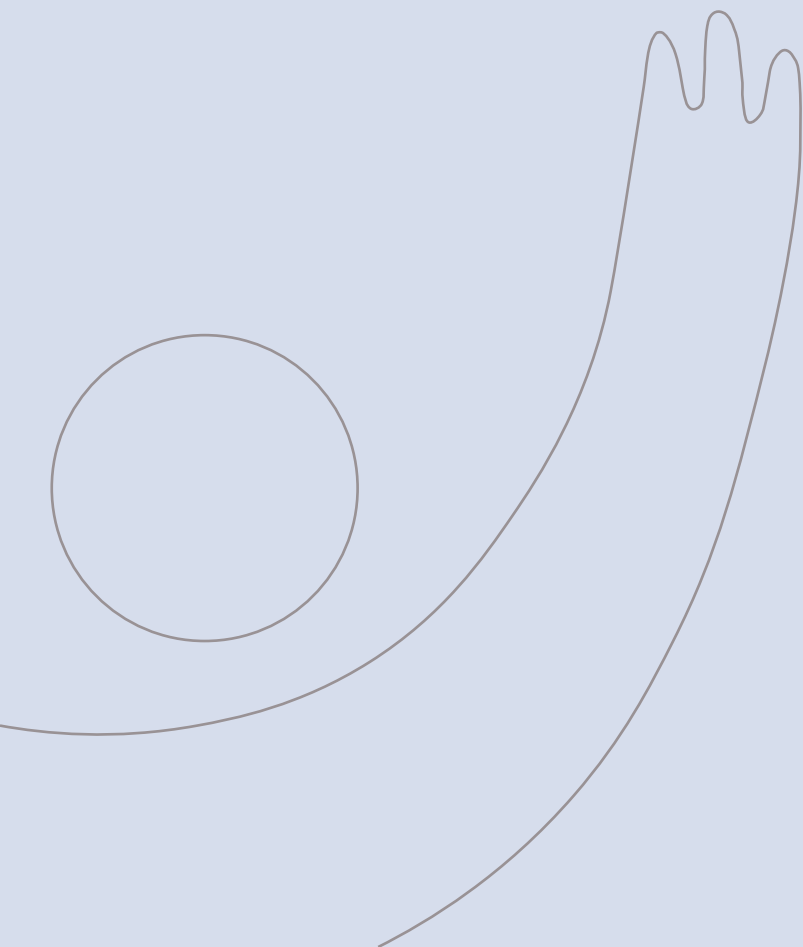


# *Estonian Refugee Council*

Strategy for 2024–2026



# Vision for 2024–2026

## Vision and mission statement

We envision a world where people displaced or at risk of being displaced by conflict or disaster can live with dignity. Our mission is to stand up for the rights and well-being of people suffering from acute and protracted crises through our humanitarian response, economic recovery, protection and community empowerment initiatives.

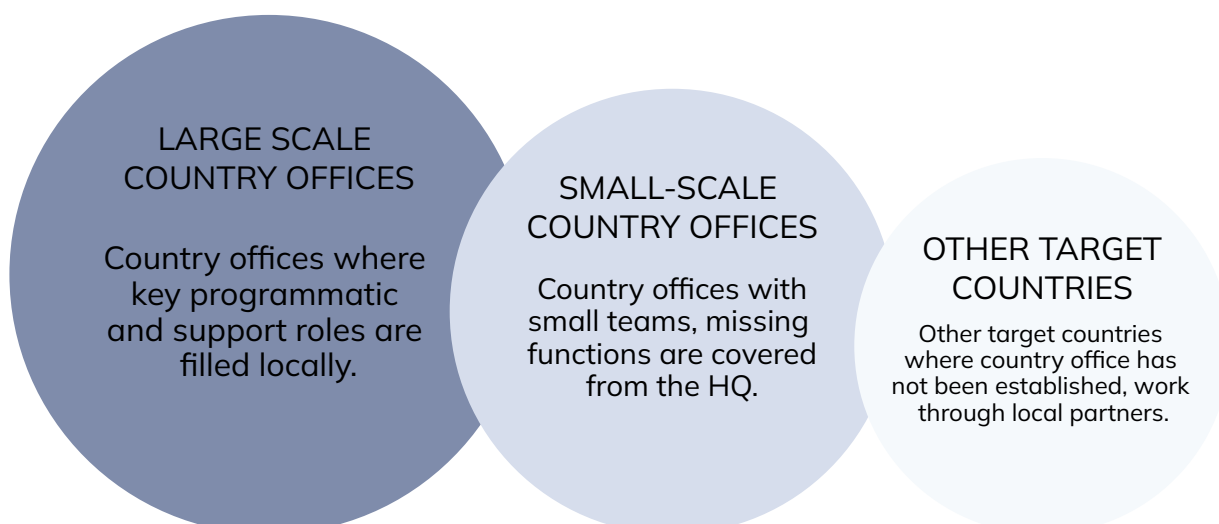
## Ambition of ERC

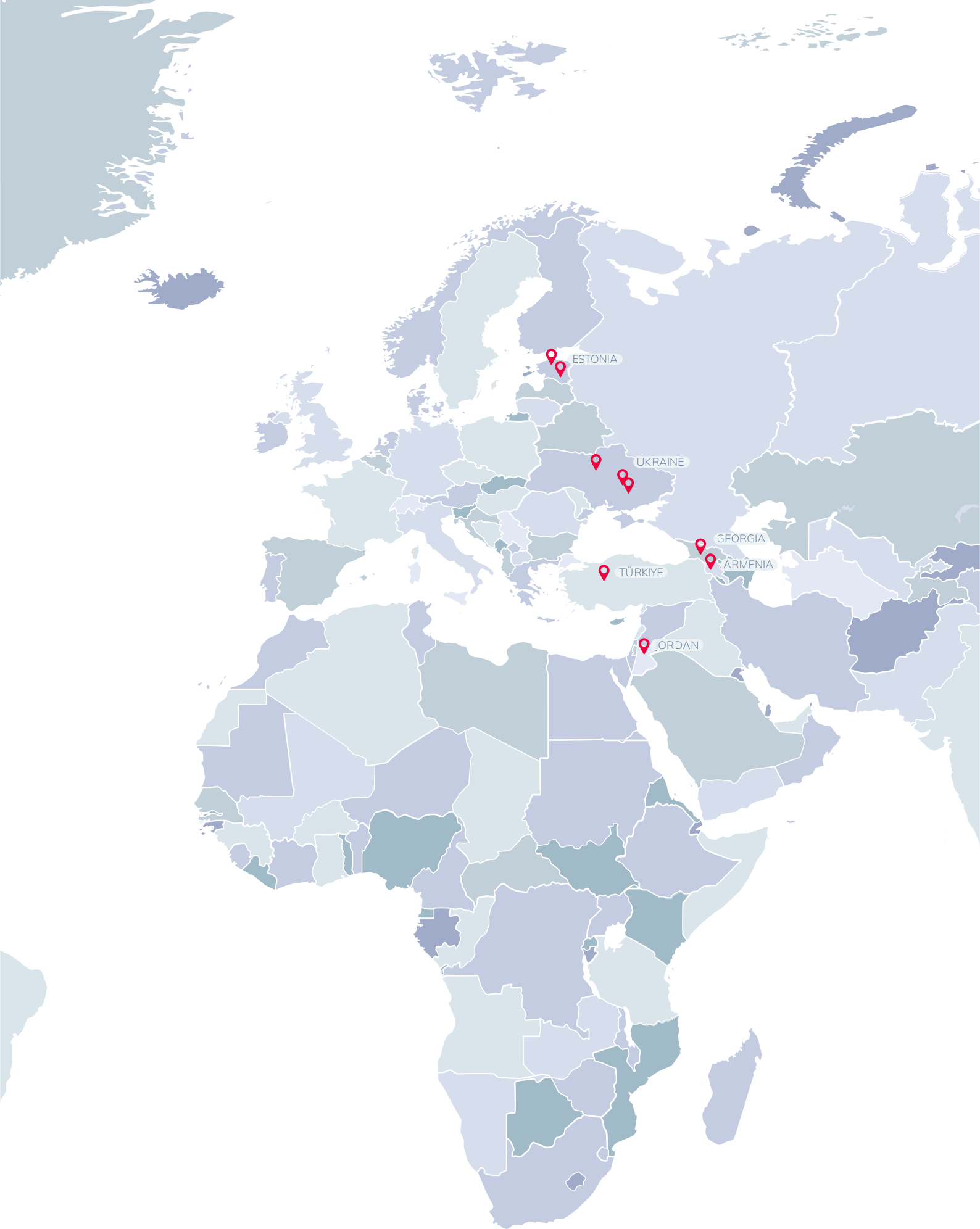
We take action during and after situations of acute and protracted crises, providing need-based support to people most affected by these crises, most notably refugees, internally displaced people, and people who remain in unsafe and hard-to-reach areas. We are a rights-based organisation and committed to the principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality.

## Geographic focus

We operate in countries hit by acute and protracted crises with humanitarian and early recovery (nexus) programming as well as in Estonia and regionally in the EU with refugee response programming. We have operational presence in Europe, Caucasus, and the Middle East, and are ready to strategically expand our coverage to countries where the needs correspond with our capacity and expertise and in cases where our involvement has a clear added value to the existing response.

We establish officially registered offices in countries where there are long-term needs and plans to respond, while also establishing local partnerships and creating local networks for cooperation and referral. In these countries we focus on humanitarian and early recovery needs stemming from armed conflict and the climate crisis resulting in large-scale displacement, the risk of displacement, and restricted access to affected people.





*This map shows the situation at the beginning of 2024.  
It may change during the strategy period.*

## Programmatic focus

We implement a core set of programmes with tailored modalities which are designed based on the needs and capacities of crisis-affected people and the best, evidence-based knowledge available. Through our programmes, we provide assistance to meet immediate humanitarian needs and contribute to durable solutions for crisis-affected communities. In addition to providing direct assistance to people in need, we work with communities at large and help them advocate for their rights and well-being.

Our programming keeps in mind the different needs of population groups based on their age, gender, disability, socioeconomic status, and other social identity markers. We maintain the readiness to respond to sudden-onset crisis situations in countries where we are already operational. We are an internationally recognized and certified humanitarian and early recovery actor.

Emergency response

Economic recovery

Protection and empowerment



## Objectives, enablers, and principles

As a global objective, we work to ensure that crisis-affected people receive timely assistance in accordance with their specific needs and are able to bounce back quickly after crises have struck. More specifically, ERC's work is centred around the following three **strategic objectives** (SO):

- Crisis-affected people are able to meet their basic needs in a timely and dignified manner
- Crisis-affected people have access to dignified sources of livelihoods
- Crisis-affected people feel safe and empowered in the communities where they live

To ensure that these strategic objectives are achieved, the organisation must be internally capable and mature to respond. For that purpose, the following **strategic enablers** (SE) must be in place:

- Effective leadership and management structure
- Complementary partnerships and diversified resources
- Efficient internal systems and processes
- Committed, competent, and valued workforce
- Innovative digital tools
- High-quality research and evidence
- Recognition and visibility in the sector

To ensure that our programmes are of high-quality and in line with humanitarian standards, we follow a set of nine core **programming principles** which guide our work and decisions throughout the programme cycle:

- Impartiality and neutrality
- Inclusivity and empowerment
- Collaboration and cooperation
- Agility and learning
- Localisation
- Protection and advocacy
- Accountability
- Anticipatory action
- Environment and climate-friendly

# Strategic objectives

## **SO1: Crisis-affected people are able to meet their basic needs in a timely and dignified manner**

We design and implement humanitarian assistance programmes in crisis-affected countries to meet the immediate needs of the affected population in a timely and context-appropriate manner. We are a **cash-first responder**, prioritising cash-based assistance wherever markets and financial services are functional. We provide multi-purpose as well as sectoral cash assistance to cover specific shelter, health, food security and immediate livelihood needs of the crisis-affected people.

If and where necessary, we monitor the functioning of markets and help to restore market functionality in cases of disruptions. At the same time, we maintain the capacity to provide **in-kind assistance** to affected populations using a localised approach, in cases of market disruptions or beneficiary preference. We develop and maintain capacity to react to sudden onset crises in the countries where we are operational.

As a principled responder, we task ourselves to be present also in the most **hard-to-reach areas** to reach all the people in need of assistance. We aim to develop innovative ways to reach those who would otherwise be left without assistance.

We liaise and **coordinate** with other humanitarian actors, government agencies, local municipalities, and other relevant stakeholders to ensure a coordinated, harmonised and deduplicated response. We take part in interagency coordination and report about our activities through agreed-upon platforms. We provide inputs, common services and new ways of thinking to the humanitarian sector at large, if the needs and issues correspond with our expertise and capacity.

Key indicators:

- Number of crisis-affected people receiving need-based humanitarian assistance (disaggregated by type of assistance, location, age, and gender)
- Share of beneficiaries who are able to meet their immediate basic needs using the assistance received



## SO2: Crisis-affected people have access to dignified sources of livelihoods

We design and implement programmes which enhance crisis-affected people's sustainable livelihoods through economic recovery and resilience. We recognize that people use different means for earning a living, including salaried work, self-employment, and agriculture.

We assist crisis-affected people in effectively **accessing the labour market** of the host community. Our programming is targeted at removing or lowering the barriers crisis-affected people may face when looking for employment and we work to find fresh and innovative methods and tools to assist them in finding safe and decent work appropriate to their education and prior experiences.

We assist crisis-affected people in starting or restoring various **income-generating activities** to be able to meet their basic needs in a sustainable manner. Our programming assists people in creating strong business plans and provides them with knowledge, skills and services necessary to build sustainable businesses. We may provide our beneficiaries with cash-based, asset-based or loan-based support to start or expand their micro- or small businesses. We invest in our beneficiaries and are therefore invested in helping their businesses succeed.

We also help crisis-affected people to sustain their households through **agricultural activities**. Our programming helps rural households to restore their agricultural activities after crises by providing them with necessary inputs, capital and services. We promote and instruct communities on sustainable and climate-friendly agricultural practices and farming methods to enhance food security.

We liaise and **coordinate** our activities with other actors and form reciprocal partnerships with local and international actors to maximise the effects of our interventions and to ensure complementarity with what is already available.

Key indicators:

- Number of crisis-affected people receiving livelihood assistance (disaggregated by type of assistance, location, age, and gender).
- Number of income generating or other subsistence providing activities created or expanded (disaggregated by type, sector, and location).
- Share of beneficiaries who are able to meet their basic needs through income generating activities.



### **SO3: Crisis-affected people feel safe and empowered in the communities where they live**

We design and implement activities which empower crisis-affected communities to feel safe and live dignified lives as equal members of the society. We provide protection and community-building services and tools to foster inclusion and integration. Our programming proactively provides effective access to services through information provision and referrals.

We systematically **monitor and assess** the needs and protection gaps of the crisis-affected people to ensure effective access to necessary services. We provide accurate and timely **information and counselling** services to make sure no one is left behind through using communication channels and methods which are sensitive to age, gender and other types of diversity.

We help to build **social cohesion and inclusion** through fostering community self-help and participation. We stay close to the people we serve by being present within the local communities, including through volunteer participation. We facilitate access to and provide mainstreamed evidence-based **mental health and psychosocial support** (MHPSS) services, prioritising methods with higher scale-up potential and multiplier effect.

We **advocate** for the rights and well-being of crisis-affected people and while doing that, ensure that their own voices are heard and taken into account. We liaise and coordinate with other stakeholders and networks and carry out collaborative advocacy interventions and to ensure complementarity with and effective referral pathways to already existing resources and services. We empower local authorities, civil society organisations, educational and health institutions, and other actors to be ready to respond and provide accessible and effective services to conflict-affected people.

Key indicators:

- Number of people taking part in community-building activities (disaggregated by type of activity, location, age, and gender).
- Number of people receiving protection services (disaggregated by type of intervention, location, age, and gender).
- Number of local actors benefitting from capacity building activities (disaggregated by type of intervention, type of beneficiary, and location).

## Strategic enablers

**Effective leadership and management structure.** Our leadership encompasses vision, effective self-management skills, and the ability to inspire and guide the organisation toward its objectives. Our senior management structure ensures efficient coordination and execution of programmatic activities across various country offices, programmatic areas and support teams.

**Complementary partnerships and diversified resources.** We build reciprocal relations with like-minded principled humanitarian actors to build complementary programmes and respond more effectively to crisis situations. We maintain a diversified funding base through a balance between institutional and private funding to support the realisation of our strategic objectives.

**Efficient internal systems and processes.** The achievement of our strategic objectives hinges on proper resource utilisation and effective operations. We adhere to high compliance standards and manage operational risks while designing our systems and processes to be as accessible, lean and easy-to-use as possible.

**Committed, competent, and valued workforce.** Committed and competent workforce is our most important asset. We work systematically to build a positive working culture in which all staff feel valued and supported and have a sense of belonging. We prioritise their safety, well-being, and development of their technical and leadership skills.

**Innovative digital tools.** We are the humanitarian innovators and strive to lead on the digitalisation agenda in the sector at large. We develop digital tools that enhance our outreach, stakeholder engagement, information flow, and service delivery to those affected by crises. Internally, digital solutions promote faster, more transparent, and interconnected work, boosting efficiency through automation and simplification.

**High-quality research and evidence.** We are a learning organisation and aim to continuously improve our programming based on research and evidence. We ensure that systematic monitoring and evaluation processes are embedded in all our programmes and leverage digital tools to facilitate data collection and analysis. We ensure that complaints and feedback are systematically gathered and continuously learnt from.

**Recognition and visibility in the sector.** We strive to make our work as visible and transparent as possible to ensure accountability towards our beneficiaries and donors. We understand that recognition of our work by others as well as solid reputation in the sector are necessary to have impact and create change.



## Programming principles

**Impartiality and neutrality.** We provide assistance based exclusively on identified needs of the crisis-affected people, without discrimination on any identity markers. Our activities are not driven by the interests of any other institution, and we do not and will not work with any stakeholders to further military, political or religious interests.

**Inclusivity and empowerment.** We design our programmes in ways that are accessible and inclusive to all people in need, taking into account the intersectionality of gender, age, disability, socioeconomic status and other social identity markers. We ensure the participation of crisis-affected people in all stages of response resulting in needs-based and inclusive interventions that ameliorate the circumstances of affected populations.

**Collaboration and cooperation.** We refer and cooperate with other principled actors and, if possible, state institutions in countries where we operate. We ensure that when people approach us for assistance, they are assisted in a comprehensive manner to address their diverse needs.

**Agility and learning.** We aim to remain dynamic in our programme design and implementation, to respond quickly and rework our approach upon changing needs or contextual factors. We systematically collect and analyse evidence about the results of our work and learn from the mistakes and successes. We share our findings with other humanitarian actors to foster community-wide learning.

**Localisation.** We believe in the localisation of aid and seek to work in meaningful partnerships with and improve the capacity of local actors and duty bearers. We design our programmes with local needs and capacities in mind and ensure that our interventions are complementary to local capacities.

**Protection and advocacy.** We advocate on behalf of the crisis-affected people, based on the information and knowledge we gain in the assistance process and on the best available evidence. We are a rights-based organisation and work to ensure that rights and well-being of crisis-affected people are protected and enhanced. We work to mainstream protection considerations in all our programmes.

**Accountability.** We ensure that our programmes follow the “do no harm” principle when working with people we assist. We actively gather feedback from the people we assist and act based on their complaints and feedback without delays.

**Anticipatory action.** We monitor ongoing and potential crises and try to position ourselves preemptively to be able to respond fast and effectively in case of emerging crises or escalation of ongoing ones. We aim to be prepared and take action to reduce the humanitarian impacts of forecasted hazards before they occur or before their most acute impacts are felt.

**Environment and climate-friendly.** We aim to work in ways which limit our footprint on the environment and help to mitigate climate change. We seek to reduce waste and adopt environmentally friendly practices throughout our country operations and programmes.

