



**SUCCESS STORIES**

## Legal Frameworks

### Innovation for Humanitarian Response

To strengthen their role as key players in risk management and emergency response, the Ecuadorian Red Cross and the Red Cross Society of Panama have promoted processes to update legal frameworks that support their intervention in critical moments. Through the sustainable and predictable funding provided by the Programmatic Partnership, both organizations have been able to influence the formulation of public policies and the creation of national laws that recognize their auxiliary role. This updated legal framework not only ensures formal recognition of National Societies but also strengthens their operational capacity and facilitates inter-agency collaboration, expanding their impact in the most vulnerable communities.

The Programmatic Partnership (PP) between the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the European Union<sup>1</sup> (EU) is an innovative three-year<sup>2</sup>, global initiative implemented in 24 countries. Under the name Accelerating Local Action in Humanitarian and Health Crises, the PP<sup>3</sup> seeks to strengthen the capacity of at-risk communities and local actors to anticipate, prepare for, withstand, respond to and recover from humanitarian and health crises

through integrated strategies. It is based on a long-term funding mechanism, greater operational flexibility and simplified reporting processes, allowing for more effective and adaptable interventions to be planned and implemented, in line with the Grand Bargain 2.0<sup>4</sup> commitments. In addition, the PP relies on the capacities of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which work on a sustained basis with vulnerable communities before, during and after disasters. It also has the

<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO). Throughout this document reference will be made to the European Union (EU) for ease of reading and understanding.

<sup>2</sup> Starting in March 2022 and with an estimated completion date of June 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this document, the term PP will be used to refer to the Accelerating Local Action in Humanitarian and Health Crises program, taking into account the funding modality that characterizes its actions.

<sup>4</sup> For more information, visit: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>

technical support of the National Societies of the European Union (Spanish Red Cross, Italian Red Cross, Norwegian Red Cross, and German Red Cross), which closely follow the implementation in each country.

The PP framework is structured into five pillars of action: disaster risk management; epidemic and pandemic preparedness and response; humanitarian assistance and protection of people on the move; cash and voucher assistance; and community engagement and accountability.

## Implications of not having updated and contextualized legal frameworks

The absence of updated legal frameworks for humanitarian organizations can be a significant obstacle to the effectiveness of their intervention. Without a clear legal framework that responds to contemporary needs, National Societies face difficulties in operating efficiently, implementing policies and programs effectively, coordinating with other government entities and international organizations, and accessing essential resources.

The IFRC works continuously to support the development of solid legal frameworks at the national level. These frameworks are the basis on which National Societies play their auxiliary role<sup>5</sup>, which gives them a privileged position to act in emergency and disaster situations. This role recognizes them as key players within the humanitarian system, enabling them to work closely with governments and international organizations to provide rapid and effective assistance to the most vulnerable communities. Updating these frameworks strengthens the operational capacity of National Societies and enables them to adapt to the changing realities of the humanitarian context, including health crises, natural disasters and migration flows.

The PP is committed to updating and strengthening legal frameworks as a key strategy to improve humanitarian response at the global level. It focuses not only on increasing the effectiveness of interventions, but also on ensuring their long-term sustainability. A solid legal framework ensures that

National Societies have the resources, authority and capacity to coordinate efficiently with other interested parties.

## Strategic positioning and development of the Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management Law in Ecuador

In Ecuador, the Ecuadorian Red Cross stands out for having a solid and trained legal team that allowed the National Society to actively participate in the formulation of policies and legal frameworks and particularly in the development of the country's<sup>6</sup> Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management Law. The Ecuadorian Red Cross played a key role in the updating of the aforementioned law, a process that was not immediate, but the result of years of work and previous relations with national authorities. Over time, the National Society demonstrated its technical and operational capacity in emergency situations, consolidating itself as a legitimate and reliable player in risk management.



Ecuador is characterized by having one of the most comprehensive laws on risk management in the region, and the Ecuadorian Red Cross played a crucial role by being involved from the initial stages of the process of updating the law. Early participation in these legislative debates is an example of how the National Society positions itself as a strategic player capable of influencing

<sup>5</sup> According to the Statutes of the Movement, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are considered "auxiliaries to the public authorities in the humanitarian field". This auxiliary role can be described as a specific and distinctive partnership, entailing mutual responsibilities and benefits, based on international and national laws, in which the national public authorities and the National Society agree on the areas in which the National Society complements or replaces public humanitarian services.

<sup>6</sup> For more information, visit: [Organic law for integral risk and disaster management - Ecuador](#)



government agendas and the construction of legal frameworks.

Thanks to the sustained strategic relationship work of the Ecuadorian Red Cross, the Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management Law in Ecuador formally recognized it as a key player in risk management and humanitarian response in the country. The law gives the National Society a central position within the national disaster response system. Article 38 of the law specifically mentions the volunteerism of organizations recognized in international instruments, such as the Ecuadorian Red Cross, which allows its volunteers to operate within the established legal framework, following the coordination guidelines defined by the governing entity of integrated disaster risk management, which guarantees an efficient and orderly response during emergencies. This recognition not only validates its capacity to intervene in emergency situations but also establishes a clear framework for cooperation and coordination with other government entities and humanitarian organizations.

By being part of the law, the Ecuadorian Red Cross has access to key resources for its operation, such as training, equipment, supplies and security for its volunteers. Although the organization is responsible for managing these resources autonomously, the law provides that it may receive additional support from the lead entity for risk management or from the decentralized autonomous governments (GAD by its acronym in Spanish) in coordinated activities. This inter-institutional collaboration strengthens the capacity of the Ecuadorian Red Cross to carry

out its humanitarian work, expanding its scope and effectiveness in assisting populations affected by disasters.

## **Progress towards a solid law and recognition of the auxiliary role of the Red Cross Society of Panama**

The Red Cross Society of Panama began to work on drafting a new Red Cross law in 2019, with input from IFRC and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). This proposal was submitted to the executive branch and, although initially postponed due to the pandemic, in 2022 the process was resumed, taking advantage of the favorable political context. The relevance of the National Society in the response to humanitarian situations of great relevance such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of hurricanes Eta and Iota, and the attention to migratory flows, demonstrated the need to update the legislation to officially recognize the role of the Red Cross Society of Panama.

The funding provided through the PP played a crucial role in this process, allowing the Red Cross Society of Panama to carry out technical meetings, the official launch of the law - its promulgation and publication - and a series of humanitarian diplomacy events to sensitize authorities and society on the impact of the legislative update. This financial support also facilitated staff training on topics such as legal frameworks and the implications of the new law, as well as the creation of audiovisual

materials and informative brochures to raise awareness of the importance of the auxiliary role of the Red Cross Society of Panama and the content of the new law. Humanitarian diplomacy played an essential role, as it allowed the National Society to interact directly with the authorities and achieve the necessary support to pass the law in the three debates of the legislative process. In February 2024, Law 422 of the National Red Cross of the Republic of Panama<sup>7</sup> was approved, marking a milestone in strengthening the role of the Red Cross Society of Panama.

The process was made possible thanks to the sustained work that the National Society has been carrying out in the country in areas such as risk management, health, migration, and other issues, and the relevance of this work in the national territory. Also, the funding made it possible to develop activities that strengthened the relationship of the Red Cross Society of Panama with the State, such as the execution of an Urban Search and Rescue Response (USAR) team training, with the participation of different institutions.



The PP also facilitated the active participation of the Red Cross Society of Panama in international forums, which made it possible to present Panama's law as a model to be followed by other National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. This type of international visibility reinforces the impact and sustainability of the law, ensuring that the process of legal updating in Panama is recognized and emulated in other contexts.

The law recognizes several fundamental aspects

<sup>7</sup> For more information, visit: [Panamanian Red Cross Law](#)

<sup>8</sup> Each branch is an operational unit of the mission development of the Red Cross Society of Panama.

to strengthen the role of the Red Cross Society of Panama, highlighting its right of initiative, which allows it to act proactively, even in situations where the national system is slow to respond, guaranteeing a more agile intervention through its branches<sup>8</sup>. Likewise, its auxiliary role is recognized, clearly differentiating it from the State and positioning it as a relevant player in risk management and emergency response, granting it reinforced legitimacy and authority to collaborate with other players in the humanitarian field and actively participate in the planning and execution of response strategies.

The law also provides a protective framework for volunteers, establishing specific rights, such as the right to volunteer hours, which facilitates their participation without affecting their regular work. In addition, it promotes corporate collaboration by allowing companies to support the work of the National Society through corporate social responsibility programs, providing volunteer hours for their employees.

The cases of the Ecuadorian Red Cross and the Red Cross Society of Panama demonstrate how sustained funding is fundamental to strengthen the role of National Societies in their auxiliary role. The active participation of these organizations in formulating laws and their inter-institutional collaboration allows them to position themselves as key players within the humanitarian system, improving their operational capacity and ensuring more efficient and agile interventions in emergency situations.

Updating laws that recognize the role of National Societies as auxiliaries to the public authorities, by establishing clear rights of initiative and participation, not only facilitates rapid and autonomous action by National Societies, but also improves coordination with other humanitarian actors, both governmental and international. A robust and updated legal framework establishes a solid basis for greater cooperation between the different entities in the sector, resulting in better planning and implementation of response actions, tailored to the needs of the affected communities. In this way, the law not only benefits National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, but also strengthens the entire humanitarian ecosystem, making emergency response more effective.

## Success is visible because

As a result of this funding, the Ecuadorian Red Cross and the Red Cross Society of Panama have been able to:



Influence public policy formulation through the active participation of both National Societies in the updating of key legal frameworks, ensuring that their interventions are aligned with national and risk management policies.



Increase its visibility and institutional presence, facilitating the creation of information materials and communication campaigns, which has increased the visibility of the Red Cross both nationally and internationally, positioning itself as a key actor in humanitarian response.



Obtain formal recognition in legislation, the updating of national laws, has allowed National Societies to obtain clear and official recognition of their role as auxiliaries to the State in risk management, giving them greater legitimacy and authority.



Train communities and authorities, reinforcing the understanding of the crucial role played by the Red Cross in emergency situations and strengthening inter-institutional collaboration.



Foster strategic alliances, through the creation of closer relationships with governments, international organizations and key players, which has favored greater cooperation in risk management and emergency response.



## Reflecting

The Programmatic Partnership enabled the Red Cross to offer rapid, diversified and dignified humanitarian assistance, supported by clear and updated legal frameworks that facilitate comprehensively addressing the challenges faced by communities in crisis and emergency contexts, maximizing the impact of interventions through:

- **Collaboration with key actors** to foster strategic alliances with government authorities, international organizations and local actors, ensuring the effective implementation of legal frameworks.
- **Institutional capacity building** to strengthen National Society staff and internal structures to adapt their operations to legal regulations and comply with established requirements.
- **Active participation in legislative processes**, getting involved from the early stages in the formulation of laws and public policies, ensuring that legal frameworks include the essential role of the Red Cross in risk management and emergency response.
- **Transparency and accountability**, ensuring that National Societies operate within legal frameworks that promote these principles and effectiveness in humanitarian response.
- **Access to resources and institutional support**, enabling National Societies to receive support in the form of resources, training and equipment, strengthening their operational capacity at critical moments.

## Looking towards the future

The Programmatic Partnership model has proven to be successful with sustained medium to long term funding, which facilitates the creation and updating of clear legal frameworks, enabling:

- **Guaranteeing the sustainability of humanitarian operations**, ensuring that National Societies can continue to function without interruption in crisis situations,

within a legal framework that facilitates their intervention.

- **Adapting to the emerging needs of communities**, enabling a rapid and appropriate response to changes and new challenges, within the framework of legal regulations that support Red Cross intervention.
- **Strengthening institutional capacities**, both in infrastructure and training, to ensure that National Societies are prepared to face future crises, complying with established legal frameworks.
- **Facilitating the implementation of innovative and strategic projects** that contribute to the continuous improvement of the organization's processes and services, always respecting the regulatory and legal frameworks in force.
- **Maintaining constant collaboration and alignment with key players**, strengthening alliances with governments, international and local organizations, to ensure that public policies and legal frameworks reflect the strategic role of the Red Cross.



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