

Humanitarian Diplomacy in Practice Learning Review

Terms of Reference | November 2025

1 OVERALL CONTEXT

In recent years, humanitarian crises have continued to worsen as conflict and displacement have risen to ever concerning levels, whilst humanitarian financing and resources have been dramatically constrained. In parallel, increasingly complex and multipolar geopolitics have seen humanitarian access and resources more overtly instrumentalised, international humanitarian laws and norms less respected, and political efforts to prevent and end conflicts less successful.

Against this backdrop, there has been increased focus in recent years on the importance and value of humanitarian diplomacy – an approach that aims to support the achievement of humanitarian goals through state-to-state diplomatic initiatives and channels across a broad set of actors. Whilst not new, humanitarian diplomacy has seen recent specific attention and investment across humanitarian NGOs, the UN, Red Cross-Red Crescent Movement and several States.

Literature and operational lessons on humanitarian diplomacy still remains fragmented, however, particularly in relation to practical learning of how public and private diplomacy by States can best support principled humanitarian access and civilian protection, and how humanitarian agencies of all types can effectively engage with a broad and diverse group of states across the world in support of principled access. This fragmentation and the gaps in learning are often exacerbated by definitions and understanding of humanitarian diplomacy varying significantly, by the nature of humanitarian diplomacy meaning that efforts are often undertaken in private spaces not widely spoken and written about, and by differing views on the extent to which humanitarian outcomes can - or should be - included in political spaces. These have risked limiting the potential for learning between organisations and stakeholders in a complex but critical area.

There is a pressing need to draw practical lessons from relevant humanitarian diplomacy examples and experience to inform both humanitarian organisations and States on how principled access can be supported by diplomatic efforts, particularly in increasingly politicised and contested contexts. This learning review is intended to capture and synthesise such learning through an analysis of specific examples of humanitarian diplomacy in the recent past.

2 OBJECTIVES

NRC is seeking an experienced consultant to examine practical examples of humanitarian diplomacy, drawing lessons and guiding future efforts to support those caught up in conflict and crisis. Drawing on real-world examples and existing learning, the findings will contribute to more informed, coordinated, and effective humanitarian diplomacy by offering practical and actionable recommendations for humanitarian NGOs, States and International Organisations.

The learning review is intended to achieve the following core objectives:

1. **Learning on humanitarian diplomacy** - Capture and analyse cross-cutting learning from previous successful and unsuccessful humanitarian diplomacy initiatives and efforts to inform future efforts.
2. **Recommendations and options for humanitarian diplomacy stakeholders** - Develop actionable recommendations for NGOs, States and other actors on effective humanitarian diplomacy and potential humanitarian diplomacy options that can be utilised in service of those requiring assistance. This may include for example a menu of options and common pitfalls, checklists and criteria to support decision making, and advice on issues to consider.
3. **Identification and management of risks related to humanitarian diplomacy** - Identify short- and long-term considerations, potential risks and mitigation related to humanitarian diplomacy efforts, particularly in relation to unintended politicisation of aid or harming principled access in the long term.

***Note on humanitarian diplomacy:** Definitions of humanitarian diplomacy can vary by stakeholder and agency. NRC defines humanitarian diplomacy as an approach aiming to achieve humanitarian goals through diplomatic means, by engaging key stakeholders. This review will specifically look at state-to-state diplomacy for humanitarian outcomes, along with the humanitarian engagement in and influencing of those processes.*

3 SCOPE OF WORK & KEY LEARNING QUESTIONS

To achieve the objectives, the review is intended to address the following key learning questions, with the scope to be finalised between NRC and the consultant in the inception phase. It is anticipated that the review should take a case study approach focussed on **c. 6 specific case study examples** in addition to broader literature.

- What **specific types of humanitarian diplomacy efforts** and approaches (including public and private humanitarian diplomacy) have been more successful and less successful in supporting principled humanitarian access?
- What **lessons can be drawn from these** to help inform future humanitarian diplomacy efforts, particularly to support humanitarian organisations and states with options that can be considered for a given issue/context?
- How have States and their diplomatic representatives successfully been able to **engage with and support humanitarian organisations** in facilitating principled

access and how well have humanitarian organisations been able to engage with a broad and diverse range of states for humanitarian outcomes?

- **What short- and long-term risks** are there (both real and perceived) for principled humanitarian action as a result of humanitarian diplomacy efforts, specifically illustrated through case studies – and how can these be managed. This may include risks related to humanitarian principles, reputation, unintended consequences and short-vs long term outcomes.
- **What actionable and practical recommendations** can be made for A. States; B. national/international humanitarian civil society; C. The United Nations and D. other international organisations and and Red Cross/Red Crescent movement if relevant to support more effective and systematic humanitarian diplomacy in the future that supports principled access?

4 ANTICIPATED METHODOLOGY & OUTPUTS

4.1 Inception and approach finalisation

- Refinement and finalisation of the scope, methodology, timeline, key informant questions, and intended outputs between the selected consultant and NRC.
- Agreement on c.6 selected case studies for in-depth review through the initiative, balancing the types, scale and locations of the case studies.

4.2 Research & analysis

4.2.1 Desk review

- Desk review of existing literature and learning on humanitarian diplomacy, including both publicly accessible information and internal/confidential information (provided by NRC where relevant).
- Brief desk review of other relevant literature to inform outputs, which could include learning on humanitarian access more broadly and on non-humanitarian diplomacy.

4.2.2 Stakeholder and key informant interviews

- Key informant interviews and discussions with relevant stakeholders across to capture learning and analysis relevant to humanitarian diplomacy.
- This should include a mixture of stakeholders operating at global, regional and national levels. A final agreed list of stakeholders will be developed between NRC and the consultant based on the specific case studies.
- Stakeholders which may include:
 - NRC and other NGOs
 - UN
 - Government
 - Red Cross-Red Crescent Movement
 - Governments and diplomats
 - Relevant academic/policy experts

4.2.3 Analysis and consolidation of learning and recommendations

- Analysis of cross-cutting practical lessons and considerations in line with the scope to inform draft findings and recommendations.

4.3 Validation and learning workshop

- Development of drafting findings and recommendations.
- Facilitated virtual learning and validation workshop with key NRC humanitarian diplomacy stakeholders to shape and finalise findings and recommendations.

4.4 Development & presentation of internal/external outputs

- Development of a package of learning materials, to include:
 - **Case studies** - Short (1-2 page) case studies on the selected previous humanitarian diplomacy initiative.
 - **Learning review and recommendations report** - Development of a concise internal learning review for NRC to capture learning, best practice and risks from case studies and literature.
 - **Concise, actionable and practical recommendations** for NRC's humanitarian diplomacy work globally and at regional/national/response levels. Recommendations for other relevant humanitarian diplomacy stakeholders (UN/International Organisations, NGOs, States)
- **External learning review brief** – Development of a short external version of the learning review report for non-NRC audiences and humanitarian stakeholders.
- **Policy brief and presentation** – Development and sharing of a presentation and discussion session on findings and recommendations for NRC and relevant external stakeholders.

5 TIMELINE & DELIVERABLES

The consultancy is intended to be completed between November 2025 and January 2026 over no more than 25 working days.

Phase	Deliverables	Days
1. Inception & approach finalisation	▪ Inception report	3
2. Research & analysis (desk review, interviews and analysis)	▪ Bibliography of research materials and sources	11
3. Draft findings and validation/learning workshop	▪ Presentation of draft findings and workshop agenda	4

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| 4. Development & presentation of draft and final products | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3-5 short case study briefs ▪ Internal (NRC) learning review report ▪ External learning review report ▪ Final presentation for internal/external stakeholders | 7 |
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The final timelines will be confirmed between NRC and the consultant during contracting and the inception phase.

6 MANAGEMENT & OVERSIGHT

The consultant will report to NRC's Head of Policy & Advocacy (Principled Humanitarian Action) based in Geneva for the duration of the project. It is anticipated that the review will be completed remotely.

7 CONSULTANT PROFILE

The selected candidate will be expected to fulfil the following criteria:

- At least 7 years progressive experience in humanitarian response, crisis management, diplomacy, or equivalent.
- Significant practical understanding of humanitarian diplomacy and/or humanitarian access approaches in complex crisis settings.
- Demonstrated experience in conducting learning reviews, policy analysis, action learning or relevant evaluations for humanitarian organisations.
- Significant understanding international humanitarian system, relevant policy issues, and dynamics between NGOs, the United Nations, Red Cross-Red Crescent movement and nation states.
- Excellent qualitative research and analysis skills and an ability to translate research into concise and practical recommendations.
- Very strong communication and presentation skills and fluency or very strong command of English.
- Proven ability to handle sensitive and confidential information appropriately.

8 APPLICATION PROCESS

Qualified consultants are invited to submit a complete application on or before **23:59 (Geneva time) 08 December 2025**, through the email address **ch.gvatenders@nrc.no**. The bid application should be titled '**Humanitarian Diplomacy Learning**' and include the following information:

- Curriculum vitae;
- Cover letter / Expression of Interest;

- Rates: daily consultancy rate in CHF or EUR, inclusive VAT and all charges as applicable;
- List of references that can be contacted to verify the quality of services;
- Proof of registration as a sole trader/consultant/registered company as per requirements in country of residence.

Please note: All service providers/consultants working with NRC should maintain high standards on ethical issues, respect and apply basic human and social rights, ensure non-exploitation of child labour, and give fair working conditions to their staff. NRC reserves the right to reject quotations provided by suppliers not meeting these standards. Consultants doing business with NRC will be screened on anti-corruption due diligence before NRC confirms a contract.

Anti-money laundering, anti-bribery, anti-corruption and anti-terrorism legislation and donor regulations require NRC to screen contractors against various international lists to ensure due diligence. Submission of the quotation constitutes acceptance of these screening practices.

We look forward to receiving your application!