

# EVALUATION

## SUPPORT RELATIONSHIPS IN ARMED CONFLICTS INITIATIVE (SRI)-2019-2023



ICRC

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a summary of the final report of the evaluation of the Support Relationships in Armed Conflicts Initiative (SRI) for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). The evaluation was carried out from January 2023 to May 2023 by Owl RE, research and evaluation consultancy.

The ICRC launched SRI in 2019, based on a five-year strategy (2019–2023) aimed at broadening the ICRC's engagement and at reinforcing its operational, legal and policy dialogue around the support received by parties to armed conflict. The SRI approach is based on two tracks of engagement: the first through operational dialogue and the second through working with partners and allies to develop a set of practical measures/recommendations to encourage better compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL). SRI has been supported through a Head of SRI based in the Directorate of Operations, SRI focal points in ICRC delegations (35 as of mid-2023) and a coordination structure comprised of a Steering Committee and Working Group.

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach including a document review, an online survey of 29 SRI focal points, key informant interviews with 42 ICRC staff and seven external stakeholders, in addition to a review of SRI delegation profiles and action plans.

## FINDINGS

**Results:** The SRI objectives and sub-objectives, to change problematic behaviour of supported parties and ensure increasing use of practical measures/recommendations, were set at a high level and it was difficult to see significant progress to date on their achievement.

However, SRI did achieve considerable progress in completing preparatory steps and reaching initial outcomes, notably:

- Creating a comprehensive SRI framework
- Improving the analysis of supporting-supported relationships
- Reinforcing ICRC's direction, dialogue and guidance on SRI
- Influencing policies and practices of supporting States in partnering with supported States

External stakeholders were positive about SRI; ICRC's research, reflection, visibility and the resulting dialogue, publications and events had made an initial impact with States.

The use of the SRI profiles and action plans have helped integrate SRI in delegation planning; limited mainstreaming reflected the difficulties for SRI focal points to convene and motivate all relevant metiers and the difficulty to find an appropriate way to raise support relations in dialogues with some actors. The SRI products, recommendations, and analysis have been used by delegations in their dialogue with (mainly) States, with the SRI profiles and action plans assessed as being the most useful.

**Coordination:** The support provided by Geneva HQ to delegations has been highly valued and appreciated. There have been a variety of challenges in ensuring coordination between the different stakeholders involved in SRI. This has primarily been as a result of the involvement of numerous departments; differing priorities between delegations; and lack of clarity in relation to the separation of roles between the Head of SRI and Protection–Global unit (PROT\_GLOB) in Geneva. The regular focal point meetings have been helpful as a means to exchange information between delegations and Geneva HQ although the lack of strategic focus was regarded as a missed opportunity. Ensuring ownership of SRI has been complex due to the multiple departments involved. At delegation level, where dedicated SRI platforms have been created, collaborative ownership has been successful.

**Way forward:** With the upcoming completion of the project phase of SRI, a number of proposals for ensuring the continued use and relevance of outputs to date and the continued pursuit of SRI objectives were identified. These included: further mainstreaming SRI into institutional planning and programming; narrowing the scope of SRI; providing increased support to delegations implementing SRI; and ensuring that delegation management fully understand what SRI entails to ensure that it continues to be driven forward.

A challenge foreseen with the future responsibility for SRI falling under the Protection–Global HQ unit of the Department of Protection and Essential Services (PES\_PROT\_GLOB) (known prior as PROT\_GLOB) was the ability to maintain transversal momentum and the achievements to date. A number of good practices in relation to SRI were identified, depicting different approaches adopted, which have ensured that relevant issues remain at the forefront of SRI action and engagement.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This evaluation found that SRI has reinforced and extended the ICRC’s engagement on support–relations. Although the ICRC has long been working on support–relations, SRI introduced a more coordinated and comprehensive approach to the institution’s work in this area. These efforts have produced some initial positive results in influencing the policies and practices of some supporting States. However, it was not possible through this evaluation to determine the extent to which these policies and practices have influenced the behaviour of combatants of supported actors. Ultimately the responsibility to monitor the application of the policies and practices remains with States (which ICRC may or may not be privy to).

The evaluation found that SRI has begun to be mainstreamed within delegations although efforts are still needed to maintain SRI as a cross–cutting issue and give it the priority in key contexts it merits. Maintaining the current momentum will be important as SRI becomes integrated within PES\_PROT\_GLOB. External stakeholders confirmed that ICRC’s increased engagement on SRI had made an initial impact within their governments and urged ICRC to continue its SRI activities. These points are reflected in the following conclusions and recommendations.

**A. Convening role and priority for SRI:** Placing SRI within PES\_PROT\_GLOB does imply a potential risk that it is perceived and treated as a protection file and less as a cross–cutting issue. Further, within delegations, SRI focal points sometimes struggle to mobilise the necessary support needed for SRI, given the absence of a convening power when they are not at the management level. The evaluation recommends that the SRI Steering Committee should: consider giving PES\_PROT\_GLOB a convening role on SRI; encourage delegations to give a convening role to SRI focal points and ensure that their role as focal point is recognised in their job description and maintained until the end of the foreseen next phase; ensure ICRC staff in key supporting States delegations continue to dedicate time to SRI.

**B. SRI as a cross-cutting issue:** Managing SRI within delegations as a cross-cutting issue has proven challenging. However, there were also positive examples seen where a dedicated platform involving all relevant metiers managed SRI well as a cross-cutting issue. The evaluation recommends that PES\_PROT\_GLOB (and the future SRI HQ coordination structure) should encourage delegations to put in place a dedicated platform to manage SRI, as seen in the examples of DR Congo, Mali and Washington DC.

**C. Scope of SRI:** The scope of SRI covered four areas which did not see similar depth of engagement in terms of implementation. The focus remained on partnered military operations (PMO) as the more natural engagement ground for FAS delegates and Protection teams. While some focal points (mostly FAS delegates) advocate for reducing the scope of SRI to PMO, this evaluation found that a value of SRI is in its ability to work across all four areas. Further, as SRI will be integrated within PES\_PROT\_GLOB and no longer benefiting from the dedicated resources of the project, prioritisation may be necessary. The evaluation recommends that PES\_PROT\_GLOB (and the future SRI HQ coordination structure) should: consider how it can reinforce balancing the four areas of SRI in the delegation-level activities; move away from delegation-level SRI action plans to context-specific action plans for some 5-7 key support-relations contexts with a focus on all four areas of SRI.

**D. Visibility of SRI:** ICRC has given a level of visibility to support-relations since the launch of SRI in 2019, both within ICRC and externally. This has supported building momentum and interest in the ICRC's recommendations for support-relations. The raising of the issue of support-relations by the ICRC within high-level political dialogue has contributed to the results described by this evaluation. There was some concern that the links between a high-level political dialogue and the technical level in-countries was not always strong and that the ICRC had varying access to the levels of decision-making. The evaluation recommends that PES\_PROT\_GLOB (and the future SRI HQ coordination structure) should: continue visibility actions both internally and externally; ensure that SRI is featured at the proper decision-making level to influence the political aspects of support relations, both at the delegation and HQ levels.

**E. Compilation of support-relation practices:** A significant part of the SRI Strategy was focused on the collection and compilation of examples of practice by States in support-relations. A number of practices have been collected and an initial draft compilation completed. However, it remains unclear what will be done with this resource. This evaluation believes that there would be value in creating both internal and external resources based on the practices collated. The evaluation recommends that PES\_PROT\_GLOB (and the future SRI HQ coordination structure) should finalise an edited version of the practices collated for internal use only and create summary public versions for specific topics.

**F. SRI road map and coordination:** As the project is now concluding its implementation in June 2023, SRI requires new direction and priorities for the coming years. This evaluation believes that the SRI Strategy set the foundations for SRI and there is no need to create a new strategy, but rather to build upon the existing Strategy with a set of priority actions to conclude its mainstreaming within the ICRC. The evaluation recommends that PES\_PROT\_GLOB (and the future SRI HQ coordination structure) should create an SRI road map for the next four years (2024-2028) with the following points integrated: 5-7 priority contexts where SRI will focus its efforts until 2028; a reduced HQ SRI coordination structure; a mechanism to continue coordination and information sharing between SRI focal points; a suggested set-up for a dedicated SRI platform at the delegation level.