

# Anticipatory Action for Population Movement by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies: Report

January 2026



*Picture: Honduran Red Cross staff providing information to migrants in transit. Source: HRC*



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The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian network, with 191 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and around 15.6 million volunteers. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the hardest to reach and most complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives and have opportunities to thrive.

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## 1. Purpose of the IFRC-DREF AA for Population Movement Working Group (Jan 2024 – Dec 2025)

The development of guidance on **Anticipatory Action (AA) for Population Movement** by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) arose from a growing recognition that earlier, better-informed action can help reduce the humanitarian impacts of increasing hazards and risks, such as epidemics, food insecurity and displacement of affected people. Across the global network, National Societies (NSs) have increasingly encountered the limits of purely reactive response in the face of evolving hazards. This is particularly the case for population movement in contexts where movement is cyclical or multi-causal. In February 2024, a technical working group was established by the IFRC-DREF's Anticipatory Pillar, tasked with examining when and how anticipatory action could meaningfully apply to migration and displacement contexts.

The Working Group—bringing together representatives from several National Societies (American Red Cross, Australian Red Cross, British Red Cross, Danish Red Cross, German Red Cross and Netherlands Red Cross), IFRC departments (including the IFRC-DREF, Climate, Urban, Resilience and Environment team, Migration and Displacement team, NS Preparedness team, and Information Management team) as well as the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre - was convened by the IFRC-DREF in January 2024 to address a clear operational gap: how to define and validate anticipatory interventions where population movement is not a single, forecastable hazard but a complex, evolving process. Its overall purpose was to provide greater technical clarity for reviewers and implementers of Early Action Protocols (EAPs) related to population movement, and to offer National Societies a shared point of reference for designing feasible, risk-informed actions ahead of population movement.

Specifically, the group sought to:

- Identify what aspects of migration and displacement can realistically be anticipated and acted upon using existing data and forecast tools;
- Clarify the types of evidence and decision criteria that could justify an EAP activation in such contexts;
- Compile an illustrative list of early actions that NSs could take ahead of population movements or before their most acute impacts are felt; and
- Develop a technical guidance package and associated pro-forma template for Population Movement EAPs

In particular, the Working Group focused on population movement contexts beyond climate- or weather-related events, where displacement is driven by multi-factor pressures and cannot rely on established forecast systems. In undertaking this work, the group acknowledged that forecasting population movement differs markedly from anticipating climate- or weather-related events. Population movement may stem from overlapping political, social, economic and



environmental factors that rarely follow predictable patterns. Rather than aiming for certainty, the guidance encourages National Societies to act on emerging signals and contextual analysis—emphasizing proportional, low-regret actions based on credible information. The focus therefore shifts from predicting events to anticipating humanitarian needs. The resulting guidance and technical note distill two years of collective learning and consultation into a coherent framework that broadens the practice of anticipatory action to include non-climate- or weather-related displacement scenarios. Through this work, the IFRC Network contributes to shaping how the wider humanitarian community can consider acting earlier in population-movement contexts—grounding that discussion in operational evidence and practical experience.

## 2. Methodology

The approach to developing this guidance combined structured consultation, operational learning, and targeted research to ensure that outputs were both methodologically sound and grounded in practice. The process was designed to balance technical rigour with inclusivity, engaging a wide range of IFRC Network and external stakeholders over a two-year period.

### Phase 1 – Laying the Foundation

The first phase established the analytical base and stakeholder consensus.

- **Desk research** reviewed existing literature, IFRC-DREF and EAP documentation, and early experiences with anticipatory action on displacement, drawing lessons from both the IFRC Network and external sources (IOM, FAO, Danish Refugee Council, Start Network, among others).
- **Consultations and interviews** with IFRC departments and partner National Societies identified operational pain points and recurring questions around feasibility, thresholds, and evidence requirements.
- **Workshops**—including the Global AA for Displacement Workshop in Berlin (December 2024)—validated preliminary insights and tested assumptions about risk analysis, activity typologies, and trigger models.

This phase produced initial discussion papers and an early mapping of illustrative readiness activities and early actions.

### Phase 2 – Building and Validating Recommendations

The second phase focused on converting collective insights into a practical framework.

- **Activity mapping and classification** distinguished between readiness and early actions, recognizing that the two often overlap depending on timing and intent.
- **Evidence review** drew on more than 1,800 records of operational learning from IFRC-DREF Responses, EAPs, and partner pilots, analysed through thematic clustering to identify common patterns across displacement phases—origin, transit, and settlement.



- **Gap analysis and peer review** ensured recommendations were complementary to existing IFRC mechanisms and reflective of varied regional contexts.
- **Validation and iteration** occurred through the Working Group sessions and bilateral exchanges with technical leads in IFRC-DREF, Migration and displacement, Information Management, and Climate and Resilience, refining both the criteria and the activity typologies that underpin the final products.

Throughout both phases, triangulation remained central. Quantitative datasets were complemented by qualitative insights and stakeholder feedback, maintaining realism for NS capacities. Peer testing of draft criteria helped verify usability for reviewers and applicants alike—linking analytical design with operational practicality.

### Phase 3 – Translating Recommendations into Actionable Products

Once the technical recommendations were agreed, the Working Group focused on ensuring they could be operationalized. The findings were translated into actionable tools that showcase early-action thinking and embed it within decision-making processes.

Two core outputs emerged: a user-focused proforma (a structured design template) to support the development of EAPs for population movement, and a complementary set of criteria considerations that clarify how proposals can be reviewed and validated with greater consistency and coherence.

This final phase reflected a deliberate effort to bridge research and implementation—ensuring that insights were conveyed in approachable, operationally relevant forms for those designing, validating, and funding EAPs. It also underscored the Working Group’s broader intent: to make the guidance not only technically robust, but immediately usable by National Societies and decision-makers across the Network.

#### Availability of supporting materials

A fuller set of analysis, draft artifacts, and working documents (including discussion papers, in-depth analysis, interim reports, and other analysis products) can be shared upon request. Please contact Malika Noisette (IFRC), Veronica Bell (Australian Red Cross), or Cyandra Carvalho (Independent Consultant) for access.

## 3. Findings

The Working Group’s analysis confirmed that anticipatory action for population movement requires an approach distinct from that used for more forecastable hazards. Migration and displacement is rarely the result of a single trigger; it arises through overlapping climatic, social, political, and economic pressures. The Group therefore focused on identifying where early,



evidence-based action is feasible for reducing predictable humanitarian impact within this complexity - balancing operational realism with strategic ambition.

### 3.1 Principles and Framing

Five central principles guided the findings:

1. **Readiness over prediction.** The objective is not to forecast displacement precisely, but to strengthen readiness for when early signals emerge.
2. **Impact-orientation.** Assessment should centre on humanitarian consequences—particularly when conditions indicate rising vulnerability or pressure on essential services.
3. **Evidence proportionality.** Expectations for data quality must align with what is feasible and accessible; credible expert judgement remains essential where data are partial
4. **Neutrality and safeguards.** Early actions must neither encourage nor deter movement. Neutrality also extends to how triggers are designed and communicated—avoiding framing or data use that might influence migration choices.
5. **No-categorization principle.** To remain consistent with Movement principles of universality and impartiality, the Guidance intentionally avoids dividing migrations and displacement into fixed types (internal, cross-border, mixed). Each context should be assessed case-by-case to ensure all at-risk people are considered.

### 3.2 Data and Analysis

The Group reviewed a wide spectrum of information sources to understand how anticipatory triggers could be grounded in reliable evidence. Three broad categories emerged:

- **External and technical sources** (e.g., IOM DTM, ACLED, WFP Hunger Map, FAO hydromet forecasts, ICMPD Migration Outlook, OCHA Humanitarian Bulletins) offer regional trend analysis and early macro-level signals.
- **Government sources** (e.g., migration registries, national protection committees, ombudsman alerts, civil-registry data) provide the formal datasets that anchor triggers in institutionally recognized statistics.
- **Community-based sources** (branch observations, CEA tools, volunteer and staff surveys) detect early changes that may not yet appear in formal or aggregated reporting.

Used together, these form a complementary evidence base. The Working Group recommended blending macro-scale forecasting with localized intelligence, using the IFRC Analytical Framework as a reference to triangulate quantitative and qualitative data consistently across contexts.

A recurring challenge noted was that rigid data definitions can unintentionally obscure certain population groups, creating “blind spots” in analysis. Flexible use of mixed data sources therefore becomes not only a technical necessity but an equity measure—ensuring invisible or under-reported movements are not excluded from early action.



### 3.3 Triggers and Thresholds

Triggers for population-movement contexts must capture *when* humanitarian conditions are likely to shift from manageable to acute. Because movement is often continuous and intertwined with other stressors, the Working Group emphasized identifying inflection points—moments when coping systems among people on the move or host communities begin to deteriorate. Indicators of humanitarian severity, such as sharp rises in unmet health or protection needs, increasing exposure along transit routes, or reduced access to essential services, can signal when anticipatory measures are warranted.

Two broad models were examined:

- **Single-phase triggers**, which initiate action once predefined indicators or thresholds are reached
- **Multi-phase triggers**, which enable an initial, low-regret activation followed by more targeted actions once field confirmation is available.

This layered approach balances timeliness with precision, allowing resources to be mobilized early while retaining adaptability as conditions evolve. The Working Group also noted that pre-agreed triggers, although sometimes constraining, are presently the most reliable and accountable mechanism for fast decision-making within the DREF system. As operational experience grows and additional learning emerges from the wider humanitarian system, the scope for more adaptive or dynamic trigger models may also increase.

### 3.4 Understanding Impacts

Migration and displacement create interconnected humanitarian pressures that extend beyond the initial act of movement. These may manifest among displaced populations, within hosting and transit communities, and in the surrounding environment. The Working Group identified three lenses through which these evolving impacts can be anticipated:

1. **People on the move** – disruptions to health, psychosocial wellbeing, family unity, and access to basic services and protection, including reliable information and safe referrals.
2. **Host and transit communities** – strain on essential services, market fluctuations, and potential social tension.
3. **Environment and infrastructure** – stress on water sources, waste systems, or natural resources due to unplanned settlement

By examining these dimensions early, National Societies can identify which risks are *sufficiently anticipatable* to justify pre-emptive measures—directing early action where it can most effectively reduce vulnerability before conditions deteriorate.



### 3.5 Universality and Safeguards

The Working Group emphasized that anticipatory action for population movement should remain geographically and hazard neutral. Restricting the access to, or application of, anticipatory action for population movement to a specific location, movement type, or scale would be inconsistent with Movement principles and difficult to justify given diverse risk profiles.

Neutrality and universality also imply avoiding over-reliance on single data sources that privilege one type of movement over another. Maintaining broad inclusion criteria and cross-sector consultation helps ensure that anticipatory action frameworks remain fair, impartial, and globally relevant.

### 3.6 Operational Application Across the Displacement Timeline

The interpretation of what constitutes “early action” changes along the displacement journey. The Working Group distinguished three broad stages:

1. **At the place of origin** – where anticipation may focus on early outreach and preparedness, such as community information, coordination with authorities, or measures to support safe decisions.
2. **In transit** – where lead times are short, and anticipatory actions may include readiness of humanitarian service points, mobile health or protection teams, or pre-positioned supplies along known routes.
3. **At longer-term displacement sites** – where early action shifts toward preventing secondary deterioration of conditions, for instance through rapid rehabilitation of water systems, environmental safeguards, or psychosocial support for both displaced and host populations.

An intervention considered “anticipatory” in one stage of this journey may be classified differently in another. This reinforces the need for contextual analysis when defining eligible activities under EAPs—prioritizing flexibility over fixed categorization. This also reinforces the need for contextual analysis when defining eligible activities, including recognising when early actions must transition into broader response measures.

### 3.7 Cross-cutting Insights

Across all areas of work, three insights stand out:

- **Flexibility is essential** – rigid definitions of movement types or thresholds risk excluding affected groups.
- **Triangulation builds confidence** – integrating multiple, diverse data sources mitigates uncertainty.
- **Learning must remain iterative** – the field of anticipatory action for population movement remains emergent; continued experimentation and innovation are needed, including



**mobility-sensitive monitoring and evaluation** that can follow people rather than fixed locations.

Together, these findings highlight that anticipating population movement is less about prediction and more about positioning humanitarian actors to act responsibly, proportionately, and early—within the fluid realities of human mobility.

These findings form the foundation for the recommendations that follow. Together, they clarify not only *what* anticipatory action for population movement entails, but *how* it can be operationalized—through balanced evidence requirements, flexible activation models, and a consistent focus on humanitarian impact. Building on this evidence base, the next section outlines the Working Group’s proposed pathways for embedding these lessons into decision-making, validation, and implementation processes across the IFRC Network.

#### 4. Technical Outputs and Recommendations

This section presents the Working Group’s two core technical outputs and the accompanying recommendations for how these should guide the design, review, and continual refinement of EAPs for population movement.

Building on the learning process outlined above, the Working Group produced two complementary tools:

- **Annex A – Population Movement sEAP Proforma**
- **Annex B – Considerations for EAP Validation Criteria**

Together, these tools bridge the technical guidance with operational decision-making, ensuring that lessons from research and consultation are reflected in how proposals are developed, reviewed, approved, and implemented.

##### 4.1 Embed Guidance through a Targeted simplified EAP Proforma

The *Population Movement sEAP Proforma*, presented in *Annex A*, operationalizes the recommendations by providing a structured yet adaptable template for designing anticipatory action for population movement.

The form mirrors the typical logic of displacement analysis while keeping entries concise and decision-focused.



It guides users through four linked sections:

1. **Context and Risk Analysis** – description of the drivers of movement, early indicators, and sources of information;
2. **Triggers and Thresholds** – documentation of agreed signals, including indicators of humanitarian severity and triangulation across data types;
3. **Early Actions** – identification of activities feasible within expected lead times across different stages of the displacement journey;
4. **Learning and Adaptation** – specification of how implementation results, partner feedback, and monitoring data will be captured and shared.

By embedding these components directly in the application process, the proforma serves as a practical tool that links technical standards with real decision-making. While designed for the IFRC system, the approach reflects principles - clarity, proportionality, and structured analysis - that can be adapted by other organisations seeking to strengthen anticipatory design in population-movement contexts.

#### 4.2 Refine Review and Validation Criteria

The second recommendation focuses on aligning quality review criteria with the realities of population movement. As set out in Annex B, the proposed considerations clarify how applicants and reviewers can apply the existing review and validation criteria framework more consistently while maintaining space for contextual interpretation.

Key adjustments include:

- **Broader hazard framing:** explicitly recognizing migration and displacement as a *multi-driver phenomenon* that may combine climatic, political, social, or economic pressures.
- **Clarified expectations for evidence:** encouraging the use of *mixed data sources*—including qualitative and community-based information—where forecasting precision is limited.
- **Humanitarian-severity lens:** interpreting proportionality through projected consequences for well-being and access to essential services, rather than the probability of movement alone.
- **Expert judgement provisions:** allowing regional or thematic experts to validate partial or emerging datasets when complete evidence is unavailable.
- **Neutrality and universality safeguards:** reaffirming that criteria should not advantage or exclude particular movement types or geographies.

Together, these refinements strengthen coherence in how population movement EAPs are assessed, while offering a transferable model for other systems seeking to adapt anticipatory action criteria to complex, multi-driver displacement contexts.



#### 4.3 Reinforce Learning and Evidence Systems

The third recommendation emphasizes that this framework should evolve through continual reflection and feedback.

To that end, the Working Group proposes that:

- **Data integration and alignment** continue across DREF AA, Risk Watch, and Scenario Analysis platforms, using the IFRC Analytical Framework<sup>1</sup> for coherence;
- **Mobility-sensitive monitoring** be further developed, enabling tracking of outcomes that follow people rather than fixed locations;
- **Structured learning loops** capture insights from each EAP activation, feeding them back into future guidance updates; and
- **Peer exchange spaces** (virtual or in person) allow National Societies to share methodological challenges and operational lessons.

This cycle of application, learning, and revision, will sustain the technical and institutional maturity of anticipatory action for population movement.

#### 4.4 Maintain Principled Universality

Implementation must remain grounded in the Movement's fundamental principles. The Working Group reaffirms that anticipatory action for population movement should apply *universally*—across geographies, drivers, and affected groups—while remaining *context-specific* in design. Validation and funding decisions should therefore assess submissions on their humanitarian value and readiness, not on the nature of the movement or its political framing. This approach ensures that anticipatory action remains impartial, inclusive, and adaptable, and is aligned with the IFRC Policy in Migration<sup>2</sup> and the Movement Strategy on Migration<sup>3</sup>.

#### 4.5 Way Forward

This guidance represents an **early-stage framework** for a rapidly evolving field. Few operational examples yet exist, and evidence will expand as the first Population Movement EAPs are activated and tested.

Accordingly, the Working Group recommends that:

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.jrc.or.jp/international-delegates/seminar/pdf/IFRC%20ENAP%20Concept%20Note\\_Jakarta\\_July2023.pdf](https://www.jrc.or.jp/international-delegates/seminar/pdf/IFRC%20ENAP%20Concept%20Note_Jakarta_July2023.pdf) Available in Annex B (Pg. 7)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ifrc.org/document/migration-policy>

<sup>3</sup>[https://rcrcconference.org/app/uploads/2024/09/CoD24\\_5-Migration-Background-document-EN.pdf](https://rcrcconference.org/app/uploads/2024/09/CoD24_5-Migration-Background-document-EN.pdf)



1. **Regular reviews** are built into IFRC’s anticipatory action cycle—ideally on an *annual basis*—to integrate new learning and maintain alignment with emerging global practice.
2. **Learning from early activations and implementations** are actively harvested through short case studies, After-Action Reviews, and cross-regional discussions, to validate and stress-test the guidance in real operational contexts.
3. **Monitoring and evaluation systems** are strengthened to accommodate *mobility*, capturing both the direct and secondary outcomes of anticipatory measures to reduce impact on people on the move, host communities, and surrounding environments.

Together, these steps will ensure that the guidance remains living, relevant, and adaptive as operational experience accumulates.

## Looking Ahead

The Working Group’s role concludes with this Technical Note, but its outcomes are intended as *living tools*.

As National Societies pilot new EAPs for population movement, ongoing dialogue with reviewers and regional teams will refine these approaches further.

The IFRC Network’s collective learnings from these pilots will inform future updates to both the Proforma and EAP Criteria, ensuring that anticipatory action for population movement continues to evolve with evidence, partnership, and practice.