

Response Policy

Norwegian Refugee Council



Response Policy

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Cover photo: Tom Peyre-Costa/NRC

Tillabéri region, Niger, February 2022: Rayowa writing on her chalkboard during a second-grade lesson.

To address the high level of stress among children, improve learning and restore hope, the Norwegian Refugee Council has implemented our Better Learning Programme. A psychosocial support programme in education involving over 5,700 children aged between six and 14 in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali.

CONTENTS

1 WHAT IS THE RESPONSE POLICY?	4
2 WHERE AND WITH WHOM WE WORK.....	5
3 THE CHANGE WE WANT TO SEE.....	6
4 HOW WE RESPOND.....	7
4.1 Advocacy	7
4.2 Our core competencies.....	8
4.2.1 Information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA)	9
4.2.2 Education.....	10
4.2.3 Livelihoods and food security (LFS)	11
4.2.4 Protection from violence	12
4.2.5 Shelter and settlements	14
4.2.6 Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).....	15
4.3 Our quality commitments.....	16
5 OPERATIONALISING THE POLICY	17

1 What is the Response Policy?

NRC's Response Policy builds upon the [NRC Policy](#) and is the primary governance paper for NRC's response across programmes and advocacy.

It sets the direction and intent that frame how NRC teams are expected to design and implement their responses, and lays the foundation for all internal procedures, systems, guidance and tools necessary for a comprehensive response.

It does not include NORCAP and the expertise we provide as a strategic standby partner.



Bangladesh: The aftermath of a fire in Cox's Bazaar camp. Barbed wire fencing between camps has made it harder for refugees to escape fires. NRC seeks to improve conditions in the camps through advocacy and programme interventions. Photo: Imrul Islam/NRC

2 Where and with whom we work

NRC is an international humanitarian organisation, focusing on displacement. We engage in a crisis when local and national actors – the primary responders in any crisis – are unable or unwilling to respond.

We primarily work in contexts affected by armed conflict and violence, prioritising communities that are hard-to-reach. We can also respond in other situations, where our expertise adds value.¹

We support populations or people affected by displacement. For NRC, populations and people affected by displacement include internally displaced people (IDPs), refugees, returnees, people at risk of displacement and people who are unable to flee (either because they lack the means or ability to do so or because they are being obstructed). Given the important role that host communities have in supporting displaced people and in contributing to durable solutions, we also include members of host communities in our programmes.

NRC primarily works in situations of armed conflict, providing assistance, protection and concrete solutions. In some countries where we operate, we also support people affected by displacement as a result of disasters caused by natural hazards, the adverse effects of climate change and generalised violence. We also include vulnerable migrants in some contexts.

We recognise that people affected by displacement are a diverse group. Therefore, we tailor our responses to suit different needs and take appropriate measures to ensure no-one is excluded from our programmes.

Working on displacement, both addressing immediate emergency needs and finding longer term solutions, we work across the humanitarian-development nexus.

¹ Decisions related to where we engage and when we exit are guided by our start-up and exit criteria.

3 The change we want to see

We design our responses to support displacement-affected people to:

Be safe and cover their basic needs after a shock or in an ongoing crisis	Remove displacement-related barriers to exercise their rights	Become self-reliant and find durable solutions to their displacement
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We have specialised in providing solutions to ensure that displacement-affected people can exercise their rights across all phases of displacement, with particular focus on:



We contribute towards the Sustainable Development Goals and see our role in these – and other initiatives aimed at promoting economic, social and environmental development – as removing the barriers that displacement-affected communities face in accessing their rights and benefitting from these efforts. We aim to ensure no-one is left behind.

4 How we respond

We respond to needs in a holistic manner using programmatic and advocacy approaches, partnering and collaborating with others to achieve the most impact.

In our response, we adhere to the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

Rights are at the core of what we do. We use available legal frameworks and actively advocate towards states, parties to conflict and local authorities to uphold their legal obligations towards people affected by displacement.

We actively seek to understand the challenges people affected by displacement face, the systems that influence their situations, and what solutions would address their challenges and improve their lives. This understanding informs our advocacy and programmes.

The people we work with are at the centre of our response and we design, implement and evaluate our responses together. We provide our services directly as well as in collaboration with partners.

4.1 Advocacy

Advocacy is an integral part of NRC's response. We identify barriers that prevent people from realising their rights and being safe, and we take action to influence people in power to change laws, policies and practices.

We advocate for access to aid and protection, and for the removal of barriers to self-reliance and durable solutions. We work to address the political factors that create or sustain displacement and push the humanitarian system to remain principled and become more efficient, effective and accountable.

We base our advocacy on evidence, including from our own programmes, field presences, thought leadership and policy analysis. We are guided by people's expressed needs and experiences. We focus on solutions.

We advocate directly with decision-makers nationally, regionally and globally, including through our presence in key capitals and multilateral forums. We engage with all parties to armed conflict, including non-state armed groups.

We speak out publicly to shed light on the challenges people face and to amplify their views and concerns, using traditional and social media.

We work in partnership with other organisations, both international and local. We seek to convene, coordinate and mobilise the humanitarian sector in advocacy efforts and invest in mechanisms for supporting joint advocacy. We engage in and lead coordination mechanisms and networks at national, regional and global levels to maximise our impact.

4.2 Our core competencies

We have specialised within six key areas, which we refer to as our core competencies. We have chosen these six based on our knowledge of the challenges displacement-affected people commonly face, and the role played by local communities, organisations, governments and other international aid providers. We integrate our core competencies to provide a comprehensive package of services for displacement-affected people. This is where we have (and continue to build) expertise, and where we believe we add value.

Education	Information, counselling and legal assistance	Livelihoods and food security
Protection from violence	Shelter and settlements	Water, sanitation and hygiene



Jordan, 2022: NRC team talking to Syrian refugees about the legal services we offer. Photo: Tina Abu Hanna/NRC

4.2.1 Information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA)

People affected by displacement frequently lose access to a range of rights and services. They are often at risk of being repeatedly displaced and face obstacles to securing a legal stay in the location they have fled to and finding a durable solution to their displacement. Legal and institutional frameworks, whether statutory, customary or religious, can either provoke and perpetuate displacement and discrimination or serve as instruments of protection, empowerment and durable solutions. NRC assists displacement-affected people to understand and navigate these frameworks, so they can exercise their rights.

Our expertise

NRC assists displacement-affected people to access justice and essential services, obtain documentation, secure a legal stay in the country they have fled to (or in a third location), claim decent employment conditions, and have their land and property rights secured or restored.

We support people through information, counselling, legal assistance, collaborative dispute resolution, capacity building and advocacy. We use judicial or administrative remedies as well as customary or religious mechanisms, as required by the context. We respect the national and international standards of the legal profession.

NRC may engage in public interest cases to create a positive impact for more individuals or generate positive structural changes as well as international litigation mechanisms when domestic remedies have been exhausted or are ineffective. We also advocate at all levels, including international bodies, to promote policy change and respect for the rights of displacement-affected people. We use our expertise to remove the legal barriers faced by displacement-affected people when accessing NRC's services and those of other service providers. Our activities promote access to justice, and understanding and respect for the rights of displacement-affected people and the obligations of duty-bearers under international and national law.



Empowerment to exercise rights

What we do

- housing, land and property (HLP) rights
- legal identity and its enabling role for rights and services, including the prevention of statelessness
- legal stay, including refugee status, residency and other relevant protection mechanisms
- government legal procedures and policies for registration of IDPs
- employment laws and procedures
- removing legal barriers to accessing essential services

4.2.2 Education

Displacement has a devastating impact on learning, and often leads to education being interrupted or even denied. Children and youth suffer from traumatic events and a loss of the social networks that provide protection and support. The capacity of education systems to deliver quality education is often significantly reduced during conflict, and host communities often struggle to integrate displaced children in existing educational facilities and systems. NRC aims to ensure that all displacement-affected children and youth enjoy high-quality, safe and inclusive learning opportunities relevant to their psychosocial, emotional and cognitive development and needs.

Our expertise

NRC assists displacement-affected children between six and 18 years old and youth between 15 and 24 years old (depending on the context) to exercise their right to education and enhance their wellbeing. We have a particular focus on those who are out-of-school or have had their education interrupted. We support them in completing a full cycle of education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

From the onset of an emergency, children and youth are provided with education that prepares them for transition into longer-term learning pathways. We promote and support the transition and inclusion of IDP and refugee children and youth into formal education systems, so they benefit from an accredited education. Recognising that governments are the primary duty-bearer, we support them to uphold their duties, including through teacher professional development and curriculum development. Teacher professional development is key to achieving quality education through the provision of continuous training, follow-up and fair compensation.

As not all children and youth are able to participate in formal education, we provide flexible, and, if possible, accredited non-formal education opportunities relevant to children's individual learning needs. We provide youth with opportunities for post-primary education, including technical, vocational and tertiary education, supporting them to engage meaningfully in their communities and access livelihood opportunities. We actively use advocacy to influence policies and systems enabling or blocking learning opportunities for displacement-affected children.



Education and wellbeing for children and youth

What we do

- protective education in acute emergencies
- classroom-based psychosocial support
- provision of non-formal education to facilitate transition to formal accredited education, and support to the formal education system

- provision of education and training, engagement and livelihood opportunities for youth

Contributions from other sectors

- removing legal barriers to accessing formal education (ICLA)
- construction or rehabilitation of schools (Shelter)
- supporting attendance and learning through school feeding and gardening (LFS)
- access to water, sanitation and hygiene in schools (WASH)
- access to livelihood and job opportunities for youth (LFS)

4.2.3 Livelihoods and food security (LFS)

During conflicts, disasters and displacement, food production and market systems face potential collapse. People lose their assets, and their ability to earn a living is disrupted. Refugees face an additional challenge, as they often do not have the right to work in the countries that they flee to. NRC works to ensure that displacement-affected people can exercise their right to an adequate standard of living, including access to healthy food and livelihoods protection.

Our expertise

Our responses aim to ensure displacement-affected people have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. NRC provides food assistance in emergencies to prevent loss of life and to keep people above the survival threshold. Where possible, this is achieved using market-based approaches. In collaboration with local actors, NRC supports and facilitates the re-establishment and/or strengthening of local food, agriculture and market systems where these have been affected by conflict or disasters, and does not establish parallel structures that will distort the existing systems and markets.

NRC is an enabler, facilitating livelihood strategies that protect, recover and strengthen people's abilities to earn a living and be financially included. Our approach requires extensive collaboration with stakeholders from the private sector, local authorities and civil society. Securing the right to work and workers' rights is fundamental in NRC's response. We promote social integration and provide access to knowledge and skills that are relevant for the labour market.

Adequate
standard of
living
including
access to
healthy food
and
livelihoods

We also promote self-reliance in an integrated manner as a preparatory step towards greater inclusion and when possible, durable solutions, and we strengthen the resilience of displacement-affected people to withstand shocks and stresses related to climate change and environmental degradation.

What we do

- food assistance to keep people above the survival threshold
- help restore or strengthen food, agriculture and market systems
- facilitate access to employment and self-employment
- financial inclusion for displaced people, as a step towards self-reliance

Contributions from other sectors

- access to energy, housing and a place to run a business (Shelter)
- access to clean and safe water for food preparation, and sustainable water sources for agricultural, pastoral and economic use (WASH)
- housing, land and property (HLP) rights and the right to work are secured to support livelihoods and production (incl. land for agriculture) (ICLA)
- school feeding and school gardening (Education)
- access to livelihood and job opportunities for youth (Education)

4.2.4 Protection from violence

People affected by displacement frequently face direct threats of physical violence, exploitation, forced recruitment and kidnapping. Many people are at risk of being harmed indirectly during armed conflict, when tensions arise between or within communities, or when they are forced to flee. NRC supports people affected by displacement to enjoy their right to freedom from violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation across all phases of displacement.

Our expertise

We seek to prevent or mitigate the consequences of violence. In particular, we work with communities facing an imminent protection threat, contributing our knowledge, expertise and voice, when requested by the community, to promote and support protection efforts led and coordinated by the communities themselves.

Freedom from
violence,
coercion and
deliberate
deprivation

Where violence does occur, we seek to mitigate the harm through dedicated support to individuals, coordinated through a case management approach or through provision of individual assistance.

We prioritise response services, approaches and advocacy that directly address protection threats and risks, and that promote social inclusion pathways to self-reliance.

We also support actors working in the same geographical area to coordinate and monitor safe and principled assistance and protection from violence, in line with priorities set by the community. This includes supporting and leveraging the formal humanitarian coordination system, and where required, assuming leadership roles within it.

We combine protection monitoring and other sector-specific monitoring and analysis to develop comprehensive programme strategies. We combine site planning, site management and community engagement to deliver coordinated camp and urban displacement responses. And we combine individual and sector-specific assistance with case management to ensure individuals receive the comprehensive support necessary to restore their safety.

We also contribute to child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) prevention initiatives, when this is part of a broader civilian self-protection effort. We refer and assist people who need specialised child protection and GBV services to access other specialised service providers.

What we do

- humanitarian mediation
- protection case management and individual protection assistance
- support to civilian self-protection
- site management and community coordination

Contributions from other sectors

- access to basic services reduces reliance on harmful or negative coping strategies and risks of exploitation (WASH, LFS, Shelter, Education)
- access to documentation and legal protections can facilitate access for people who would otherwise be deliberately deprived of basic services (ICLA)
- psychosocial support through our Better Learning Programme reduces psychosocial distress and strengthens resilience, both preventing and mitigating children's and families' exposure to violence (Education)

4.2.5 Shelter and settlements

Displacement-affected people have often been forced to leave their homes behind or have seen their homes destroyed. Many are struggling to find a safe place to stay and are left without the social network of their original village or neighbourhood. People who have lost access to housing and their community are exposed to numerous protection risks – the weather, illnesses, violence – and often have no access to infrastructure, basic services or energy. NRC supports people to exercise their right to adequate housing within safe and healthy settlements.

Our expertise

NRC provides temporary, transitional and permanent housing solutions, community infrastructure, access to clean energy, and learning spaces.

We work to ensure that displacement-affected people have the best possible shelter and settlement conditions across the different phases of displacement. We take guidance from them on what they believe makes a shelter a home and how to transform their settlements into a community.

We consider both the home itself and the wider area or habitat where people live (camp, neighbourhood, village), to ensure they have healthy homes with access to basic services including water, sanitation and education, as well as livelihood opportunities and resilient communities. We identify and develop solutions that meet shelter needs and benefit local market systems while meeting standards, and we advocate across the wider sector to encourage best practice.

We ensure meaningful shelter outcomes through complimentary activities such as participatory design, training, and understanding behaviour change to address local, cultural and environmental practices. We ensure that shelter solutions take environmental impact into account, have structural integrity, and are safe, secure, and sustainable.



Adequate housing in safe and healthy settlements

What we do

- life-saving emergency shelter and essential household items
- transitional and permanent shelter
- community infrastructure – including schools
- access to clean energy in the home and community
- Market system interventions and cash and voucher assistance, such as rental programmes

Contributions from other sectors

- displacement-affected people have access to water, sanitation and hygiene inside the home and in the community (WASH)
- housing, land and property rights and due diligence are integrated in all our work to protect people from eviction or further displacement (ICLA)
- protection risks are addressed in relation to accessing emergency shelters and increased community engagement both inside and outside of camps and displacement sites (Protection from violence)
- rental market interventions help people transition to self-reliance through livelihood activities (LFS)

4.2.6 Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

For displacement-affected people, access to clean water and appropriate sanitation facilities is among the most urgent of all needs. Without enough safe water for drinking, cooking and personal hygiene, it is difficult to maintain good health and fight off illness. Without proper sanitation, water supplies can become contaminated and disease can spread rapidly. NRC works to ensure that displacement-affected people have access to dignified, durable public health WASH solutions.

Our expertise

NRC seeks to save lives, prevent diseases, promote dignity and support access to livelihood opportunities, helping to meet emergency temporary needs and facilitate sustainable solutions. Working together with communities, we focus on the delivery of, and equal access to, a sufficient quantity of safe water and the provision of contextually appropriate sanitation and hygiene services.

To maximise the public health impact, we provide these services as a package. Facilities are sex-segregated, accessible and designed in an inclusive way, ensuring dignified and meaningful access for all, and reflecting the wider cultural, social and economic aspects of hygiene practices. Behaviour change approaches that address identified poor hygiene behaviours is key: we do not follow a blanket approach to hygiene promotion, but instead target our messaging.

We use approaches that manage water resources responsibly and prioritise the solar supply of water whenever feasible. The long-term impact of our work is considered from the outset. We use a phased approach to transition towards sustainable solutions, decreasing dependence on short-term response actors in favour of government, the private sector and communities – building and strengthening governance structures and systems, particularly in relation to water service delivery. Using market systems to find WASH solutions is our default response, and needs to be ruled out before we consider pursuing alternative approaches.



Dignified,
sustainable
public health
solutions

NRC works to ensure access to WASH across our responses, in the schools, homes and settlements we support. We focus on understanding land and water rights, leading to safe and sustainable WASH interventions. We work to ensure access to sustainable water sources for agricultural, pastoral and economic use, and provide hygiene education to help form healthy, lasting behaviours.

What we do

- positive and lasting hygiene behaviour change
- safe water for drinking, cooking, personal hygiene and domestic use
- safe sanitation facilities for all
- land and water rights: identification and protection of people's rights for safe access to WASH services
- better learning outcomes in schools through integrated education/WASH

Contributions from other sectors

- focus on understanding land and water rights in our interventions, leading to safe and sustainable WASH interventions (HLP/ ICLA)
- a healthy environment at the household level through the provision of healthy living space and essential household items (Shelter)

4.3 Our quality commitments

Across our global responses, we adhere to the following internationally recognised standards: [SPHERE](#), the [Core Humanitarian Standard](#) and the [Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies \(INEE\) Minimum Standards](#) for education.

NRC aims to use cash and voucher assistance (CVA) every time it is the most appropriate option for the context and NRC's programme objectives. In addition, we perform due diligence related to housing, land and property rights, and design our responses in a way that ensures environmental sustainability and reduces our carbon footprint.

NRC has established internal sectoral quality standards for each of its core competencies, building on these internationally recognised standards. Core to these are NRC's Safe and Inclusive Programming minimum standards.

5 Operationalising the policy

We operationalise the policy through our frameworks for quality, risk and compliance, monitoring and evaluation, and project cycle management, providing teams and partners with tools and guidance materials on how to do it in practice.

Programmatic areas of work that are not mentioned in the policy are to be considered off-policy, as are approaches that contradict its content. These can only take place with explicit authorisation from the Executive Director of Field Operations.

Compliance to the policy is the responsibility of NRC's Country Directors, with Regional Directors providing an oversight role.

Areas for compliance improvement that are identified through our monitoring and evaluation and risk and compliance systems must be acted upon.

If the risk of doing harm is significant, action should be taken promptly. Follow-up on agreed action points is tracked through internal accountability processes between countries and regions, and between regions and head office on a trimestral basis.

Lack of compliance on issues that are assessed to present a lower risk of doing harm, and that require systemic change, should be fed into country, regional and/or global strategy processes.

The custodians of the policy are the Global Programme Director for programmes and the Advocacy and Media Director for advocacy. They can trigger external evaluations, quality assessments and country office visits to conduct spot checks to monitor and ensure compliance to the policy.

We continually seek to improve the quality and relevance of our responses. Please see the NRC Global Strategy and supporting roadmaps for where we are currently focusing our efforts across the organisation. For development areas within each of the core competencies, please refer to the CC development strategies.