ve learned will help to structure my humanitarian diplomacy work back home better and make it more effective”, said one participant.

Collaborating on migration with the Belgian EU Presidency

The RCEU Office has been coordinating a ‘Trio approach’ to engaging with the Presidencies of the Council of the EU since 2022. It mirrors the EU Member States’ approach by bringing together the three National Societies of the respective countries in any given trio to work together. The aim is to strengthen the impact of the Red Cross’ humanitarian diplomacy vis-à-vis the Presidency with a longer-term perspective that goes beyond the six-month intervals of the mandate of each Presidency. The approach offers a platform for cooperation for the three Red Cross societies and enables knowledge transfer and a consistent approach to engagement with EU Presidency priorities and activities.

Under the Belgian Presidency, our collaboration around migration was particularly fruitful. We

contributed to a series of events on asylum and migration organised by the Federal Agency for the reception of asylum seekers (Fedasil) as part of the Presidency – sometimes alongside our colleagues from the Belgian Red Cross. This included a mix of closed-door workshops and public conferences on topics like multistakeholder models in reception and in integration, as well as on issues related to return and reintegration.

In May, we worked with the Belgian Red Cross, Fedasil and the Belgian Permanent Representation to the EU to organise a visit for EU Member States’ Justice and Home Affairs Councillors and representatives of the European Commission and the Council’s General Secretariat to a reception centre for international protection applicants managed by the Belgian Red Cross in Rocourt. The visit was an opportunity to explain the Red Cross approach to reception: how we work to create a safe and dignified living environment, the support we provide in the asylum procedure, how we ensure social inclusion of our residents, and how we work to support unaccompanied children. Beyond giving visibility to the work of the Belgian Red Cross in asylum reception, the visit offered the Councillors – many of whom had never been in a reception centre before – first-hand insights into the living conditions, challenges and needs of asylum seekers, which we hope can inform more empathetic and effective policymaking across Europe.

Reception centre for international protection applicants managed by the Belgian Red Cross in Rocourt. © Belgian Red Cross



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The International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement is committed to, and bound by its seven fundamental principles

HUMANITY | IMPARTIALITY | NEUTRALITY | INDEPENDENCE | VOLUNTARY SERVICE | UNITY | UNIVERSALITY