



PROMOTING SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL BLOOD SYSTEMS POLICY

June 2022

THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT MOVEMENT

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

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Promoting Safe and Sustainable National Blood Systems Policy

INTRODUCTION

Blood safety is a critical underpinning for safe blood transfusion and health systems. People in all countries have a right to expect that the blood and blood products supplied to them are collected, processed and provided in a safe and sustainable way that supports their communities and health systems.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) recognises that health security is a fundamental and indispensable prerequisite to global, national and individual development and it supports the advancement of global health security by promoting voluntary non-remunerated blood donation (VNRBD), and advocating for the safe provision of blood and products¹.

While the World Health Organisation (WHO) recognises that it is the ultimate responsibility of governments to ensure a safe and adequate supply of blood², National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in many countries, as auxiliaries to their governments, play an important role in promoting safe and sustainable blood programmes.

Many models exist for a nation's blood supply; National Society activities range from providing the national blood service to systematic recruitment of voluntary blood donors to promoting blood donation and advocacy for VNRBD and, for example, annual participation in World Blood Donor Day. In addition, National Societies may operate in concert with other blood providers, such as government and private entities.

SCOPE

This policy applies to the IFRC network and The Global Advisory Panel on Corporate Governance and Risk Management of Blood Services in Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and sets out their position on advancing health security through safe and sustainable blood systems. This policy replaces the *Promoting Safe and Sustainable National Blood Systems* policy adopted by the IFRC General Assembly in 2011 and updated in 2015 in accordance with the revision requirement stated in the original 2011 policy. The policy will be reviewed regularly and at the latest by IFRC General Assembly in 2029. In addition, it can be revised when requested by either GAP or the IFRC.

1. *Strategy 2030*, IFRC Plan and Budget 2021-2025 p 14, IFRC
2. *Blood Safety*, Aide-Memoire for National Blood programme, WHO, 2011

STATEMENT

Importance of safe blood programmes

It is recognised that a sufficient supply of safe blood and blood components based on voluntary non-remunerated blood donation (VNRBD), and the security of that supply, are important national goals to prevent blood shortages and meet the transfusion needs of the patient population³. In addition, the availability of safe blood contributes directly to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3 – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.⁴ VNRBD was enshrined as a fundamental principle of blood service when the 1975 World Health Assembly (WHA) resolution called for member states to “promote the development of national blood services based upon the voluntary non-remunerated donation of blood”⁵.

Sustainable and quality blood services play a critical role in the health of any society. The unavailability of safe blood can lead to serious health consequences such as death from haemorrhage or the transmission of life-threatening infections like HIV, hepatitis B and C, syphilis and other infections. Therefore, it is paramount that patients have equitable access to safe transfusion based on their clinical needs and that the safety of the donor and patient is a priority. The IFRC network promotes equity, access, quality and safety of blood and blood components so that citizens can have confidence in the security and integrity of their blood system.

In terms of disaster preparedness, the existence of a quality blood service is critical. While the availability of blood could be a significant concern in a disaster, safety is always of paramount concern in any emergency or disaster response. Therefore, National Societies should have plans in place to provide rapid response in emergencies and for the post-disaster reconstruction of blood transfusion services.

While the benefits of blood transfusion are widely acknowledged, there are also some inherent risks in the blood donation and transfusion processes. The risks of blood transfusion can include exposure to transfusion-transmitted infections such as HIV. To efficiently manage the risks of blood donation and transfusion, blood services must remain vigilant against new threats to the blood supply and ensure that appropriate donor screening and quality management processes are in place.

National Society engagement in blood programmes

While it is the responsibility of a country’s government to ensure an adequate and safe blood supply, many National Societies play an essential role in supporting their government to achieve this objective.

National Societies may be involved in blood-related activities at three levels:

Category A: Full blood services (collecting, testing, processing, distribution)

Category B: Systematic recruitment of blood donors to a blood service (the blood service may or may not be a Red Cross or Red Crescent service)

Category C: Promotion and advocacy of VNRBD

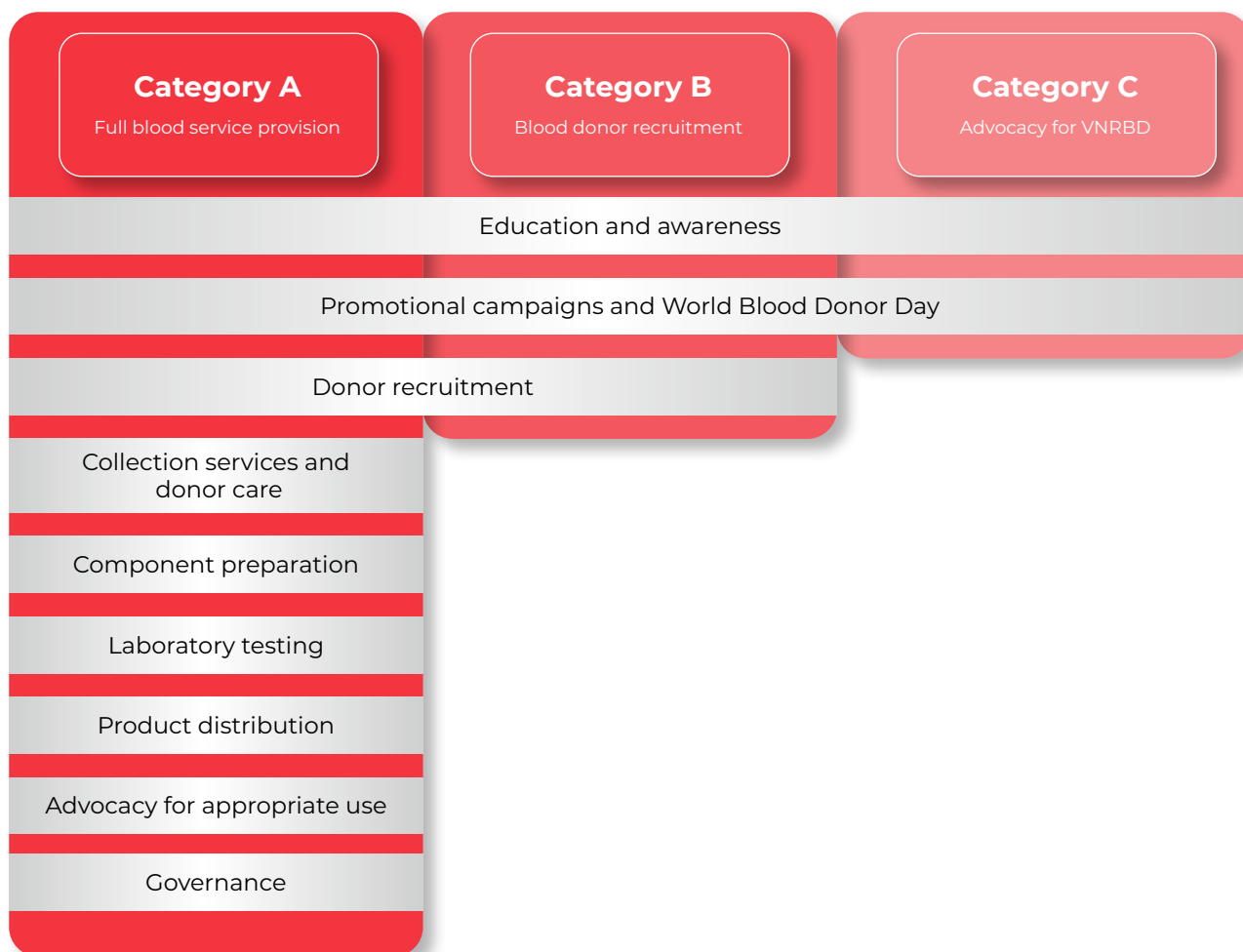
3. Availability, safety and quality of blood products, World Health Assembly Resolution 63.12, World Health Assembly, 2010.

4. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>, UN NY USA, 2015

5. Utilization and supply of human blood and blood products, World Health Assembly Resolution 28.72, 1975. This principle was reasserted again by the WHA in 2005 (WHA58.13) and 2010 (WHA28.72)

These levels are reflected in the figure below.

Figure 1: Red Cross/Red Crescent role in blood programme activities



Characteristics of well-functioning Red Cross Red Crescent blood programmes

Different capacity and risk management requirements characterise each Category of National Society involvement in blood services. While Category A requires the most resources and has the highest level of risk, a well run National Society blood service can contribute enormously to the health and well-being of the community in which it is based. However, all National Societies can contribute to developing a safe and sustainable blood system through the advocacy and promotion of VNRBD.

For a complete description of the characteristics of each Category, please refer to the Global Advisory Panel on Corporate Governance and Risk Management of Blood Services in Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (GAP) Blood Manual 'Development of Safe and Sustainable Blood Programmes'⁶. A summary of the main characteristics of a well-functioning Category A or B blood programme is provided below.

6. GAP Blood Manual, https://globaladvisorypanel.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/GAP-Blood-Program-Manual-2021_final.pdf, Global Advisory Panel, Australia, 2021.

For both Categories A and B:

- Systems are in place to protect the health and well-being of the donor and recipient. A national blood policy is in place and reflects WHO recommendations, including VNRBD, and a legislative framework supports it.
- The blood programme is integrated into a national health policy and plan.
- The allocation of roles and responsibilities between the government, the blood programme, and the National Society reflect the overall responsibility of the government to ensure an adequate and safe blood supply and are formally documented in a service agreement.
- Long-term and sustainable funding allows the blood programme to:
 - ✎ meet operational and regulatory requirements with regards to facilities, supplies, equipment and trained staff and volunteers; and
 - ✎ implement appropriate donor care and risk management systems leading to high quality, safe and effective blood products.
- The blood programme is nationally coordinated to ensure uniformity of standards and cost- efficiency.
- Donor selection criteria are in place to identify low-risk donors, and counselling is provided in deferral cases.
- There is a risk management framework to identify, prioritise and manage risks.

At Category A:

- The National Society has secured adequate funding and government protection/indemnity and/or insurance cover for its blood service activities, including clinical advice.
- The National Society assures that adequate external assessments are conducted regularly to ensure that the blood service operates under the necessary quality assurance programme and adheres to a national regulatory framework based upon internationally recognised standards.
- The blood service is involved in collaborations and partnerships to ensure a safe and adequate blood supply and appropriate product use.

At Category B:

- The blood service to which the National Society recruits donors for operates under a quality assurance programme and adheres to a national regulatory framework based upon internationally recognised standards.
- There are agreements in place whereby the roles and responsibilities of the National Societies and the blood service are clearly defined.

Therefore, it is important that National Societies carefully consider their level of involvement in blood activities. If contemplating a commitment to undertake Category A activities, the National Society needs to consider all aspects of a sustainable and quality programme and:

1

Should have a clear mandate from their government to do so.

2

Should have the capacity to adhere to regulatory requirements and implement appropriate blood safety measures.

3

Should be able to manage any legal liabilities, possibly by considering whether a separate legal entity is required to separate the assets of the National Society from the blood business. Independence with its own director, board of management and budget may also lead to increased public trust and confidence, crucial to a successful national blood programme.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The IFRC Secretariat, GAP and National Societies will engage to:

- support and advocate the principle of voluntary, non-remunerated blood donation (VNRBD)
- advocate a balanced decision-making approach to blood safety that addresses both evidence-based considerations and the precautionary principle
- promote and uphold high ethical standards, integrity and accountability consistent with the Code of Ethics for Blood Donation and Transfusion of the International Society of Blood Transfusion, as adopted by the International Conference of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 1981, and supported by the World Health Organization

National Societies have a responsibility to:

- work to ensure their governments accept their responsibility to ensure a safe and adequate blood supply within their jurisdictions
- identify their role in the overall strategy of blood service delivery in their country in accordance with their capacity, technical know-how, available resources, local priorities and in liaison with government
- promote safe, sustainable, and equitable practices in the development and administration of blood programmes
- ensure their blood programme has an adequate governance structure with a well-defined system for delegation of authority and accountability.
- support the aspiration of national self-sufficiency, including ensuring adequate blood and blood products to meet domestic health needs

- undertake Humanitarian Diplomacy as necessary to seek government action to minimise risk in blood services and to help ensure that government alerts the public to any reasonably preventable inadequacy in blood service delivery which places them at risk
- implement the GAP Self-Assessment and adhere to the Development of Safe and Sustainable National Blood Programmes Manual, which may necessitate a more detailed analysis, assessment and development of an exit strategy
- respect the confidentiality and privacy of all information relating to blood donors and blood donation
- administer any blood programme in compliance with this position; inform all staff, volunteers and blood sector partners participating in blood programmes of this position
- where practical, provide support to other National Societies and blood services in achieving a safe and sustainable blood system in ways that enable self-empowerment and long-term sustainability
- take steps in consultation with GAP and other partners to ensure that appropriate risk management measures are implemented; this includes ensuring that its senior management and governing leaders are alerted to any material risks and that appropriate action is subsequently taken
- ensure that all blood programmes comply with this policy

The IFRC Secretariat has a responsibility to:

- focus on the promotion of voluntary non-remunerated blood donation and liaise and work in close collaboration with GAP, WHO and other partners in implementing the WHO/IFRC Global Framework for action-towards 100 per cent voluntary blood donation
- share knowledge, peer to peer support and exchange information with GAP at a strategic, regional, and country-level
- ensure this policy is reviewed after five years
- work with GAP to help ensure necessary GAP resourcing
- keep – through the IFRC’s Secretary General – IFRC Governance appropriately informed of major material risks for the IFRC it becomes aware of

GAP has a responsibility to:

- share knowledge and provide advice to National Societies and their blood services on governance and management of risk associated with blood programmes, as resources allow
- ensure any lessons learned from the implementation of the GAP manual “Development of Safe and Sustainable National Blood Programmes” are incorporated into an update of the manual at the same time as the policy review, if required
- review the GAP Self Assessment questionnaire periodically to ensure it captures any emerging risks or new governance concerns for National Societies regarding their blood programme-related activities
- inform both the IFRC Secretariat and the concerned National Societies of Major Material Risks for the IFRC discovered through the GAP National Society Self-Assessment programme and any other GAP related activities.

REFERENCES

- *Decision 34, 8th session of the General Assembly, Budapest, 25-28 Nov 1991.* Voluntary non- remunerated blood donors are persons who give blood, plasma, or other blood components of their own free will and receive no payment for it, either in the form of cash or in-kind, which could be considered a substitute for money. This includes time off work, other than reasonably needed for the donation and travel. Small tokens, refreshments and reimbursement of direct travel costs are compatible with the voluntary, non-remunerated donation
- *Code of Ethics for Blood Donation and Transfusion.* International Society of Blood Transfusion, General Assembly, Montreal, 1980 and XXIVth International Conference of the Red Cross, Manila, 1981.
- Code of Ethics for Blood Donation and Transfusion. International Society of Blood Transfusion, General Assembly, 12 July 2000; amended by the ISBT General Assembly, 5 September 2006.
- Decision 36, Blood Quality Programme. Seville, Spain: 11th Session of the General Assembly, November 1997.
- Melbourne Declaration 2009, arising from WHO/IFRC global consultation on 100 per cent VNRBD whereby participants (more than 65 experts in transfusion medicine, policymakers, government and non-government representatives from 38 countries across WHO/IFRC regions) agreed, *inter alia*, to work in collaboration in international efforts to promote safe and sustainable VNRBD programmes that foster community engagement and benefit the recipients of blood and blood products.
- Decision, World Health Assembly, 2010, *availability, safety and quality of blood products* (WHA63:12)
- Towards 100% Voluntary Blood Donation: A Global Framework for Action. World Health Organisation and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva, 2010.
- Strategy 2030, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Geneva, 2018.



The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)

is the world's largest humanitarian network, with 192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and around 14 million volunteers. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives, and have opportunities to thrive.

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Address: Chemin des Crêts 17, Petit-Saconnex, 1209 Geneva, Switzerland

Postal address: P.O. Box 303, 1211 Geneva 19, Switzerland

T +41 (0)22 730 42 22 | **F** +41 (0)22 730 42 00 | **E** secretariat@ifrc.org | **W** ifrc.org

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