



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION



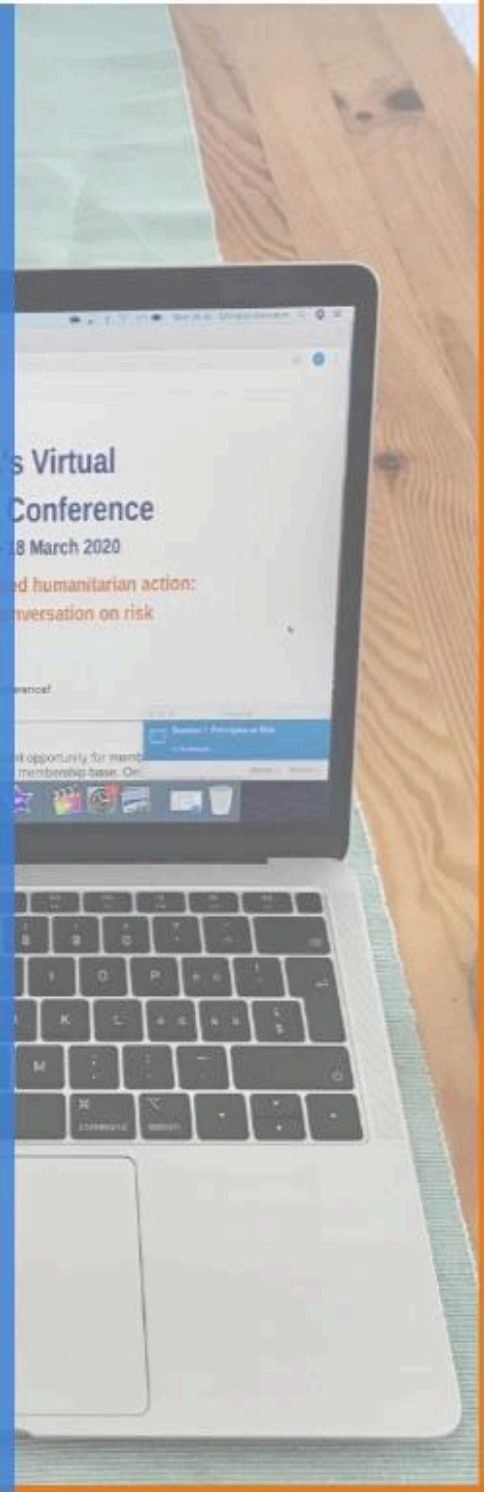
#ICVAConference2020

ICVA's Virtual Annual Conference

Online - 18 March 2020

**Protecting principled humanitarian action:
an honest conversation on risk**

Annual Conference Report 2020



What did we discuss?

Introduction

ICVA’s Annual Conference shows that we, as a sector, are agile; we continue delivering to our mandate while complying with the duty of care for our staff.

The transformation of ICVA’s face-to-face annual conference to a successful online event in such a short time demonstrates the agility of the whole sector to respond to the ever-changing environment. It shows that with the right safeguards in place, humanitarian actors can continue their work, while also delivering on duty of care towards their staff.

Covid 19 does not suspend our principled intervention, although it adds to the already existing risks.

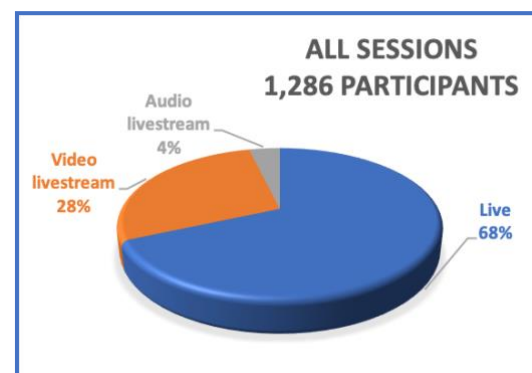
COVID-19 was inescapable throughout the discussions of the Annual Conference, touching on the ability of locally based humanitarian actors, including youth, to respond and on lobbying for exceptional measures from donors for quick decision-making, flexibility and a real risk sharing attitude. However, as other disrupters and challenges discussed throughout the three sessions, it has not put principled humanitarian action on hold, on the contrary. It is important to make sure that humanitarian actors consider those who are off the grid in their responses and keep driving to respond.

In-line with commitments in ICVA’s statement [“COVID19 - NGOs critical to the delivery of effective, principled humanitarian assistance”](#), issued on 17 March 2020, ICVA is ensuring open dialogue with donors to share multi-faceted NGO voices to be reflected in key discussions on COVID-19. It will continue supporting its members to deliver on their mandate and in respond to COVID-19.

Who participated and how did they engage at the Virtual Annual Conference?

ICVA’s first virtual annual conference saw the active and vibrant engagement of almost 1,300 participants, who either joined the event on the webinar platform or through video and audio-only livestreams.

If you missed it, don’t worry, as you can view the recordings of all three sessions on ICVA’s Virtual Annual Conference [webpage](#).



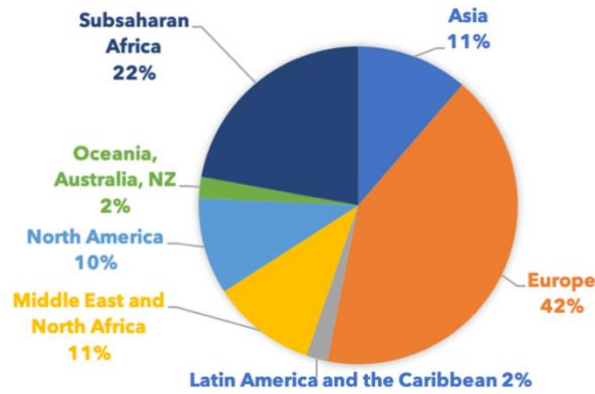
You can find English captions at the bottom of the recordings and English, French and Arabic subtitles of the recordings are also available.

More information, background reading on the topics discussed can be found on the [ICVA Annual Conference website](#).

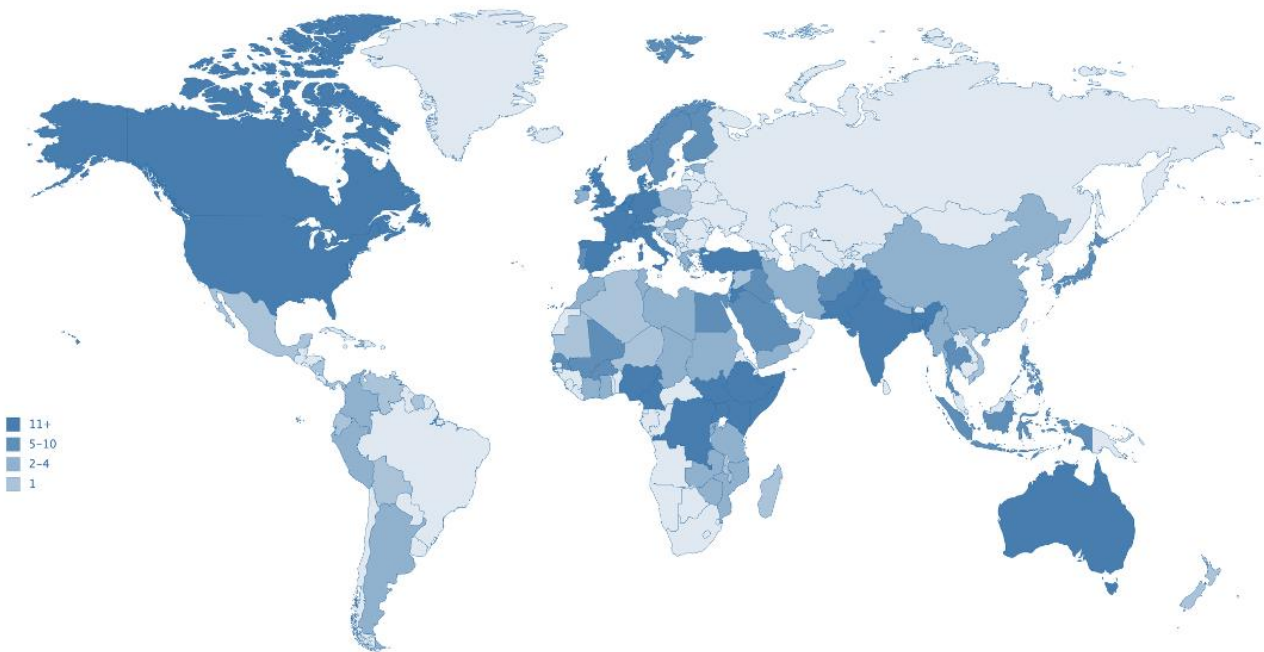
Participation by the numbers:

We had participants joining the virtual conference from 100 countries based in 7 regions.

REGIONAL PARTICIPATION



COUNTRY LEVEL PARTICIPATION



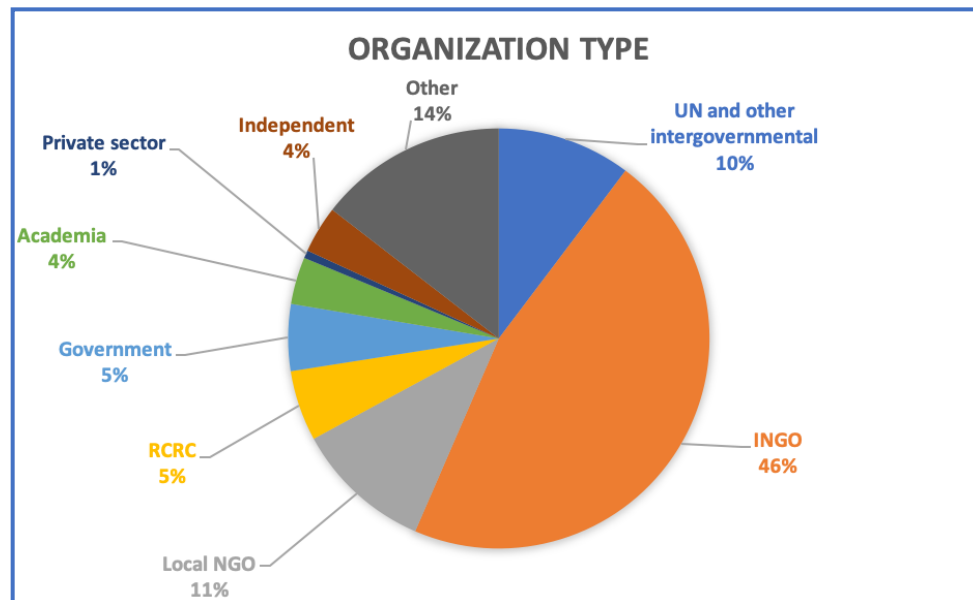
PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

45% of participants were male



55% of participants were female

Over half of our participants (57%) were from International and Local/National NGOs, while the UN and other Intergovernmental organisations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and other organisations working on the front lines and on issues related to principles and risk consisted of almost 30% of the audience during the conference.



Summary of Sessions: What did we hear from the speakers and participants?

Ensuring principled humanitarian intervention is as crucial as ever, but the risks to principled intervention are on the increase.

Today, the pressure on NGOs and the risks humanitarian actors face to deliver in a principled manner to their mandate is enormous. The number of conflicts has not diminished, on the contrary they have become even more protracted and complex. Gloria Modong Morris, Executive Director of the Titi Foundation, highlighted the realities of physical safety and sexual violence that women and girls face in conflict settings. School and hospitals are often the first targets of the conflicts, while civilians sieged and constantly instrumentalized by the parties to the conflict. NGO workers are also under attack. Yves Daccord, Director General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and a number of ICVA NGO members shared how colleagues and friends have been kidnapped, tortured and in some cases killed, while working with the most vulnerable and excluded communities.

To address some of the risks to principled humanitarian action, we need to do more to support enforcement of international humanitarian law (IHL) and accountability under IHL.

Lack of accountability for grave breaches of international humanitarian law is a constant threat to principled humanitarian intervention. NGOs need to further use and support existing instruments and mechanisms that ensure accountability for perpetrators of IHL at national, regional and international level. As Inger Ashing, Chief Executive Officer of Save the Children International emphasised, humanitarian actors need to do more together

to put pressure on States and non-State groups to uphold the law.

Counterterrorism (CT) measures are important to safeguard peace and save lives, however, they also might threaten principled humanitarian action if not drafted and applied correctly.

If not well formulated and justly applied, CT measures can hinder access to humanitarian aid for civilian populations and become strong weapons at the hand of the terrorists they seek to fight. Khaleel Desai, Head of Governance at Islamic Relief Worldwide, reminded that compliance requirements are often developed without the understanding of their implications. Hibak Kalfan, Executive Director of the Network of Empowered Aid Response (NEAR) underlined the importance of having different voices at the table. The complex political environment requires us to invest more in diplomacy and advocacy, reach out, inform and engage with the public, the politicians and all branches of the government to influence the laws, policies and practices that impact the sector. It requires us to adjust internally and externally; we need to invest in acquiring new skills, tools and [guidelines](#) for our staff and engage with non-traditional actors, like ministries of finance and treasury.

Our principled work in support of refugees and migrants is also highly at risks. Humanity is core to our principled intervention, and we stand in solidarity to protect it.

Ignacio Packer, ICVA's Executive Director, mentioned how ICVA and other civil society members of the Action Committee on Migration took a strong position on the situation in the Turkey-Greece border and elsewhere in the world, where border management practices put at risk the lives of those we need to protect and support: people escaping war, conflict, disaster and violence; people seeking better opportunities for themselves and their children. Sarah Mardini's story is a stark reminder of how NGOs and humanitarian actors are taking risks, including risks of being criminalised to protect the rights of refugees and migrants. Humanity is core to principled intervention, and NGOs stand in solidarity to protect it.

Addressing risks coming from within the sector itself, such as risks to sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian workers and/or fraud cases is also high in our common agenda.

In addition to the direct risks to principled humanitarian intervention, other, rather functional and operational risks, make it further challenging for humanitarian actors to deliver on their mandate. Some of the risks come from within the sector itself. Cases of fraud, lack of accountability to donors and the populations NGOs work with undermine the credibility and integrity of humanitarian aid work. Cases of sexual exploitation, abuse by humanitarian workers and sexual harassment at work are severe violations of human rights and there should be no impunity for their perpetrators. Diane Goodman, UNHCR Senior Coordinator for Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH), stressed the importance of collective action to strengthen the humanitarian sector's approach to preventing and responding to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) and Sexual Harassment (SH). The High Commissioner for Refugees, as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Champion on Protection from SEA and SH has set up an ambitious agenda. Building on his

predecessor's achievements, the High Commissioner's agenda focusses on addressing root causes. Find out more on the IASC Champion on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment.

We need to focus on operational external risks, which requires a renewed engagement to the core commitments of the Grand Bargain.

NGOs seek to deliver aid that is timely, inclusively accessible and empowering those affected to realize their rights. However, they are operating in an ever increasingly challenging environment, and with resources are reducing, they often have to invest heavily in administrative work to access such resources. The Grand Bargain commitments, especially in relation to localisation, are more relevant than ever. Despite some progresses made, a renewed engagement is needed on core commitments such as multi-year, flexible, un-earmarked funding. ICVA's call for less paper and more aid should also remain at the core of our joint advocacy.

Donors should support an environment where NGOs are not pushed to compete for funding but work together, in complementarity, towards solutions on the ground. Sustainable investment in institutional capacity of local actors is a must.

Core funding of NGOs supports principled humanitarian intervention as it allows them to build knowledge; invest in accountability to affected populations; improve efficiency and quality in their delivery; it enables them to better analyse and manage risks, including by investing properly in duty of care for their staff. National and local NGOs find it particularly difficult to access such core funding while they are often on the frontline of the response. A truthful commitment to localization means supporting the institutional capacity development of the local actors in a sustainable manner. The ICVA and Humanitarian Leadership Academy paper "[Unpacking Localisation](#)" indicates that more understanding may be needed of the true cost of managing risk for NGOs, and the difference between the willingness to accept risk and the ability to manage the risk effectively.

It is also critical for NGOs to understand how to better manage risk.

This does not mean reducing risk to zero; it means being more intentional in the process of identifying risk, developing controls where possible, and embedding good risk management practice in the culture of the organization. Jeremy Rempel, Head of Humanitarian Finance and Coordinator Less Paper More Aid at ICVA, explained that embedding risk management is to put trust at the centre (See ICVA briefing paper [Risk and Humanitarian Culture](#) for more details). Jean-François Riffaud, Executive Director at Action Against Hunger France, underlined the need to keep the focus on people in need while managing risk and not on risk itself. A key challenge for NGOs is to better identify risk appetites and begin to develop a clear link between risk appetite (willingness to take on risk), and risk tolerances (the ability to manage individual risks) while avoiding a serious gap between the two. Collectively, NGO and partners need to have a more open dialog on how to address the challenge of embedding risk management into organizational culture: improved sharing of good practices, collective dialog with donors, sharing of challenges.

**On the donor side - NGOs welcome a more honest discussion on risk sharing.
There is no partnership without a risk taking.**

Risk transfer is also a natural part of the funding process. However, there is a strong need for improved dialog on how best to ensure that all partners in the chain of humanitarian funding (donors, UN, INGOs, NNGOs, local partners) accept and manage an appropriate level of risk without simply transferring as much as possible to the next partner. As Philippe Besson, Head of the Multilateral Division at the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), noted, donors need to be challenged by collective NGO leadership in order for this discussion to take place. NGOs should collectively and propositionally raise the power and ethics relations to breakdown the financial and political dichotomy that exists in governments so they would engage in a more principled manner on topics like Counterterrorism measures, bank de-risking etc. Show the mirror to the donors, it is in the donors interest to be principled too.

The complex challenges we face demand of us to work more closely and better together.

No one can address such challenges alone, but if NGOs come with common positions and actions, they make a better chance of influencing the environment to the benefit of the people we work with. Gloria Modong Morris, pointed out the need for a greater inclusion of local and national NGOs. ICVA serves exactly this purpose. It brings NGOs together, help them coordinate and react jointly, while leveraging the actions of individual members that are at the benefit of the collective and the people we work with. But ICVA itself is also part of other networks and has developed a large number of partnerships with States, other civil society organizations, UN Agencies and private sector, so that humanitarian actors can be even stronger in their actions. Working with the affected population is also a must for a lasting change. Roxanne Tajbakhsh, Global Focal Point for the Migration Working Group at the UN Major Group for Children and Youth ([UNMGCY](#)), highlighted the importance of youth participation as well and provided for concrete examples on the positive impact it brings.


Despite all the risks and challenges, there are also many partnerships and joined initiatives developed to protect principled humanitarian solutions.

It is encouraging to see how States are engaged with NGOs in the normative, political and practical sense. Anna de Courcy Wheeler, Advisor at Article 36 and International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW), presented the [Political Declaration](#) to ensure the protection of civilians from humanitarian harm arising from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Martin Menger detailed the [Humanitarian Call for Action \(CfA\)](#) which compiles concrete measures and best practices to strengthen and better implement international humanitarian law worldwide. The CfA shows states concrete ways in which they can help humanitarian organisations to provide needs-based aid. This comes in addition to the various [initiatives by ICVA NGO members and other partners](#) to protect principled humanitarian action. As Jeremy Rempel stated, collective action is key.

To ensure these initiatives will work at the benefit of the people we work with, we need to continue investing in partnerships.

ICVA is working hard on its 2030 Strategy and commits to follow up on all the important points that came out of the discussions throughout the three sessions. This is a crucial moment to reflect how by working together NGOs can enhance the quality of their intervention at the benefit of those more in need. ICVA's mission is to make humanitarian action more principled and more effective. Its 2030 Strategy is taking into consideration the different trends affecting the work of humanitarian actors and how ICVA membership and Secretariat engage with those trends to keep humanitarian action principled and effective.

To see how you can feed into the 2030 Strategy development, please visit [ICVA's 2030 Strategy webpage](#).



ICVA 2030
A Collaborative
Future for
Principled
and Effective
Humanitarian
Action

Don't miss out!

If you liked what you read in the summary and you missed the discussion live, you can still watch and hear the recordings with subtitles in English, French and Arabic on [ICVA's Virtual Annual Conference](#) webpage.

You can also find the [Agenda](#), the [Speaker Bio's](#) and the [Concept Note](#) of the Virtual Annual Conference on the website.