

FINNISH RED CROSS CLIMATE SUSTAINABILITY POLICY

Approved at a meeting of the Board of the Finnish Red Cross on 2 September 2022
Effective date: 2 September 2022

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Introduction

Climate change is one of the greatest global challenges of our time, and at the same time a major humanitarian crisis. Its effects are visible throughout the world. Climate change has increased extreme weather phenomena, such as heavy rainfall, floods and storms, exceptional heat waves, drought and forest fires¹. Climate change affects things such as health, food production, agriculture, ecosystems and the pursuit of livelihoods in many ways. It makes it difficult for people who are already in the weakest position to survive and forces people to migrate. Considerable resources are required to mitigate climate change, to respond to its consequences and to remedy the damage.

As a major global humanitarian actor, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement will respond to the impacts of climate change and growing humanitarian needs and strive to curb climate change by changing its own activities. In autumn 2020, the General Assembly of the Finnish Red Cross adopted a policy to commit to *reducing the climate impacts of its activities and to be carbon-neutral by 2030*.

The 2030 strategy of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) puts climate change at the centre of global challenges. The international aid policy of the Finnish Red Cross also emphasises responding and adapting to climate change as key areas of action. The Finnish Red Cross identifies the impacts of the environmental crisis and loss of biodiversity on the operating environment and humanitarian needs and aims to find environmentally sustainable solutions in its own activities. This policy primarily focuses on the climate crisis and responding to it.

The IFRC and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have drawn up the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organizations, which has also been signed by the² Finnish Red Cross. The following are the Charter's commitments:

- Step up our response to growing humanitarian needs and help people adapt to the impacts of the climate and environmental crises.
- Maximize the environmental sustainability of our work and rapidly reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.
- Embrace the leadership of local actors and communities.
- Increase our capacity to understand climate and environmental risks and develop evidence-based solutions.
- Work collaboratively across the humanitarian sector and beyond to strengthen climate and environmental action.
- Use our influence to mobilize urgent and more ambitious climate action and environmental protection.
- Develop targets and measure our progress as we implement our commitments.

Climate change affects the organisation's basic activities and preparedness needs. Preparing for changes in time improves the organisation's overall readiness. In addition to this, branches and volunteers can influence their own communities and promote their preparedness and support people's ability to adapt to changes. Volunteers and branches are key in making changes in our activities.

¹ <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-working-group-i/>

² <https://www.climate-charter.org/>

Objectives of the policy

The Finnish Red Cross is an active player in climate change. By implementing a climate sustainability policy, the Finnish Red Cross reduces the environmental and climate impacts of its operations, improves its ability to manage climate change risks and its ability to respond to climate change impacts and promotes climate sustainable social development both in Finland and internationally. We speak for the most vulnerable people and make their voices heard in communications and influencing.

The climate sustainability policy aims at identifying harmful operating models and eliminating or reducing their impacts by enhancing operating practices; utilising new practices, technologies and materials; or changing actual activities, while securing the organisation's basic operations. The policy steers the sustainability of the organisation's **own activities, climate change adaptation and preparedness work** and **communication and influencing concerning climate change**, in particular.

Climate sustainability in our own operations

Reducing emissions and decreasing the environmental impact of our own activities is a task shared by the organisation as a whole. The Finnish Red Cross sets specific targets for reducing the environmental impacts and emissions of its own activities and commits to measuring their implementation at central administration and district level. To achieve these objectives, the Finnish Red Cross will, for example, be digitalising its operations, exploiting fossil-free energy sources and favouring the circular economy. The headquarters and districts, as well as their institutions, monitor the effects in different areas, including waste and material streams; the environmental impacts of meetings, training and other events; the climate footprint of travel; and the effects of procurement chains and logistics. These are also themes suitable for the activities of branches.

There are differences in the possibilities of branches to influence emissions from travel, for example, but the objectives of the policy also apply to the activities of the branches. Good practices can be promoted at branch level, which at best increases both the sustainability of activities and the various opportunities for participation, including through digital means. It is important to identify existing good practices and share them between branches.

The Finnish Red Cross *calculates and monitors the adverse environmental and climate impacts of activities and sets targets for their reduction*. Shared, standardised calculation tools developed by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement will be utilised in this work. The aim is to reduce emissions. Specific emission reduction targets and timetables, the achievement of which will be monitored annually, will be set on the basis of emission baseline values.

Taking environmental impacts into account is also part of humanitarian aid, but saving human lives, alleviating human suffering, limiting damage and responding to people's protection and support needs are prioritised. Shared assessment models and tools of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement will be applied in environmental impact assessment work. Every effort shall be made to avoid the adverse environmental and climate impacts of activities in order to prevent any harm to the communities and persons that need aid.

The Finnish Red Cross handles *its financial resources responsibly, openly and transparently*. Responsibility for capital is assumed through ethical investments that do not conflict with human rights or international sustainable development commitments. The investment plan approved by the Board of the organisation takes climate change into account, and the Finnish Red Cross adheres to the principles of responsible investment.

The environmental sustainability of fundraising products will be taken into account in procurement. The objective is to source products as locally as possible and favour products made of recycled materials, for example.

Before concluding business partnerships and agreements concerning donations, the suitability of a potential partner shall be reviewed in accordance with the IFRC process (Due Diligence Assessment Procedure for Corporate Partnership) and the partner shall be asked to fill in the Finnish Red Cross Corporate Self Screening form for 2021. Both contain points related to environmental sustainability.

Climate change adaptation and preparedness work

Climate change will bring challenges and increase the need for assistance in Finland, too. Responding to these requires raising awareness of weather and climate risks and the means to adapt to change. Adapting involves both long-term preparedness and preparedness for sudden crises. As climate change progresses, extreme weather phenomena, for example, are increasing in frequency and severity. The consequences of climate change are forcing people to move around the world, and this may also be reflected in increasing migration to Finland, thus increasing the need for assistance and protection.

Key threats from the point of view of the aid operations of the Finnish Red Cross include long heat waves, floods and severe storms. Floods are increasingly causing problems in the autumn and winter. Increases in precipitation in the winter months can lead to difficult snow situations, which can cause accidents and sever traffic connections. During the summer season, the risk of forest fires increases due to drought.

The challenges posed by climate change increase the role of the Finnish Red Cross as an active operator on national, regional and local levels. It is important that climate change adaptation and preparedness plans are drawn up at different levels to enable the organisation to actively strengthen adaptation capacity, preparedness and everyday security in Finland.

As part of climate change adaptation, it is important to recognise the Finnish Red Cross's special role in assisting the authorities. The Finnish Red Cross is working in constant cooperation with the likes of municipalities, public authorities and water companies and through voluntary rescue services (Vapepa). Strengthening cooperation and continuous training is important in order to maintain competence. Communication and action by the Red Cross also encourages authorities and other actors to address the need for assistance caused by the climate crisis.

Promoting and developing good practices is an important part of preparedness and preparedness planning. It is important to include tasks related to extreme weather phenomena increased by climate change, as well as the impacts of climate change on preparedness for other crises, in preparedness drills and ensure the organisation's functional capacity in new types of exceptional situations.

Communications and influence

The Finnish Red Cross helps both the general public and decision-makers understand how climate change affects living conditions, especially in the world's poorest countries. The Finnish Red Cross's international work and its results, including in disaster preparedness, proactive action and climate change adaptation, will be utilised in the organisation's communications. Communications strengthen the status of the Red Cross as an advocate for the most vulnerable people and as a climate change operator. Our communications on our actions focus on the point of view of preparing for and adapting to the effects of climate change.

Communication and influence strengthen the role and opportunities of the Finnish Red Cross to prevent, prepare for and respond to disasters caused by climate change. Communication increases people's awareness of weather and climate risks and adaptation opportunities. Decision-makers are influenced to direct flexible and climate-wise funding to adaptation measures and to the most vulnerable countries. The Finnish Red Cross also invites people to participate: both to support the work of the Red Cross and to make a difference in their own communities. On a global scale, volunteers play a key role in verifying and responding to the effects of climate change and, therefore, in raising awareness of climate change.

Emissions offsetting

Given the nature of the activities of the Finnish Red Cross, it is likely that despite the measures we take, the carbon neutrality target of the policy will require offsetting for the remaining emissions. In order to assess the need for and scale of greenhouse gas emission offsetting, it must be possible to assess emissions using calculation methods developed by the Finnish Red Cross in cooperation with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It is important to define principles and criteria for offsetting, whether they are projects in the target countries, increasing domestic carbon sinks or environmental investments.

When the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement adopts a common policy on emission offsetting, the Finnish Red Cross will adopt the policy as well. With emission calculations, the cost of this policy can also be estimated.

Application and implementation of the policy

The entire organisation has adopted the climate sustainability policy. *The policy encourages and supports everyone involved in the actions of the Finnish Red Cross to assess the climate impacts of the activities, make emissions reduction decisions and, if necessary, change their operating models.* The policy also applies to international cooperation between the Finnish Red Cross and its sister associations, the IFRC and the ICRC. The Finnish Red Cross will also share the policy with its partners and promote the achievement of the policy objectives through partnerships with other organisations, companies and science and research institutes.

The management of the organisation is responsible for the implementation of the policy. The implementation of the policy is part of the organisation's operational planning, which is decided on by the Board of the Finnish Red Cross, district boards and institution directorates. The policy will also be taken into account in branch and district action plans and in the agreements with partners and subcontractors.

An updated plan with timetables and objectives will be prepared to support the implementation of the policy. Tangible emission reduction targets and means are an integral part of the implementation plan. The implementation is reported as part of the organisation's annual reporting. The other updated guidelines and rules of the organisation support the implementation of the policy and should not conflict with the *do no significant harm policy* concerning climate sustainability. A compilation of the key guidelines will be drafted. Branches will make use of the guidelines concerning the headquarters and the districts where applicable. Some instructions, such as procurement and travel instructions, apply to all the organisational units in their entirety.

The Finnish Red Cross is actively engaging the organisation as a whole in the continuous development of the policy, guidelines and activities. The Finnish Red Cross will also promote discussion on the policy and its objectives as part of its activities with volunteers and interest groups.

The Finnish Red Cross will ensure that the organisation has resources, the necessary tools and support for the implementation of the policy and that the policy is well known throughout the organisation. The policy and its implementation will be evaluated regularly.