

# IOM's Humanitarian Policy - Principles for Humanitarian Action (PHA)

## Overview

IOM's institutional humanitarian policy – Principles for Humanitarian Action (PHA) – is framed around the four core humanitarian principles. The policy guides IOM to determine the most appropriate course of action when confronted with humanitarian dilemmas and helps navigate challenges in complex and volatile environments.

The policy applies to all situations where IOM provides humanitarian response and represents IOM's global institutional humanitarian commitments. It clarifies and highlights IOM's humanitarian identity and mandate and spells out IOM's role and mode of engagement in humanitarian action.

At the heart of PHA are the four core humanitarian principles:

- The principle of humanity – humanitarian action is motivated by the aim to help others who are affected by crises, and by this aim alone.
- The principle of impartiality – humanitarian assistance and protection is given without any discrimination, based on people's needs, and needs alone, and in proportion to need.
- The principle of neutrality – humanitarian action is pursued without favoring any of the conflicting sides.
- The principle of independence – humanitarian action is free from any political, military, economic, and other interest.

Principled Humanitarian Action for IOM means also a clear commitment to humanitarian partnership, humanitarian accountability and humanitarian protection, which are all enshrined in the policy as its key elements.

The humanitarian policy supports IOM's [Migration Crisis Operational Framework \(MCOF\)](#) and guides the organization's decision making in complex and volatile environments.

## Description

### Principles for Humanitarian Action (PHA)

The PHA reaffirm IOM's commitment towards the internationally agreed core humanitarian principles in the delivery of its humanitarian response, and the need for all those engaged in humanitarian action to promote and fully respect these principles:<sup>2</sup>

- **Humanity:** The purpose of humanitarian action is to protect life and health and ensure respect for the rights and well-being of human beings. Concern to alleviate human suffering and preserve human dignity is the driving force for humanitarian action. In line with this principle, IOM reaffirms the humanitarian imperative and that its priority is the humanitarian duty to save lives and alleviate

suffering.

- **Impartiality:** Humanitarian action must be carried out on the basis of needs alone, prioritizing those most in need, without discrimination on the basis of race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, religious belief, class or political opinion. While IOM recognizes the importance of balancing the needs and interests of different stakeholders, it strives to be strictly non-partisan in its humanitarian action. To do so, and in line with the principle of impartiality, IOM's humanitarian response always gives priority to the most vulnerable.
- **Neutrality:** Humanitarians must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of an ideological, religious, racial or political nature. IOM assesses the relationship between a policy of neutrality and its advocacy role on a case-by-case basis, without compromising the principle of humanity.
- **Independence:** Humanitarians must remain independent of the political, financial or other objectives that any others may have in areas where humanitarian action is being implemented. IOM is committed to the principle of independence where and when it is engaged in humanitarian action and in any other situation in which IOM adheres to the principle of humanity.

IOM uses the MCOF to provide a comprehensive response to migration crises that draws on IOM's humanitarian, transition, recovery, development, and peacebuilding activities as well as migration management services.

Protection is at the centre of IOM's humanitarian action. Humanitarian protection is defined as: "All activities aimed at ensuring full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law."

IOM is committed to protection mainstreaming, within the context of the MCOF, and to conducting activities in ways that seek to do no harm, prioritize safety and dignity, foster empowerment and participation, and are non-discriminatory and needs-based.

Preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse by IOM staff and the Organization's implementing partners are vital protection considerations that IOM integrates into all its operations.

IOM engages in partnerships and cooperates with the stakeholders involved in humanitarian action on the basis of shared principles to promote mutual respect, complementarity, predictability and reliability for a more effective humanitarian response.

IOM requires that its implementing partners commit to respect for humanitarian principles when delivering humanitarian responses. It uses existing standards as a reference during the due diligence process and applies them when monitoring and evaluating implementation. IOM is committed to the transfer of expertise and knowledge to build the capacities of its implementing partners in this regard.

IOM applies a principled approach to humanitarian action in different operating contexts, integrating humanitarian principles into the MCOF - the basis for establishing clear strategic objectives - and supports consistency in professional standards and programme implementation.

## Relevance to IOM's Emergency Operations

Humanitarian principles have practical operational relevance and value in different contexts (including armed conflict, natural disaster, health emergencies, and crisis triggered by migration flows). The ability to reach the most vulnerable and the safety of IOM staff, local partners, and affected populations all depend on IOM's

consideration for principled humanitarian action.

It is often difficult to reconcile humanitarian principles with operational realities when responding to humanitarian crises in complex and volatile environments, and when facing [security, access, operational, and institutional challenges](#) at different levels. Almost always, it is necessary to prioritize one principle over the others to achieve a broader humanitarian goal. In such situations, being principled means using the four core principles to identify and analyse the challenges and to carefully assess the options to determine which compromises are likely to lead to the best humanitarian outcome.

Needs-based and quality aid delivery builds confidence among communities. Well managed perceptions lead to acceptance. Acceptance facilitates access. Neutrality and impartiality are key to perceptions and to earn trust. To gain acceptance, IOM's work is strictly non-discriminatory and pays attention to vulnerabilities. Humanitarian principles assist in managing perception – gaining acceptance – and negotiating access to those in need with communities, armed groups and government authorities and other stakeholders.

It is important to consistently and transparently apply the principles.

Negotiated access in practice requires proximity to both – those who need assistance and those who control access to those populations. This means it necessary to consistently reference and apply humanitarian principles to negotiate safe and effective aid delivery.

Adherence to the principles helps IOM to protect against or mitigate the misappropriation of aid and enhances overall programme quality.

## **IOM's Role**

IOM is at the heart of the international humanitarian system for delivering humanitarian response to vulnerable migrants, displaced persons and affected communities. This role brings responsibilities that the PHA clarify at all levels but foremost at the field level, where IOM's actions take place.

The humanitarian principles remind us that the humanitarian imperative of saving lives, alleviating suffering and preserving dignity must prevail; and that our actions must not be used or hijacked for political gain. Humanitarian responses must also be predicated on the understanding that the people affected remain at least partly agents, enablers and drivers of their own resilience, recovery and development at household, community and national level before, during and after a crisis, thus reducing the risk of aid dependency.

IOM is a full member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). In addition to coordinating its action through the existing humanitarian response system, IOM responds to the migration dimensions of a crisis by taking action within other international, regional and national systems addressing peace and security, migration governance and development issues.

In its humanitarian response, IOM is accountable to the persons and States concerned, its Member States, donors, and its partners within the humanitarian response system. IOM is committed to strengthening its accountability mechanisms and to keeping them under continuous review.

IOM supports the efforts of States, at their request and with their consent, to fulfill their responsibilities to protect and assist crisis-affected persons.

IOM's humanitarian mandate is set out in particular in Articles 1.1(a) and (b) of the IOM Constitution, Objective 1 of the Strategic Results Framework (SRF), the MCOF, and Principle 1 and Objective 2 of the Migration Governance Framework (MiGOF).

The PHA, as well as their accompanying tools, clarify IOM's position on the humanitarian assistance and protection and partnership aspects of crisis response. They bring IOM responses in line with the recognized principles of our key humanitarian partners and further strengthen IOM's own accountability in this regard. Moreover, the PHA help connect the relevant dimensions of other sectors of IOM's work (transition/ development/ migration management) as articulated in the Member States' endorsed MCOF. Above all, they put affected populations at the center of our action in terms of needs, rights and accountability obligations.

## Links

- [Principled Humanitarian Access SharePoint \(INTERNAL\)](#)
- [IOM Intranet - Humanitarian Policy](#)

## Media

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrSpBPF3YFY>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6\\_u6-MnzcE&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6_u6-MnzcE&feature=youtu.be)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQPpvcY2niA&feature=youtu.be>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAgMGL\\_Qi\\_0&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rAgMGL_Qi_0&feature=youtu.be)

## Contacts

If you have further questions on IOM's Humanitarian Policy, please contact the Humanitarian Policy Team: [humanitarianpolicy@iom.int](mailto:humanitarianpolicy@iom.int).

## Key Points

- IOM has a strong institutional commitment to Principled Humanitarian Action.
- IOM's institutional humanitarian policy guides the Organization's overall response to migration crises.
- IOM's humanitarian crisis response is based on the four humanitarian principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence.
- Principled Humanitarian Action for IOM means also a clear commitment to humanitarian partnership, humanitarian accountability, and humanitarian protection.
- Adherence to and consistent application of humanitarian principles is essential for effective humanitarian response.

## References and Tools

- [Council Document on IOM's Humanitarian Policy](#)
- [PHA Infosheet](#)
- [Project Cycle Guiding Questions Principled Humanitarian Action](#)

## Other Entries in this Topic

- [Inter-Agency Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse \(PSEA\)](#)

# Document date

Document last updated: Apr 2023

