International Rescue Committee – SYRIA
Remote Management Guidelines
Last updated August 2016

Part 1: INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose of these guidelines

The IRC in Syria has adopted the mechanisms and principles outlined within this document to assure a standardized, transparent, and predictable approach to remote management, which is in line with IRC's Global Remote Management Guidelines. These guidelines identify the additional risks associated with remote management in Syria and the mechanisms we employ to ensure the safety of staff/partners and mitigate the risk of low quality or unaccountable programs caused by vulnerabilities with or restrictions placed upon the IRC's usual oversight systems. Within this document, risk is disaggregated into four categories: safety and security, programmatic, financial and reputational.

There are many challenges of working inside Syria that are a result of the devastation of the war, widespread insecurity, defunct banking system, or border and road closures. Instead of offering a full accounting of all of the risks of operating inside Syria, this document mentions these additional challenges only in relation to or as a confounding risk of remote management.

DEFINITION

For the IRC, *"Remote Management"* refers to a set of adapted procedures put in place because IRC's access to field offices and/or field sites is limited – for security, practical or logistical reasons. The term encompasses procedures of *control* over finances, resources and quality, as well as *support* through capacity building, training and empowering field staff and partners.

B. IRC Programming Overview in Syria:

The IRC has been responding to the conflict in Syria since 2012 and has helped more than 3 million Syrians in that time with the provision of health services, economic and livelihoods support, educational opportunities, and protection. The IRC's delivery of humanitarian assistance in Syria is managed through cross border programs from three separate country offices – in North Syria from Turkey, Northeast Syria from Iraq, and South Syria from Jordan. The IRC's response involves direct service provision as well as support to local actors providing services.

In general, we can define four different levels of access for IRC staff. These will be used throughout this document. They include:

Unhindered: Full principled access into areas held by armed opposition groups (AOG)
Restricted: Principled access with restrictions on personnel or type of activities (it could be security related or other)
Untenable: Sporadic principled access that is difficult to maintain (it could be security related or other)
Unreachable: None

The IRC's goal is to achieve unhindered access in all of the communities in which we work. However, in reality, the IRC experiences different levels of access from unhindered to untenable. By definition, the IRC doesn't work in areas that are unreachable. However, as the situation changes these classifications vary so that unreachable areas may open to humanitarian programming over time. There are two overarching factors that influence this level of access: 1) local actors in the implementation sites and the areas from which we manage those programs; and 2) operating environment including security, governmental and donor regulations, and local markets. Because of the IRC's active acceptance strategy (see below), the local actors are not usually a key determinant for IRC's go/no-go decisions. Instead, it is the operating environment that is a crucial determinant. For example, there are donor restrictions against operating in areas controlled by the Islamic State; and legal requirements for implementing in areas controlled by the government of Syria. In addition, most of the border crossings into Syria are closed, some open sporadically and all are carefully controlled.

Based on level of access and staff capacity, the IRC's means of managing programs inside Syria varies greatly across the region. We can explain these variations generally by using the model below which identifies four categories of remote management with varying configurations of decision making authority[1].

Figure 1: Categories of remote management

	Decision Making	Project Implementation
Remote Control	Majority of decisions made by international managers located apart from programs. Limited delegation of authority.	National or local staff
Remote Delegation[2]	Partial or temporary delegation of authority to national/local staff at project sites while other staff are in a separate location.	National or local staff, partners, or contractors
Remote Support	A strategy to transfer decision making and authority gradually to national/local actors, while financial and strategic oversight is retained remotely.	National or local partners, authorities, or communities
Remote Partnership	Local actors maintain significant decision making authority	National or local partners, contractors

In the Syria region, the IRC employs a combination of all of these modalities which are not static and instead evolve over time as the IRC capacity and the context allow.

Part II: SECURITY RISKS AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

A. Security Risks
By the very nature of the IRC's work inside Syria, situations arise where there is an active presence of armed forces, national militaries, local militias, and other constituent parties

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[1] Hansen, G. (2008) *Operational Modalities in Iraq.* Amman: NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq. Retrieved from: http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/erd-3646-full.pdf

[2] This term has been changed from remote management to remote delegation in order to avoid confusion. Within this policy the term remote management is used synonymously with remote programming whereas in Hanson's model, remote management is one type of remote programming.

pursuing different agendas through violent, armed conflict. There are complex linkages between these groups in large geographical areas of Syria which lack effective forms of law enforcement or government control. The perception of the international humanitarian community in Syria as primarily Western in origin and values increases its risk as a target. Transnational and local organized crime may also pose security challenges in the future but have not yet exacted a toll on lives or programs.

B. Risk Management

The IRC in Syria has adopted a comprehensive and integrated approach to risk management that consistently ensures the safety of staff, unhindered principled access to beneficiaries, and delivery of services. The IRC Syria risk management Strategy[3] identifies the overarching principles which guide our work and key strategies and approaches that are embedded in programmatic plans and operational processes. Updated annually, the plan outlines the ways in which the IRC systematically deals with the risks it faces in Syria including the use of:

1. Acceptance-based approaches,
2. Negotiated access,
3. Remote management,
4. Low-profile approaches,
5. Tailored programming,
6. Security coordination, and
7. Protective and deterrent measures.

The risk management plan and program which is led by the country Senior Management Teams (SMT), the Regional Safety & Security Advisor, the Deputy Regional Director, and the Regional Director ensure that risk management is integrated seamlessly into the culture of the organization. Furthermore, the IRC has committed in its 2020 strategy for Risk Management to be a fundamental part of the organizations' strategic management globally.

The IRC accepts the responsibility for managing its programs in such a way that is consistent with the "duty of care" principle, whereby the IRC works proactively to ensure the safety of its national and international staff. This is accomplished by developing and maintaining effective security strategies and procedures which are updated on an ongoing basis and reinforced through written communication and tailored orientation sessions.

The IRC maintains a global Right to Withdraw[4] policy that affords both national and international staff the right to make decisions based on their own safety without cause for retaliatory practices, and recognizes that partner organizations supported by the IRC also have that right. The IRC ensures that expectations for field travel are explicitly outlined during the hiring process of all IRC staff whether international or national, and in partnership negotiations. Furthermore, the IRC offers support to all partner organizations with the development of their security management strategies and procedures through the provision of templates, tools, and training. In addition, the IRC remains proactive in enhancing staff comfort and security through stress management and emotional wellness support strategies.

C. Threshold of Acceptable Risk

The determination of "acceptable risk" is a critical responsibility of senior program decision makers in consultation with the regional team. The relationship between program criticality and risks must be considered in the determination of acceptable risk. The IRC will constantly strive

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[3] IRC Syria Risk Management Strategy, International Rescue Committee, August 2016.
[4] IRC Global Security Policy, International Rescue Committee, 8 March 2006, p. 2.

to balance these two critical functions in order to create and manage a culture of risk management. When determining the threshold for acceptable risk in any given situation the IRC considers the following questions:

1. Would the consequences of not implementing the program be so serious that the IRC is prepared to accept a High to Very High risk to staff lives?
2. Has everything possible been done to find alternative methods of achieving the program objectives?
3. Has every possible prevention measure including the transfer of resources been applied to minimize the value risk so as to reduce the current risk level to Medium or lower?
4. Is there an adequate system to manage the residual risk in order to ensure that it does not increase beyond the current level?

Only if the answer to all of the above questions is "Yes" will the program be implemented.

D. *Closure Criteria/Red Lines*

IRC programs in Syria and globally are guided by the principles of humanity, neutrality, operational independence, and impartiality. Attempts to infringe upon IRC's operational independence are often a factor in the suspension or cessation of programs. These risks are managed by IRC's Communications and Liaisons Managers and Humanitarian Access staff who represent IRC locally and negotiate for unhindered principled programming.

IRC's activities inside Syria are further guided by the Protocol for Engagement of Parties to the Conflict in the Delivery of Humanitarian Assistance in Northern Syria also known as the Joint Operating Protocol (JOP)[5]. This protocol was enacted by the humanitarian community in December 2014 through the Turkey Humanitarian Forum. The document defines the demands to be met prior to the delivery of humanitarian assistance as well as those requests from outside actors and parties to the conflict which will result in program suspensions or closures. The IRC and partners adhere to the parameters included within the protocol for all programming in Syria.

The protocol demands that humanitarian organizations:
1. Request unhindered access to areas under the control of parties to the conflict;
2. Agree to provide publically available organizational information; and
3. Agree to provide information on planned humanitarian activities in areas under the control or influence of a party to the conflict.

Red lines defined in the protocol include any requests to humanitarian actors for the following:
1. Beneficiary information revealing personal identifiers. This is in order to protect the privacy and dignity of those receiving humanitarian assistance;
2. Influence over the selection of staff for humanitarian organizations. This is to ensure our independence and neutrality is respected by all parties;
3. The use of armed escorts for humanitarian vehicles or personnel;
4. Influence over the content or findings of needs assessments or other such questionnaires, which adhere to internationally recognized methodologies for assessing humanitarian needs and response. This is to maintain independence and to assess needs impartially so they are credible and acceptable to the international community and beneficiaries;

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[5] Protocol for Engagement of Parties to the Conflict in the Delivery of Humanitarian Assistance in Northern Syria, Turkey Humanitarian Forum, December, 2014

5. Delivery of humanitarian assistance to parties to the conflict. Under International Humanitarian law, only wounded combatants without weapons/disarmed are considered *hors de combat* and may be treated by medical agencies;
6. Control of humanitarian stores, commodities or warehouses;
7. Payment of taxes or duties on aid deliveries or humanitarian services to beneficiaries. Where authorities require taxes and duties to be paid by law, the formal procedures and requirements necessary to pay taxes or duties should be publicly available; or
8. To accompany humanitarian personnel carrying out their humanitarian activities.

IRC Country Directors, in coordination with the Regional Director and the Regional Safety and Security Advisor, may establish additional red lines for programs according to each context and their respective security management plans.

E. Acceptance Strategy
The IRC's ability to operate effectively in Syria relies on a comprehensive and continuous strategy of gaining and maintaining acceptance with local communities including beneficiaries, parties to conflict, local organizations, and other relevant stakeholders. Over time, the IRC has actively built and cultivated good relations and consent as part of a holistic security risk management strategy, and obtained acceptance and consent for its presence and programming from local actors and donors. The IRC has sought acceptance-based security for staff and activities in a variety of ways that range from passive acceptance (i.e. eschewing any association with political or military actors or other international entities), to active acceptance involving outreach strategies and direct negotiation (with political or military actors) to receive access and security guarantees.

To actively advance our acceptance strategy, the IRC employs humanitarian access staff and communications liaisons whose responsibilities include exploring new areas and regions for expanding program reach, conducting risk assessments, working with local communities to identify key stakeholders and opinion leaders, and promoting the IRC's mission and the IRC Way[6]. In addition, the humanitarian access teams work with the program staff to ensure that activities are implemented fairly and transparently and are acceptable to local beneficiaries. This emphasis on good, tailored programming is critical to the IRC's acceptance strategy. Finally, humanitarian access teams also ensure smooth and effective operations through their involvement in critical functions such as recruitment and partner vetting.

It is equally critical to ensure that communities and local stakeholders have adequate information about the IRC and our programs. Providing information to communities in an accurate and timely way is therefore a fundamental ingredient of building trust, which in turn is essential for acceptance. This criticality is taken into account in the IRC Visibility Guidelines[7] which provide strategies and messaging for enhancing IRC's image within communities and among stakeholders despite maintaining a very low profile in Syria.

Part III: IMPLEMENTING REMOTE MANAGEMENT

A. General Management
Syria cross border structures
In general, the IRC cross border team structures vary among the three contexts according to the level of access and type of remote management employed. For instance, figure 2 below shows

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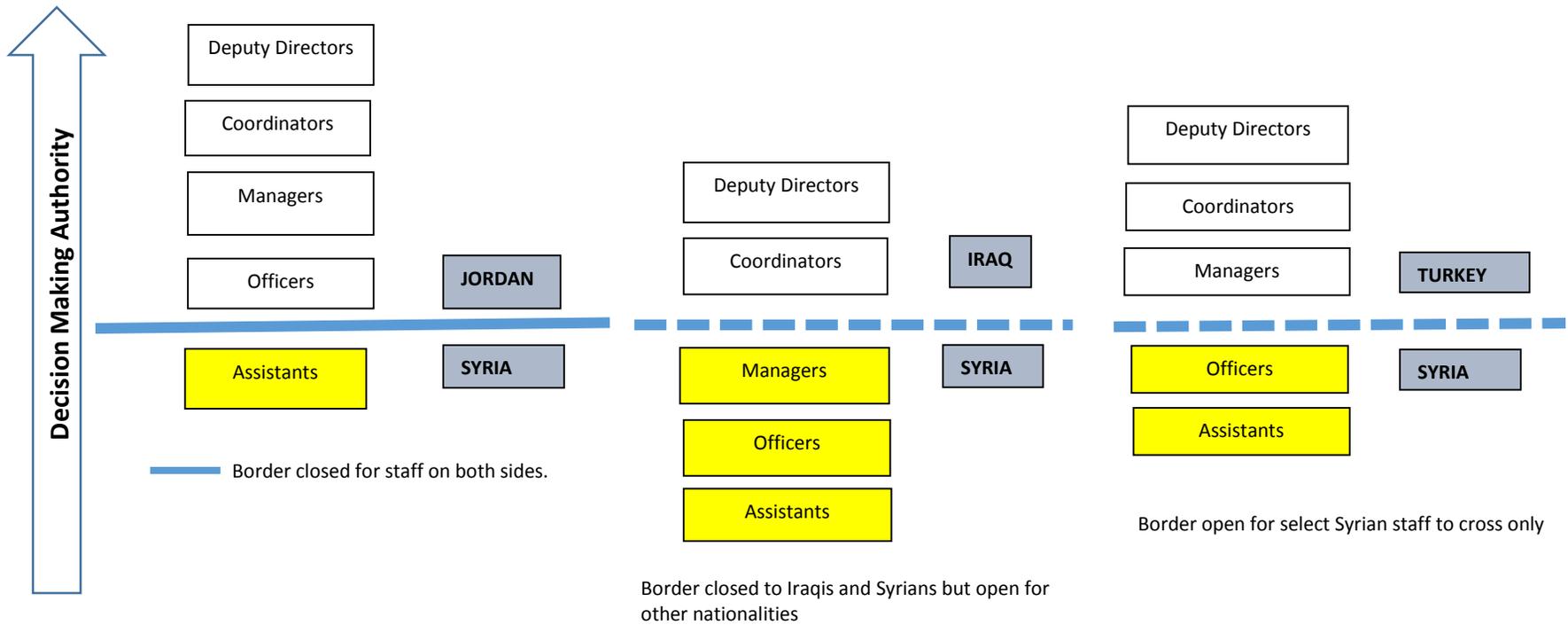[6] The IRC Way- Standards for Professional Conduct, International Rescue Committee.
[7] IRC Visibility Guidelines – Syria, International Rescue Committee, 23 December 2015.

that the Jordan cross border program is managed through remote control, operating with restricted access in which staff from neither side can cross the border. And, all decision making authority remains with staff inside Jordan.

On the other hand, in the Iraq cross border program most of the projects are managed by staff located inside Syria who receive remote support from coordinators and deputy directors based in Iraq. They operate with restricted access in which the border is closed for Syrians and Iraqis but expatriate or foreign national staff can cross. These programs are much more locally-managed than those in either Jordan or Turkey.

The IRC Turkey cross border program has prioritized for 2016 the recruitment of Syrian managers who can lead the teams of officers and assistants inside Syria, a transition from a remote delegation to a remote support form of remote programming. They operate with restricted access along a border that is open only to a select number of Syrian employees who cross into Turkey for training, supervision, and other logistical reasons.

Figure 2: Cross Border Team Structures in Jordan, Iraq and Turkey

Decision Making Authority

Deputy Directors

Coordinators

Managers

Officers   JORDAN

Assistants   SYRIA

── Border closed for staff on both sides.

Deputy Directors

Coordinators   IRAQ

Managers   SYRIA

Officers

Assistants

Border closed to Iraqis and Syrians but open for other nationalities

Deputy Directors

Coordinators

Managers   TURKEY

Officers   SYRIA

Assistants

Border open for select Syrian staff to cross only

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The IRC is continually working to transition from remotely managed programs to more locally-managed programs by improving the proximity of decision-making staff to project locations. This is a best practice that reduces programmatic, reputational, and financial risks. These efforts include an active acceptance strategy and negotiation with governments and local authorities for fewer restrictions on international staff. Concurrently, IRC is opening management positions inside Syria and nationalizing them, efforts which also serve to strengthen the acceptance and quality of IRC's programming. Finally, ongoing capacity building efforts for Syrian staff to take on managerial duties ensures that the delegation of duties inherent to remote management happens responsibly while increasing IRC's long-term investment in those communities.

Internal Controls
Globally, all staff, consultants, contractors, and volunteers are bound by IRC's Standards of Professional Conduct outlined in the IRC Way as well as by 18 global policies that define our work. The IRC facilitates compliance by providing copies of all internal policies to remote staff in Arabic. New staff orientation, including an overview of the IRC Way and all global policies, is compulsory within the first month of employment and is delivered either in person, or remotely via Skype, WebEx or phone. Human resource leads in each country program organize annual IRC Way Days which also often include refresher training sessions on one or more of IRC's global policies.

In addition to orienting staff, the IRC relies on its strong systems including clear procedures for finance, supply chain and human resources to avoid noncompliance. In addition to the global manuals for these systems, each cross border program has developed contextualized standard operating procedures (SOPs) or programmatic controls manuals[8],[9], as appropriate, which may or may not differ from those developed for the respective country programs. When strictly adhered to, these systems significantly increase internal control and reduce the risk of improprieties or noncompliance.

Finally, holding staff and partners accountable for noncompliance is a very strong deterrent. To that aim, the IRC Global Reporting Guidelines[10] outline multiple ways for reporting suspected violations of IRC policies all of which are shared with staff in English and Arabic through trainings and on all IRC Way posters, as well as on the IRC website. To further encourage reporting, the IRC upholds an anti-retaliation policy prohibiting harassment against staff for any good faith reporting of suspected noncompliance or unethical behavior. Dissemination of this information outside of the IRC is challenging due to the low visibility guidelines in Syria.

Staff Support
Because in-person contact between remote staff and supervisors is limited, interaction is commonly facilitated via mobile phone and technologies such as Skype, Viber, and WhatsApp. All new staff are issued an IRC phone to facilitate communication with supervisors and technical units for support. Supervisors perform weekly check-ins with all remotely-located direct reports to offer a minimum level of support and guidance. Performance reviews are also mandated every six months to ensure regular feedback and communication between staff and supervisor. These reviews are documented and records kept by human resource leads in each country. HR

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[8] Programmatic Controls in Northern Syria, International Rescue Committee – Iraq, May 2016.

[9] Programmatic Controls in Southern Syria, International Rescue Committee – Jordan, February 2016.

[10] IRC Global Reporting Guidelines, International Rescue Committee, September 2013.

leads in the SRR are also mandated to compile and implement annual learning and development plans for all IRC staff. The IRC maintains a global portal for online capacity building which includes hundreds of courses and training resources. These materials are available to all staff with an internet connection for self-paced learning. (For more on staff support, see B. Operations: Human Resources.)

B. Programs
Types of programs
Remotely managed projects are inherently more difficult to manage than projects that are locally managed. For this reason, the IRC carefully selects the types of programs implemented inside Syria. First, the IRC prioritizes programs that are either life-saving or have been requested by local communities through needs assessments. Second, programs that are highly technical such as those requiring case management or intensive skills training usually require greater oversight from senior management and higher capacity of local staff. Therefore, due to low levels of in-person supervision in remote programming, these may not be immediately appropriate for highly insecure project sites if local capacity does not exist. However, the IRC may gradually segue to more technical programs as staff capacity is increased and community acceptance grows.

Third, some of the IRC's programs, such as women's empowerment, challenge cultural norms and are therefore more sensitive in nature. To be effective, these programs require good acceptance from the local communities, and careful messaging and timing to avoid reputational and security risks. These programs may also require technical expertise that does not exist locally. For these reasons, the IRC may delay implementing sensitive programs remotely until community acceptance and capacity is deemed sufficient.

Fourth, in contexts where market conditions are conducive, the IRC invests in programs that provide beneficiaries with cash transfers, cash for work, or vouchers. These distributions are easier to monitor and track remotely than trucking, transporting, storing, and distributing goods[11].

Program Design
There is a greater risk with remotely managed programs that their design and implementation will somehow miss the mark because decision makers working in remote locations are more susceptible to proposing strategies and activities that aren't responsive to the local communities. And inadequate involvement from more senior staff during implementation can lead field staff to deviate from work plans – often as a means of adjusting to the context – which may result in lower quality services or a failure to meet program objectives. These risks are multiplied if client feedback mechanisms are insufficient, local staff lack capacity or authority to make programmatic decisions, or communication between field and management staff is inadequate.

At a minimum, the IRC commits to gathering input from local community members and a broad range of local stakeholders prior to designing new projects or beginning work in a new location. This data is collected inside Syria through field staff via mobile phone using pre-set needs assessment tools or through focus group discussions. In addition, as a best practice security and program staff collaborate during the design stage to ensure that programming is realistic in

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[11] Hidrobo M, Hoddinott J, Peterman A, Margolies A, Moreira V. Cash, Food, or Vouchers? Evidence from a Randomized Experiment in Northern Ecuador, Journal of Development Economics (2013)

terms of the scale and scope, coverage, security risks, and available staff capacity to implement quality programs.

In its global strategic plan 2015 – 2020, the IRC committed to making its programs more informed by client needs, preferences, and expectations. In 2015, the IRC Syria regional office undertook a scoping mission to explore the responsiveness of IRC's programming in the region[12]. The mission highlighted the IRC's impressive efforts in the region to engage clients and stakeholders on multiple platforms and in all stages of programming, resulting in a solid foundation for client-informed programming. A Programmatic Complaint Management Field Guide[13] has been produced which provides minimum standards to SRR country programs, including their cross border programs, to develop and implement complaint mechanisms.

Working with Partners
The IRC chooses to work with local partners when doing so is more effective or a better use of resources, expands our scope and reach, or improves responsiveness, speed, and timeliness of our programs compared to implementing directly. There are various mechanisms by which the IRC may provide financial support to partners and this is dictated, not by the type of organization, but by the nature of the organization's relationship with the IRC. These include sub-awards, fixed amount awards, third party agreements, and service contracts.

Though our remote programming might influence the means by which the IRC identifies, vets and performs due diligence on partners, the standard requirements do not change. IRC staff use tools to support the vetting process such as the partner snapshot, pre-award assessments, and anti-terrorism checks guide decision making during the selection process. Due diligence through open dialogue, review of reports, and routine monitoring of partner-led programs continues throughout the life of the relationship. For the sake of accuracy and safety, IRC staff may also communicate with local councils and other available networks in areas of partner programming to verify competencies and good community relationships.

In the SRR context, careful due diligence is especially crucial in order to explore and understand a potential partner's relationship with political or military actors and assess subsequent implications on IRC programs. Having these discussions early allows for time to solve foreseen operational challenges and improves the likelihood that compliance issues will not arise. The IRC is developing additional tools to strengthen the vetting of partners and for conducting pre-award assessments that are specific to remote programming in the region. This toolkit is expected to be available late in 2016.

Working in areas with restricted access hinders the IRC's communication with and support to local partners. At the outset of engagement, the IRC organizes pre-award meetings either in-person or remote which focus on introduction of IRC's policies and procedures and all contractual obligations. Partners in the SRR are provided with additional information about the humanitarian principles and the joint operating principles (JOPs) which guide our work in Syria. The IRC has an additional obligation to support partners in besieged areas to realistically assess their ability to safely implement as planned and to meet the compliance and other requirements of the grant. This obligation is met through regular guidance for partners in the

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[12] Toward a Client-Responsive Approach in the Syria Response Region: Scoping Results and Recommendations, International Rescue Committee, March 2016.

[13] IRC Syria Response Region Programmatic Complaints Management Field Guide, International Rescue Committee, April 2016.

development of their security management plans and training on humanitarian principles, when needed.

Program Coordination
The IRC programs in Syria are implemented through three separate but coordinated country offices in Iraq, Turkey and Jordan. In each of the cross border programs, services are provided inside Syria directly or by supporting organizational partners. The context complexity and poor access resulting from high insecurity requires strong internal and external coordination mechanisms.

The IRC maintains a regional office for the Syria Response in Amman Jordan which provides technical and operational support to country offices, and coordination as needed to ensure a harmonized and more efficient organizational response inside Syria. The IRC ensures cross-learning and consistent programming through regular communication with the Deputy Regional Director. Internal team meetings for each country's cross border program are scheduled on a weekly basis to facilitate better coordination of remotely managed projects.

Overall coordination of cross border humanitarian action is managed through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) cluster system, which operates across two hubs located in Jordan and Turkey, as well as informal coordination networks for actors working cross-border from Lebanon and Iraq. Each year, humanitarian actors working through the cluster system compile a Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for Syria, which outlines the overall strategic plan for humanitarian action for the following year, in addition to consolidating projects to produce one financial figure to appeal to donors for. The HRP builds off of the Humanitarian Needs Overview, which is produced through inter-sector and sector needs assessments conducted through the year. The Senior Management Teams of IRC's country offices in the region are members of the Humanitarian Leadership Group in Turkey and the Cross-Border Task Force in Jordan. In addition, the IRC is the co-lead agency for the WoS Health Sector, the Turkey Protection Cluster and the Jordan XB Health and Nutrition Sector Working Group. Through this involvement, the IRC is providing direction to strategic decision making bodies that drive the Syria response.

The IRC's cross border program from Iraq experiences difficulty with coordination due to the lack of a cluster hub in this location and the challenges of frequent travel to Turkey or Jordan in order to actively participate in those hubs. Program activities in Hasakeh, in Northeastern Syria, fall under the coordination of the Qamishli directorate through the Damascus hub. This model is insufficient since many NGOs including IRC are not recognized by the Government of Syria and therefore do not participate in those meetings. As a result of poor coordination, there is an increased risk of program duplication, missed needs, or unserved populations. Because of these concerns, a new NGO Advisor has been recruited to begin filling gaps in coordination in this region.

Program Monitoring and Controls:
Many of the risks associated with remote management can be mitigated through comprehensive, effective monitoring systems that allow for data triangulation. The basic principles of monitoring and evaluation do not change from a context with unhindered access to one in which access is restricted or untenable. However, monitoring becomes more difficult and more imperative because senior staff do not have access to the project sites and therefore need to rely heavily on data collected by field staff to assess program quality and compliance. The IRC Syria fulfills this need, in the following six ways.

1. The IRC Assessment and Remote Monitoring System for Syria was developed so that IRC-funded programs may better understand the needs on the ground, as well as to monitor program implementation inside Syria. All cross-border programs employ Research and Monitoring Assistants (RMAs) to conduct monitoring and assessment activities. (See Remote Monitoring Manuals for Iraq and Jordan.) The monitoring team operates independently from program and humanitarian access teams; as well as from partners, so that the IRC can use data from any of these sources to increase reliability of the information. RMAs collect data before, during and after distributions; upon receipt of commodities; at partner-led activities; and regularly at health facilities and schools. RMAs also collect beneficiary feedback through surveys, they conduct routine market assessments and monitor daily currency exchange rates.

   The RMAs monitor most of the IRC's activities inside Syria, excluding protection programming due to concerns of confidentiality and safety. They collect the data via Android-based smart phones using pre-set electronic forms and the data are compiled on a common data platform called ONA using the Open Data Kit (ODK) application which is available on and offline. These data are then analyzed and utilized at country and regional levels to direct future programming and to modify strategies to continually improve quality. In the case of partner-led programming, the RMAs monitor compliance with all sub-award or contractual agreements, which is a requirement of several IRC donors.

2. Program teams monitor their own respective program activities. Depending on the sector, staff may be tasked with some of the following: documenting activities, verifying program quality, monitoring displacement and human rights violations, tracking indicators, conducting vendor spot checks, and collecting solicited or unsolicited feedback from beneficiaries or non-beneficiaries.

3. The IRC complements the work of staff to offer a more robust and accountable remote monitoring system through a Commodity Tracking System (CTS) which uses QR codes on the packaging of all commodities traveling into Syria. IRC and partner staff use GPS-enabled mobile phones to scan the codes routinely throughout the delivery of the commodities to track their movement from outside Syria to the distribution endpoints. RMAs are present at each distribution to ensure that the commodities arrive with the packaging.

4. As mentioned in the IRC Acceptance Strategy above, humanitarian access managers are also frequently present during project activities to identify facets of program implementation that may create challenges to acceptance such as misconceptions about the beneficiary selection process, issues with quality of commodities, or the presence of non-independent actors such as members of armed groups. In this way, information from the HAMs may be used to corroborate other data sources.

5. Several of the IRC's donors have initiated third party monitoring as an additional measure of accountability for programs and operations. Third party monitors (TPM) are contracted by the donor and their site visits are coordinated by the respective IRC country office. Following each monitoring activity, the TPM provides all findings to both the donor and IRC. The IRC may provide a written response to any findings within one week of receiving the monitoring report.

6. Partners are required to provide the IRC with relevant data that tracks progress on all sub-awards, as a minimum monitoring requirement. If needed, the IRC staff may support

partners in the development of their monitoring frameworks at project outset and/or engage with them routinely throughout the project cycle to jointly review and analyze data.

C. Operations

All of the IRC's global policies, procedures, and systems assume that senior staff have both physical access and a variety of means of communicating with field office and sites and that they use that access regularly in order to monitor performance and compliance. In Syria, the level of direct oversight, support, and independent monitoring by senior staff is significantly reduced in most of the project sites. In addition, the operating environment inside Syria presents numerous difficulties in complying with the IRC's standard policies and procedures. To avoid undue security risk to staff and address compliance issues, certain alternative procedures may be enacted in consultation with the IRC NY and with approval from IRC donors.

Below are the additional operational risks associated with remote management and the mitigating measures the IRC employs in the region.

1. Human Resources:
There are several aspects of remote management that impact the recruitment, onboarding, management, and support of staff inside Syria.

Recruitment
The pervasive insecurity and remote management of the IRC programs in Syria requires adaptations to recruitment and personnel management strategies. Advertisement of positions is significantly reduced due to the extremely low visibility guidelines[14] under which the IRC operates in the region. Primarily, recruitment within Syria is done using word of mouth by the networks of the IRC staff, other NGOs, and partners. In some sites, open positions are also advertised through flyers placed on community boards or other discrete locations, as appropriate. In accordance with the visibility guidelines, advertisements will also contain the message "the IRC uses a merit-based system of recruitment which emphasizes competencies, knowledge, and expertise".

Vetting of staff in the SRR is complicated by the inability to meet applicants in person. Phone and Skype interviews are standard practice though hindered by poor connectivity and access to mobile networks. Extra care is taken to assess all final candidates for their neutrality and impartiality through Anti-terrorism Checks (ATC) and rigorous pre-hire vetting by the IRC staff in the country office. In particular, the humanitarian access or security management staff are valuable to the recruitment process to verify information at the community level and to examine a candidate's suitability for the position.

There is another important aspect of remote management that has substantial impact on recruitment. Limited access to programs by senior management begets the necessity to transfer supervisory and management responsibilities to staff in the field. Coupled with the significant out-migration of individuals with technical skills and competencies from the crisis, this transfer places enormous burden on recruiters to find, hire and retain staff with supervisory and management skills. However, the IRC makes great efforts to be the "employer of choice" in all project locations which ensures that we succeed in recruiting and retaining highly-qualified staff so that this transfer of duties can happen responsibly.

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[14] The IRC Syria Visibility Guidelines, 2015.

As one way of achieving this, the IRC released a unified Syria Personnel Policy effective January 1, 2016 which serves to harmonize the management, compensation, and support provided to IRC Syria employees. All staff are oriented on the personnel policy as part of the standard onboarding process for Syria staff. The policy outlines a competitive benefits package which takes into account the prevailing labor law and best practices in Syria, SRR human resources (HR) standards, and the IRC Global HR Operating Policies and Procedures. The harmonized policy ensures clear understanding of staff rights, responsibilities, benefits, and obligations; fairness for all staff; and equitably enjoyment of IRC staff benefits.

In addition, an expanded benefits package for returning nationals was launched in 2015 that incentivizes potential employees in the diaspora to return to and remain in their country of origin. In this way, the IRC is working to achieve a goal of nationalization for managers within the SRR.

Staff Onboarding and Orientation
Remote onboarding and orientation is challenging. New field offices within Syria present additional risks because most of the staff are new to the IRC with limited knowledge of the organizational policies, procedures, and standards. This increases the need for strong and consistent remote onboarding as well as sustained capacity strengthening of all IRC Syria staff. Onboarding and orientation is completed either in person, where possible, or through Skype or WebEx meetings. Following orientation, human resources assigns a suite of complementary onboarding trainings and resources to all new employees on their mobile phones using the SRR Mobile Learning Application, launched in 2016. Using this tool, HR tracks employee progress to ensure all resources have been completed as part of their onboarding. The application can also identify ongoing knowledge gaps based on scores collected from participants of each topic.

Staff Retention
Staff retention is particularly important given the challenges in recruitment highlighted above and difficult because of the limitations caused by lack of direct contact and communication. Because of the acute need for management capacity in Syria, the IRC offers Syrians working in Syria at manager level or above an expanded benefits package that incentivizes those who stay with the organization.

The IRC ensures that job descriptions are transparent in the location and associated risks of each role so that candidates may make informed choices in accepting the position. The SRR risk management strategy and plan are presented to all new staff as part of their orientation and a copy of the SRR risk management plan is provided in an appropriate language upon hire.

Performance Management
Remote management of staff is a challenge that is not unique to Syria, the region or to the IRC and is, in fact, a mainstay of most global organizations. In the Syria region, the disadvantages related to the lack of in-person communication and supervision are further exacerbated by poor mobile networks and low internet connectivity. As a best practice, the IRC hires local human resource officers inside Syria as a means of improving the ability of remote supervisors to monitor and manage performance. The IRC's standardized system of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) also ensures that all staff receive performance reviews twice a year. In addition, the development and roll out of a Syria Staff Manual is beneficial for adding clarity to staff rights and responsibilities and to the IRC's performance monitoring system more generally.

Staff support and development
For remotely managed projects, staff support is difficult because of the distance between the employee and supervisor. Appropriate and tailored staff support and professional development

requires frequent communication, and regular performance evaluation which includes discussion of career goals. In the Syria Response Region, HR Leads have developed plans for staff learning and development for each country program. At a global level, the organization has developed a library of online training courses and materials available to all employees wishing to pursue self-directed learning. In addition to internally-produced materials, the IRC has established relationships with DisasterReady[15] and Columbia University to offer online training courses and learning materials on relevant topic areas for staff[16].

In the SRR, the IRC has developed an e-learning mobile application which facilitates employee learning by offering short learning resources on IRC-issued mobile phones. This tool is also used by HR for onboarding. Use of the application is driven by an employee's supervisor who is responsible for assigning all resources. This also serves to foster the involvement of supervisors and managers in staff development.

In addition, remote management frequently relies on the transfer of management responsibilities to remotely-managed field staff. Poor delegation can lead to miscommunication, role confusion, staff burnout, poor quality programming, and ultimately may damage the IRC's reputation. Globally, the IRC offers managers guidance and tools for smart delegation through the Management Development Program (MDP)[17].

2. Finance

The absence of a functioning banking system in Syria necessitates cash programming which is inherently risky and more so for remotely managed programs. The IRC mitigates a substantial portion of this risk by working through formal and informal systems of cash transfer commonly referred to as "*hawala*" which means *transfer* in Arabic. In this system, no funds actually cross the border. Instead, the hawala maintains agents on both sides who communicate with one another to arrange for payments in Syria. Agents are highly respected and accepted members of the community which decreases their risk for conducting this work. For monitoring purposes, distributions and payments by hawala agents are always observed by two or more IRC staff.

In the SRR, Hawalas are used for a variety of functions:
  a. Transferring cash to the IRC offices,
  b. Payment of salaries for the IRC staff and volunteers
  c. Currency exchange, and
  d. Payment of program beneficiaries.

The IRC further lowers our financial risk inside Syria by engaging hawala agents on a reimbursement basis, meaning the hawala agency in Iraq, Turkey or Jordan does not get paid by the IRC until the transfer or distribution is completed inside Syria and all documentation is received.

The IRC compensates for remote management of finance staff and the security risks of operating inside Syria by placing limits on the value of funds kept on hand. In many sites the IRC operates without a field office and therefore, without a safe. For those sites, funds are transferred on the day of the distribution or payment to avoid asking staff to hold or travel with

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[15] View free online courses at: www.DisasterReady.org

[16] All IRC staff can access these online learning resources on RescueNet at: https://rescuenet.rescue.org/admin/hr/default.aspx

[17] IRC staff can get information on the Management Development Program on RescueNet at: https://rescuenet.rescue.org/admin/hr/mdppenglish/default.aspx

cash. In project sites with a safe, a small amount of cash may be kept on hand but daily cash counts are done to ensure totals are within the maximum limits. Lower limits for approvals by Syria finance staff also allow for greater control from the country offices.

3. Procurement:
Globally, the IRC uses a system of decentralized purchasing and supplier contracting authority under which country programs are responsible for managing their in-country resources while global and regional supply chain provides support and guidance. All procurement and related activities undertaken by the IRC must follow the guidance and procedures in the Global Supply Chain Manuals and corresponding standard operation procedures (SOPs). However, remote management presents a number of risks and overcoming them may result in slower delivery and questionable quality of essential supplies.

- Vendor selection:
  The process of identifying and vetting suppliers inside Syria must be done in the absence of management staff in a context in which sourcing is highly challenging becuase 1) Procurement is dependent on the availability of informal suppliers and ad hoc markets; 2) advertisement of tenders is impossible due to low visibility guidelines; and 3) transport of goods into or out of besieged communities is impossible. These factors hamper IRC's ability to receive multiple quotations from qualified vendors. For this reason, larger procurements are performed by the country offices or, in the case of pharmaceuticals and medical supplies, by IRC NY for transport into Syria.

  In areas where procurement is possible within Syria, the IRC will advertise tenders on community boards or other common access areas, in addition to approaching known suppliers directly to encourage bid submissions. Country programs maintain updated approved vendor lists in project areas to facilitate active outreach for the solicitation of bids. The identification and vetting of reliable suppliers includes site visits, references, and ATC checks conducted by the IRC staff using tools developed to assist in the process. The IRC ensures that supply chain staff inside Syria receive the sufficient training and are equipped with the required operational knowledge and technical capabilities to vet suppliers and partners.

  Waivers and supporting documentation are required whenever three quotations are not available, including besieged areas, and/or where there are a limited number of vendors capable of providing commodities or supplies. In some besieged areas, and when solicitation of competitive bids is not allowed due to low or no visibility, a deviation from standard procedures may be applied, in consultation with IRC NY and with approval from IRC donors.

- Price verification:
  Verifying prices inside Syria by staff working remotely from the three country offices is difficult. And, the extreme volatility of the context results in wild fluctuations in availability and prices of commodities. When operating under remote management, the IRC overcomes these risks by triangulating price information captured by RMAs, supply chain staff in the field, or by partners and other networks. To monitor prices, IRC teams consisting of supply chain and non-supply chain staff inside Syria conduct monthly market surveys and regular spot checks on frequently needed supplies.

- Delivery verification and product quality:

In order to ensure receipt of items and services, additional verification for deliveries has been put into place. First, IRC's Commodity Tracking System (CTS) uses scanners on the mobile phones to track the transport of shipments and document when they arrive at the final destination. Deliveries need to be confirmed by staff from two different departments at the time of delivery. In several sites the IRC uses third-party monitoring for additional confirmation. RMAs and program staff collect beneficiary feedback during and after distributions to verify that the supplies delivered were of acceptable quality.