

The Swedish EU Presidency and Swedish Red Cross priorities



Swedish Red Cross



Sweden holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU in critical times. During the next few months, the Swedish Presidency will seek to drive forward the Council's work on EU legislation, ensure continuity of the EU agenda, and try to ensure that Member States cooperate. The work and agenda of the 6-month period is guided by the **Trio programme** of the French, Czech and Swedish Member States who form a Trio of Presidencies, as well as the **Swedish government Presidency Priorities**. The intensification of the international armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine has defined and influenced the EU agenda and these Presidency priorities considerably.

An integral part of the Red Cross mission is to prevent and alleviate human suffering, protect life and health and to ensure respect for the dignity of each individual, locally, nationally and globally. In line with this mission, the Swedish Red Cross strives to influence relevant domestic and EU policy, legislation and practice through sustained advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy dialogue. The starting point for our advocacy and humanitarian diplomacy is the Red Cross and Red Crescent **Fundamental Principles**. These principles, including humanity, impartiality and neutrality, sum up our values and have enabled us for decades to provide effective, unbiased assistance globally to people in need. Apart from the principles, the basis and foundation are the practical experience and evidence from the operational activities of the Swedish Red Cross and its partners in the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (192 National Societies and around 15 million volunteers globally).

For National Red Cross Societies in the EU, the Presidency period represents an important opportunity to highlight key concerns to relevant stakeholders. The current Trio of Presidencies of France, Czech Republic and Sweden, are working together to draw attention to the needs of the most vulnerable people on the EU stage. The Swedish Red Cross advocacy priorities for 2023 and 2024 relate to themes such as health and care, migration and protection, disasters and crises.¹ In relation to the EU agenda for 2023 and the Swedish Presidency period, the Swedish Red Cross has identified three thematic priorities around which we are concentrating our advocacy efforts:

- › **RESPECT FOR THE HUMANITARIAN PRINCIPLES AND INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW**
- › **MIGRATION AND PROTECTION**
- › **THE CLIMATE CRISIS AS A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS**

Our humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy efforts are carried out through constructive humanitarian diplomacy dialogue, participation and organisation of events, meetings and seminars in Brussels and in Sweden. The Swedish Red Cross works in close coordination with the Red Cross EU Office (**RCEU**), representing the European National Red Cross Societies and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). In doing so it draws on the experience, participation and involvement of the whole International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

¹ For further information, see "[Svenska Röda Korsets Påverkansarbete 2023–2024](#)" (in Swedish).

Respect for the humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law

The world enters 2023 facing immense humanitarian challenges, record-level displacement, hunger and a worsened poverty situation.² The international armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine continues, with detrimental consequences on a national, regional and global scale. Humanitarian emergencies are lasting longer and have become more volatile and multifaceted. The nature of today's humanitarian crisis situations is increasingly complex and transcends the traditional lines between humanitarian aid and development cooperation. Humanitarian organisations and their operations are often severely impacted by conflict, insecurity, attacks on infrastructure and humanitarian assets, and violence against humanitarian workers. Humanitarian access constraints continue, due to bureaucratic impediments, counterterrorism measures and sanctions measures, among other factors.

There is a growing general concern that many of the people in most need of humanitarian aid, development aid, or basic services assistance live in fragile and conflict-affected states and areas where there are constraints on donors and actors to support and access. In many cases, and thanks to their anchorage in the local community, humanitarian organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), IFRC and National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are among the only actors present to support the population in need.

Humanitarian organisations such as the Swedish Red Cross and other International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement actors are obliged to adhere to humanitarian principles including impartiality, neutrality and independence, at all times and in all contexts, whether conducting humanitarian assistance or implementing development work. These principles require assistance to be provided without discrimination and solely based on needs, in a neutral and independent manner. Furthermore, all work must be fully aligned with our Fundamental Principles. International humanitarian law contains rules which provide protection for and help facilitate humanitarian work in armed conflict.

Swedish Red Cross calls on EU and EU Member States for continued support for humanitarian organisations, humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law.

The Swedish Red Cross calls on the EU and EU Member States for respect of humanitarian organisations and humanitarian organisations' need to adhere to humanitarian principles³ at all times, including when sanctions and EU restrictive measures are applicable.

² For an overview of humanitarian situation and trends, visit [Home | Humanitarian Action](#)

³ At EU level, the humanitarian principles are enshrined in the [European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid](#), signed in December 2007 by the Council of the EU, the European Parliament and the European Commission.

Migration and protection

Swedish Red Cross and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement have a long-standing commitment and expertise in helping to meet the needs of migrants. This commitment is strictly humanitarian, focusing on the needs, vulnerabilities and potential of migrants, regardless of their legal status. Based on our expertise and experience, the Swedish Red Cross is committed, in coordination with RCEU and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, to continue to raise concerns regarding the legislative proposals of the EU Migration and Asylum Pact and the overall reform of the Common European Asylum System. The proposed legal instruments currently under negotiation focus on determining how migrants are treated when entering EU territory and what space humanitarian actors will have to deliver assistance to migrants. We urge that fair, accountable and high-quality migration and asylum procedures and dignified reception facilities throughout the EU are at the heart of EU migration and asylum policy.⁴

Our key messages and concerns include:

Ensure the protection of the humanitarian space to access and to support migrants

EU and Member States should be able to guarantee that all migrants, irrespective of status, have safe and effective access to assistance and protection including that delivered by humanitarian actors.⁵ Therefore, it is essential that EU and EU Member States promote a conducive environment to humanitarian assistance and solidarity towards migrants, also by amending legislation that hampers or criminalises the assistance.

Uphold the right to access fair and effective asylum procedures

When negotiating and agreeing on the new Asylum and Migration Pact, the Swedish Red Cross urges EU Member States to focus on ensuring access to fair and efficient asylum procedures, upholding European and international human rights commitments including the right to seek asylum. Severe human rights violations as a result of excessive use of force or failure to adhere to the non-refoulement principle continue to occur at EU borders. Respect for migrants' human rights at Europe's borders and safe access to the territory to ensure the possibility to apply for international protection must be upheld. The central part of a fair EU asylum system is ensuring access to the territory and to asylum procedures, with respect to the principle of non-refoulement.

Return to the place of origin is not the necessary end durable solution of migration. Return of migrants should always be preceded by fair procedures and respect for the non-refoulement principle. Migrants in return procedures should be provided with dignified reception and humane conditions responding to their needs, including counselling opportunities and reintegration support.

Immigration detention must remain a measure of last resort

There is strong evidence that immigration detention has a profound and negative impact on people's family life, well-being and physical and mental health, as well as child development, even for short periods and even when children are detained with their families.⁶ For this reason, children should never be detained: community-based non-custodial alternatives based on individual case management should always be preferred in situations where there is limitation of liberty. Detention should be a measure of last resort. Liberty should be the norm.⁷

4 Red Cross EU statement [Final call for EU governments to put humanity first in EU migration legislation and practice](#)

5 Red Cross EU Position Paper: [Protecting the Humanitarian Space to access and support migrants](#)

6 Swedish Red Cross, [Children in immigration detention](#) (in Swedish)

7 Red Cross EU Position paper, [Reducing the use of immigration detention in the EU Detention](#)

Secure quality identification and treatment of vulnerabilities of individuals, in all procedures, including people with invisible vulnerabilities (e.g. people with mental health issues and torture survivors)

Vulnerability checks of asylum seekers, when not of a sufficient quality standard, or when lacking relevant safeguards or adequately considering vulnerabilities, have the potential to harm and affect people in vulnerable situations. Based on extensive experience in treating migrants with specific vulnerabilities throughout the administrative procedure, the Swedish Red Cross and other European National Societies have evidence to share, to contribute to the improvement of the timely identification, treatment and rehabilitation of individuals with vulnerabilities.

Protect family unity

Family unity considerations during any type of admissibility procedure must be promoted and respected at all times. Any mechanism of responsibility sharing which includes the possibility for asylum seekers to be relocated should be based

on a systematic and individualised examination of the asylum seekers' situation and consider first their needs including their right to be reunited with their family members.

Secure and promote safe pathways and family reunification

Safe and legal pathways, such as resettlement, community sponsorship and humanitarian visas but also family reunification, are essential to enhance refugees' access to protection in Europe and increase EU Member States' global share of solidarity towards refugees and asylum seekers. Besides, safe and legal pathways are key to reducing the enormous risks migrants take to reach Europe.⁸ The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has long-standing expertise in family reunification, that builds upon its Restoring Family Links services. We provide family reunification support in countries of origin, transit and destination thanks to the support of our global humanitarian network consisting of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, IFRC and ICRC.

The climate crisis as a humanitarian crisis

Climate change is contributing to humanitarian crises, in particular in contexts where people are already vulnerable, as the unequivocal scientific evidence provided by the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report shows.⁹ This is driving disasters, food insecurity, water scarcity, and health and displacement impacts in an increasing number of countries around the world. The report also confirms that climate impacts and risks exacerbate and perpetuate vulnerabilities as well as social and economic inequities, and that the consequences are worse and happening sooner than we thought. Irreversible changes cannot be ruled out.

Over the past decade, 83 percent of all disasters were caused by climate-related events – floods, storms and heatwaves.¹⁰ Climate-related disasters are driving increased levels of risks¹¹ and the humanitarian consequences are already being felt by billions of people, disproportionality impacting the most vulnerable people. The current humanitarian system may soon be overwhelmed by a crisis of this magnitude and complexity.

The EU addresses climate change through a number of reforms and initiatives, including the European Green Deal and Fit for 55.¹² The Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU claims that albeit global

8 Red Cross EU Position paper, [Perilous journeys: addressing the vulnerabilities linked to migratory routes to the European Union – Position – Red Cross EU Office](#)

9 IPCC, [Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability](#)

10 IFRC, [World Disasters Report 2020](#)

11 IPCC, [Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#); UNICEF, [An Environment Fit for Children](#), UNICEF's Approach to Climate Change; WHO, [Donors making a difference: Climate change and its impact on health](#)

12 European Council Council of the European Union, [the European Green Deal and Fit for 55](#)



climate change requires a global response, Europe must lead by example. In this context, the Swedish Red Cross will, in coordination with International Red Cross and Red Crescent partners including the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, continue to raise awareness and key Red Cross concerns and issues, including:

Increase the urgency and action to address the humanitarian impacts of the climate crisis. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions to prevent even worse humanitarian impacts, whilst also vastly scaling up adaptation action.

Prioritise the most vulnerable: Recognize the humanitarian impacts of the climate crisis, prioritise support for the most vulnerable people, focus on their protection and inclusion in global, national and local laws, policies and plans, to meet their needs.

Increase the amount and accessibility of climate finance: Increase attention and finance for adaptation and resilience as well as loss and damage; prioritise funding for the most vulnerable countries and communities; including fragile and conflict-affected countries and communities, make climate finance more accessible, including for local actors.

Promote locally led action: Champion locally led adaptation action and support vulnerable groups in decision-making, particularly about how climate finance is accessed and channeled.

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Promote coherence across humanitarian, development, environment and climate commitments by showcasing our integrated risk management approaches to building climate resilience, and translating global commitments to practical action at national and local levels.

Enable more anticipatory and early action to reduce the impacts of rapid and slow-onset climate shocks and stressors.

Promote awareness and implementation of Green Response: This is an approach targeted towards improving the environmental sustainability of our work and avoiding, minimising and managing the damage we cause to the local environment and climate. It aims to reduce the global impact of the carbon emissions we generate and encourage the adoption of solutions, impacting on sustainability.

Planned activities: In addition to these priorities, the Swedish Red Cross is organising and participating in a number of events connected to the Presidency, in both Brussels and Sweden. More information is available and will follow on the [RCEU](#) and the [Swedish Red Cross websites](#).