

In Perspective: Movement Coordination in Northern Ireland – SAF in action

OUR SELECTED EXPERIENCE



More than 22 years since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, which brought an end to ‘the Troubles’ in Northern Ireland, the legacy of violence continues to impact society in multiple ways. Numerous armed groups remain active, embedded in often marginalized and disadvantaged communities. While many former groups are now a part of civil society, others continue to issue threats and carry out attacks, intimidation, shootings or forced expulsions within their communities, with serious repercussions on victims and their families. While the ongoing violence should not overshadow the significant progress of the past two decades, post-conflict Northern Irish society remains deeply divided, and the messy reality of Brexit, along with the Covid-19 pandemic, have only deepened socio-economic vulnerabilities, inequalities, and frustrations.

It is in such a context that the British Red Cross (BRC), the Irish Red Cross (IRC) and the ICRC have sought to increase their tripartite cooperation and **mitigate the consequences of the ongoing violence** and respond to the outstanding humanitarian needs. Crucially, this requires **building trust with communities; ensuring**

Red Cross teams can access them safely; understanding gaps in responses where the Movement can add value; and improving cross-border emergency responses.

In 2020, while the Covid-19 pandemic limited direct, face-to-face interactions and impacted on BRC’s, IRC’s and ICRC’s regular work and services, it also created new needs for Movement partners to respond to as well as opportunities to deepen partners’ engagement with marginalised, divided and economically vulnerable groups.

The complementary expertise and capacities, along with the **mutual investment in building relationships and understanding between the British RC, the Irish RC and the ICRC have resulted in better outcomes for some of the most at-risk communities and individuals in Northern Ireland.**

Longstanding and supportive relationships have also been nurtured over a number of years through a **sharing of analysis and skills;** the Covid pandemic and the events of April 2021 have demonstrated the value of these relationships in providing the basis for a more comprehensive humanitarian response in a context marked by a legacy of violence and division.



In June 2021, ICRC and BRC rapidly established a crisis cell in anticipation of violence during the summer marching season, and established a WhatsApp channel for live updates, which it will reactivate as and when needed, to share information, analysis and tools in a fluid manner. The involvement of ICRC Safety, Crisis Management and **SAF experts** also helped BRC teams to feel prepared in case of further flare-ups ahead of the marching season.

The *Irish RC and British RC have a long history of cooperation* and are committed to do more in the future. Of particular value has been the cross-border First Aid and joint events, as well their *mutual capacity building* – the Irish RC support to British RC in Psychological First Aid (PFA) support to communities in Northern Ireland, while the **British RC is supporting IRC to scale up its Safer Access (SAF) capabilities and response, notably in more sensitive urban areas.**

Building on the platform that has been established and **ensuring acceptance in all communities remains a challenge and a work in progress.** Institutional commitment from all partners, **continuing to innovate together** with the aim to **strengthen the responsiveness and reach of the Movement** in Northern Ireland will be key to this effort.