



NUTRITION

ECONOMIC SECURITY

IN BRIEF



ICRC



M. Knowles-Courtesy/ICRC

INTRODUCTION

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) works to prevent and treat malnutrition in communities affected by armed conflict and other violence. People become malnourished for many reasons – not just because they are not eating enough nutritious food, but also because they lack health care, clean water, sanitary facilities and security and are vulnerable to illnesses that cause malnutrition. When a conflict breaks out, the

risk of malnutrition grows as important infrastructure is destroyed and essential services are disrupted, making it more difficult or impossible for people to get the food they need. And widespread malnutrition can seriously harm a country's development long after a conflict has abated. While good nutrition is important for everyone, it is particularly vital for children under the age of five and pregnant and lactating women.

Malnutrition is the result of an unbalanced intake of food – either too much (overnutrition) or too little (undernutrition). When people are undernourished, they are at risk of wasting, stunted growth and deficiencies in vitamins and minerals. That is what we work hard to prevent.

PREVENTING MALNUTRITION

When people living in conflict zones can no longer get enough to eat – for example, because they have had to flee their homes and abandon their livestock, or because the fighting has destroyed their fields – we provide emergency support. If enough nutritious food is available on the local market, we give people cash

so that they can buy what they like and need most. If not, we provide nutritionally balanced food rations.

When the threat of malnutrition is widespread, children and pregnant and lactating women may receive fortified food in addition to regular food rations or cash.

Standard ICRC food rations provide a balanced diet of 2,100 calories a day and take into consideration local dietary habits. For example, monthly rations for a household of six in the Lake Chad region consist of 60 kilograms of rice, 25 kilograms of beans, 2.5 kilograms of sugar, 10 litres of vegetable oil and one kilogram of salt.



EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

Sometimes people are malnourished not for lack of food or health care but for lack of information. We work with communities to spread behaviours that promote good nutrition. This includes raising awareness of how to feed infants and toddlers, manage a balanced diet, practise basic hygiene to prevent illnesses that cause malnutrition and spot the signs and symptoms of malnutrition.

We pass on key messages through community leaders, radio spots, drama pieces, mother-to-mother support groups and cooking demonstrations. We also educate people about nutrition alongside our other activities, such as when we distribute food and treat people for malnutrition, run animal-vaccination campaigns and install water-supply infrastructure.



TREATING MALNUTRITION

We support community management of acute malnutrition. This approach involves engaging the community in identifying people who are malnourished and referring them to a treatment centre. We specifically focus on children under five and pregnant and lactating women, who are most at risk of malnutrition.

Working with communities helps ensure that malnutrition is detected earlier and people are supported as they recover. In hospitals where ICRC surgical teams treat war-wounded patients, we provide specific nutritional support and follow-up to the patients to ensure they recover properly.



NUTRITION IN DETENTION

The ICRC has a unique mandate to ensure that all people deprived of their liberty are treated humanely, which includes preventing and treating malnutrition. Detainees can easily become malnourished because they have no control over their diet or conditions of detention, and overcrowding and a lack of proper

sanitary facilities spread diseases that cause malnutrition. We closely track prisons' food supply chains, from the budget for feeding detainees all the way through to what people get on their plates. Wherever we identify issues that are preventing detainees from eating enough nutritious food, we take action.





J. Candon/ICRC

WHAT IS ECONOMIC SECURITY?

Economic security is the ability of individuals, households and communities to cover their essential needs and unavoidable expenses in a sustainable way. When assessing economic security, we consider people's physical requirements, the environment and cultural norms.

Essential needs include food, basic shelter, clothing and hygiene. Any expenses related to these needs are considered unavoidable, as are taxes and the costs of health care, education and the assets people need to support themselves and their families.

The ICRC's Economic Security (EcoSec) teams work to bring victims of armed conflict and other violence rapid and flexible assistance in order to meet their essential needs and unavoidable expenses in ways that are sustainable and respect their dignity.

As part of our mandate, the ICRC helps not just civilians but people deprived of their liberty too, so we also do economic security work for detainees.

We help people around the world affected by armed conflict and other violence, doing everything we can to protect their lives and dignity and to relieve their suffering, often with our Red Cross and Red Crescent partners. We also seek to prevent hardship by promoting and strengthening humanitarian law and championing universal humanitarian principles.

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