



protect
humanitarians



CHARTER OF RIGHTS

FRONTLINE HUMANITARIAN AND COMMUNITY WORKERS

Recognising the humanity behind humanitarian work.

Developed and Published by

Humanitarian Aid International (HAI)
Community World Service Asia (CWSA)
Protect Humanitarians

Contributors and Supporters



HUMANITARIAN
ADVISORY GROUP



ABBREVIATIONS

BMJ	British Medical Journal
CAFOD	Catholic Agency For Overseas Development
CAR	Central African Republic
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
CWSA	Community World Service Asia
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
GISF	Global Interagency Security Forum
HAI	Humanitarian Aid International
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
INSO	International NGO Safety Organisation
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organisation

FOREWORD

On behalf of civil society organisations across both the Global North and South, it is with a deep sense of honour and shared responsibility that we present the Charter of Rights for Frontline and Community Workers. In recent years, it has become increasingly apparent that the conditions and challenges faced by frontline humanitarian and community workers—those who stand closest to both human suffering and human resilience—have too often remained invisible within the broader international development narrative. These individuals embody the moral compass of our collective humanitarian effort. Yet, their well-being, safety, and dignity are rarely afforded the same attention as the frameworks they strive to uphold.

While the Grand Bargain agenda 3.0 outlines ten transformative levers aimed at 2026, it is crucial to highlight that the well-being of local and community actors should be at the forefront of these discussions. Thus, it is essential to acknowledge that much work remains to be done at the grassroots level to advance the rights of those who connect with the most marginalised communities.

The Charter of Rights for Frontline Humanitarian and Community Workers represents an important collective effort developed over recent years. This document is rooted in the final recommendations from the “Status of Frontline Humanitarian Workers” study, a global initiative led by Humanitarian Aid International (HAI) and Community World Service Asia (CWSA), in partnership with COAST Bangladesh and ECOWEB Philippines. We affirm that rights are not simply privileges granted by those in power but are fundamental entitlements shared by every individual. The Charter seeks to establish a framework in which these rights are acknowledged, protected, and realised through principles of fair governance, accountable institutions, and active civil society participation. Furthermore, it emphasises that both development and humanitarian initiatives must be firmly grounded in the respect for human rights, ensuring that no one is left behind. As such, this document is not only a statement of our values but also a call to action, encouraging all stakeholders—governments, civil society, private sector actors, and communities—to reaffirm their commitment, by endorsing this charter, to uphold, defend, and promote these rights in all areas of life. We envision a future where justice is accessible to everyone, participation is meaningful, and systems are transparent and inclusive.

The Charter of Rights for Frontline Humanitarian and Community Workers will serve as a vital advocacy tool for civil society organisations working across North and South, drawing attention to the rights of those who are often unheard and may not receive the recognition they rightfully deserve for their critical work. In closing, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to Rajeev Kumar Jha, a valued member of HAI, for his leadership as the author of this significant document. We would like to sincerely acknowledge and express our deep appreciation to CWSA, Protect Humanitarians, INSO, GISF, CAFOD, CHS Alliance, and the Humanitarian Advisory Group. Their exceptional support and profound insights have greatly enriched the development of this charter. Their collaborative efforts have been instrumental in crafting a charter that is not only pertinent to current challenges but also poised to make a significant impact on the communities we serve.

Sudhanshu Shekhar Singh
Founder & CEO
Humanitarian Aid International (HAI)

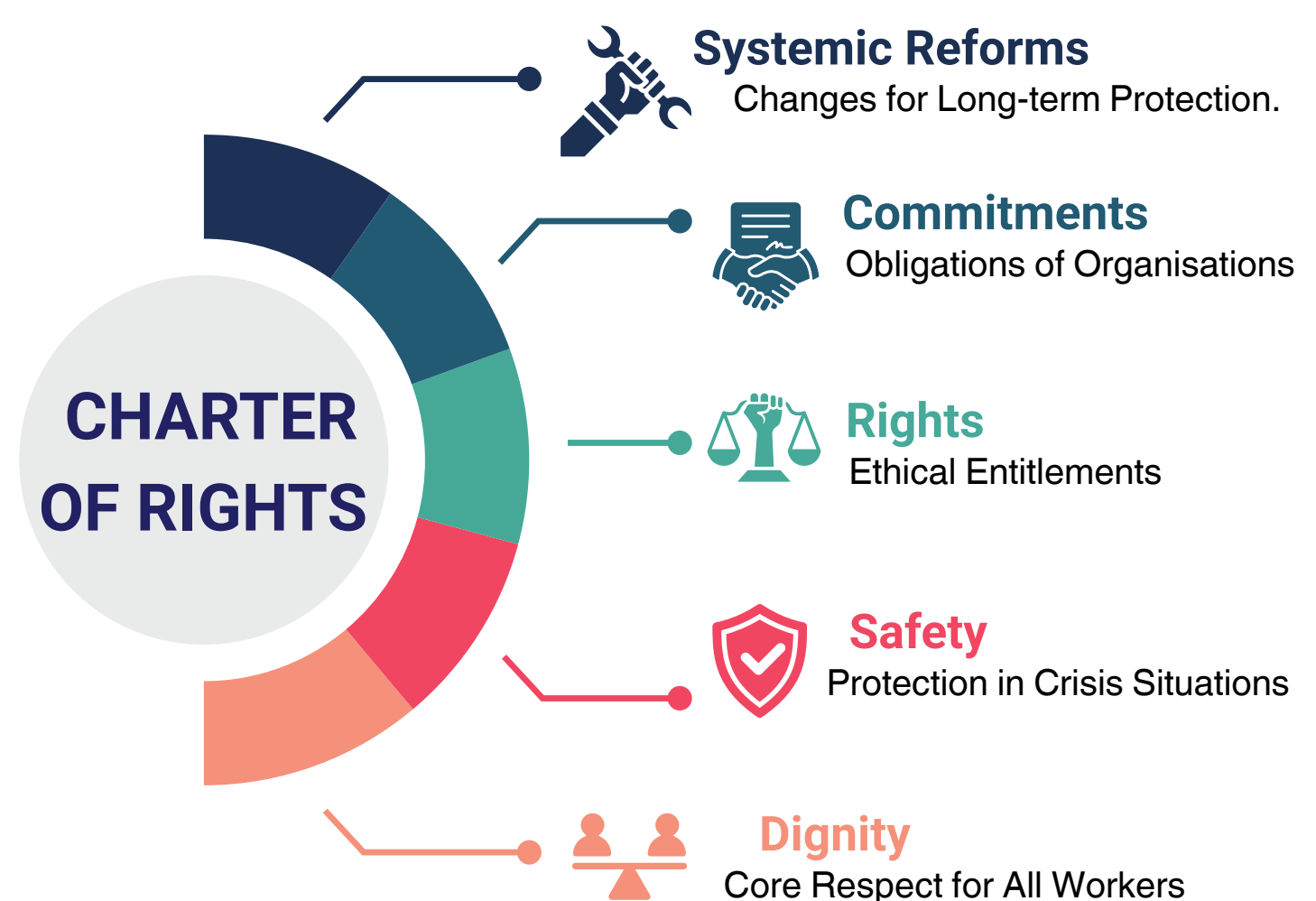
CHARTER OF RIGHTS

FRONTLINE HUMANITARIAN AND COMMUNITY WORKERS

Vision Statement

This Charter of Rights aims to affirm the dignity, safety, and rights of frontline humanitarian and community workers who stand at the forefront of crises and resilience.

It calls for ensuring rights and commitments from humanitarian actors, governments and institutions, while allowing for context-sensitive and progressively realised implementation aligned with legal and operational realities.



Why is it Important?

Strengthening the well-being and security of frontline workers is essential for ensuring continuity, efficiency, and quality of humanitarian response. Evidence demonstrates that protected and supported workers are more effective, experience lower turnover, and contribute to improved humanitarian outcomes. Thus, investment in their rights is not an administrative burden but a strategic and ethical approach to saving more lives.

Loss of Life

The neglect of the well-being of local humanitarian workers is not anecdotal—it is extensively documented across global humanitarian monitoring systems. According to the humanitarian outcomes, 2024 surpassed the previous year's record-high death toll for aid workers, with 383 fatalities reported across 27 countries—21 of which saw an increase from last year. Attacks on healthcare also surged¹. The Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition reported a 25% rise in attacks on health workers and health facilities in 2023–2024, the highest since tracking began².

In parallel, chronic risks—mental health distress, job insecurity, and discrimination—continue to escalate. These risks justify why the Charter of Rights must formally protect local and frontline humanitarian and community workers.

Operation Risk

- Local humanitarian personnel undertake 72–80% of field-level operations globally, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates.
- Most of the security incidents affecting aid operations occur within 50 km of workers' home communities, demonstrating that local responders bear the operational risk, not internationals³.
- In protracted crises such as South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), attacks on local staff occur at a rate 4–6 times higher than on international staff⁴.

Mental Health

- A global survey published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) Global Health found over 50% of aid workers reported symptoms of anxiety, depression, or PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), directly linked to workload, insecurity, and lack of organisational support⁵.
- WHO indicates that post-disaster environments increase the risk of common mental disorders by two to three times⁶.
- According to the study, The Status of Frontline Humanitarian Workers, conducted by HAI, CWSA, COAST and ECOWEB, Status of Frontline Humanitarian Workers, One-third of participants (34%) said they felt “overly stressed” on a daily or weekly basis, to the point that it affected their ability to work, and 12% described their mental health as poor or very poor.

Job Insecurity

- According to the study “Status of Frontline Humanitarian Workers”, 94% of INGO staff had a formal contract, compared to only 57% of staff in sub-national or community-based organisations. Short-term contracts dominate, with 47% of frontline workers on contracts shorter than a year, and a further 19% having no formal contract at all.
- Pay varied widely, with expatriate frontline workers earning over four times that of national frontline workers and INGO workers earning twice that of staff in sub-national and community-based organisations, which reflects the findings of previous research.

This study underscores the importance of accurately diagnosing the critical conditions they face in conflict zones. One of the most significant recommendations arising from the research is the development of a “Charter of Rights” specifically for frontline humanitarian and community workers.

Following this recommendation, the Charter of Rights will serve as an advocacy tool for promoting the agenda of localisation, through improved well-being of frontline workers, as promised under the Grand Bargain agreement in 2016. It will also empower thousands of frontline humanitarian and community workers by ensuring their dignity in life and labour, which has yet to be fully recognised.

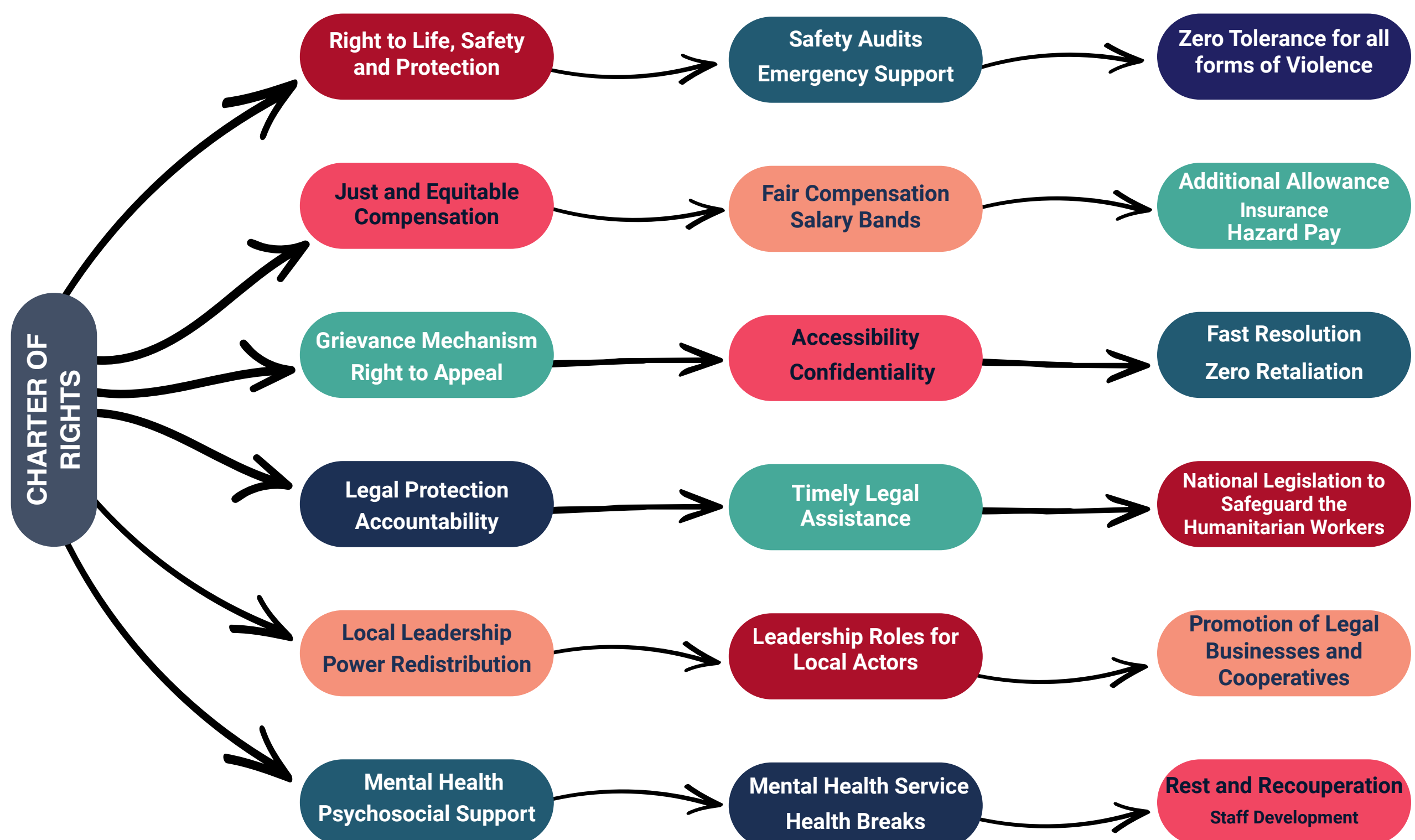
The Charter of Rights calls upon all international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), United Nations agencies, and national government bodies to take proactive measures to promote and protect the rights of frontline humanitarian and community workers. These dedicated individuals, who often operate in challenging and high-risk environments, play a crucial role in delivering essential services and support to vulnerable populations. The Charter emphasises the need for these organisations to ensure that these workers are treated with dignity and respect, that their safety is prioritised, and that they have access to the necessary resources and support to carry out their vital missions effectively. By doing so, we can uphold the essential principles of human rights and enhance the impact of humanitarian efforts worldwide.

Preamble

Recognising that humanitarian operations occur across diverse geographic, political and legal landscapes, this Charter affirms the universal dignity and rights of frontline humanitarian and community workers while allowing for context-sensitive operationalisation. Organisations adopting this charter acknowledge that labour laws, security environments, funding structures, and socio-economic conditions vary significantly across countries and crisis settings. Implementation of the Charter shall therefore be guided by principles of context, ensuring alignment with applicable national labour legislation, existing organisational mandates, and risk environments.

Organisations commit to progressively realising the rights outlined in this Charter, recognising that full implementation may not be immediately feasible in all operational contexts.

1. Establishing a “Charter of Rights” that is universally applicable and non-negotiable.
2. Prioritising rights directly linked to humanitarian and community worker safety, protection and prevention of harm.
3. Strengthening frontline humanitarian and community worker rights over time based on available resources, funding structures and programme scale.
4. Leveraging inter-agency collaboration, pooled funds and partnerships to overcome financial and structural limitations.

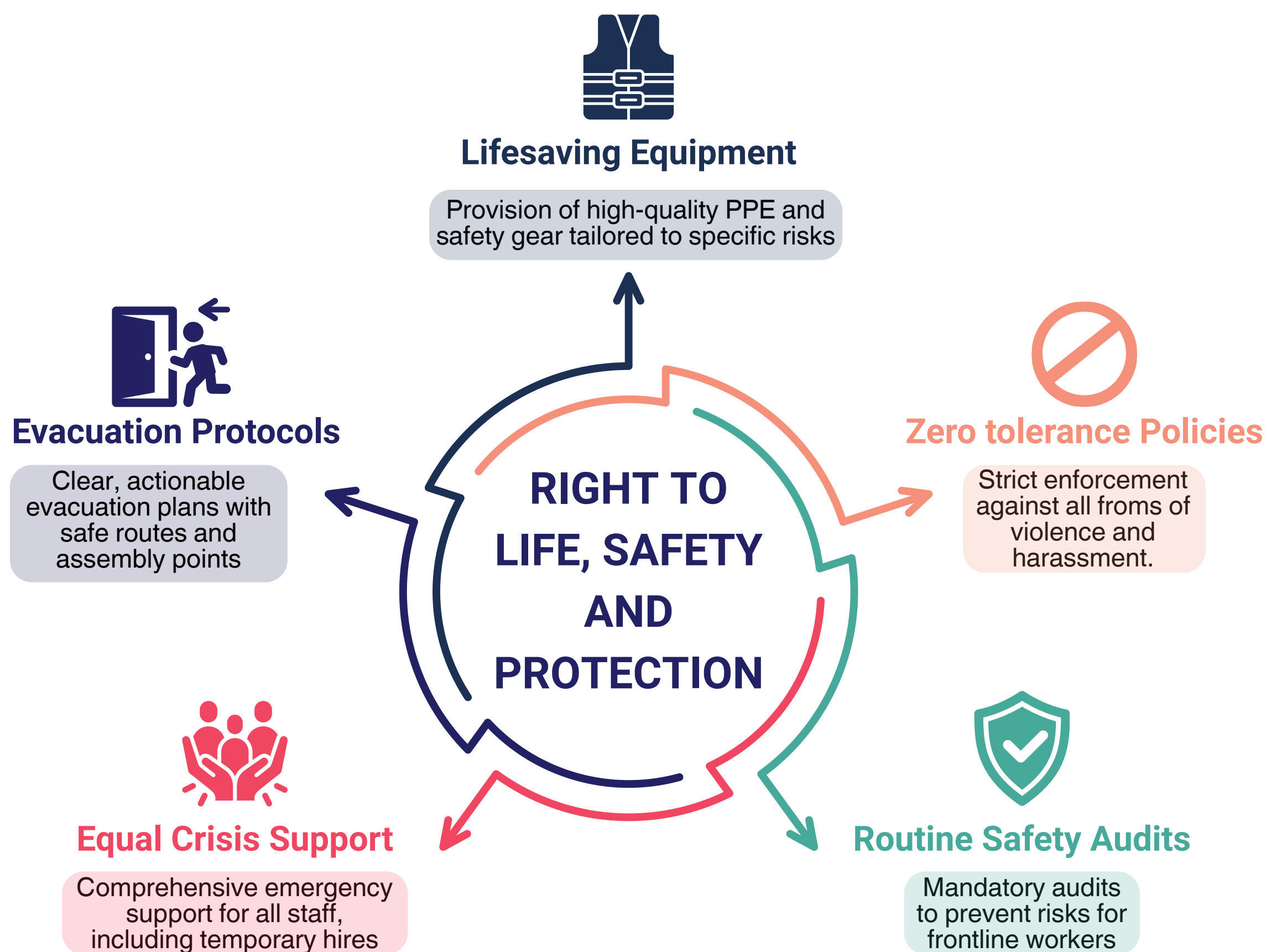


Components

The rights outlined in this Charter apply to all humanitarian and community workers across all humanitarian and crisis contexts. While the rights outlined here apply universally, their implementation may be adapted to national legal frameworks and contextual constraints.

I Right to Life, Safety and Protection

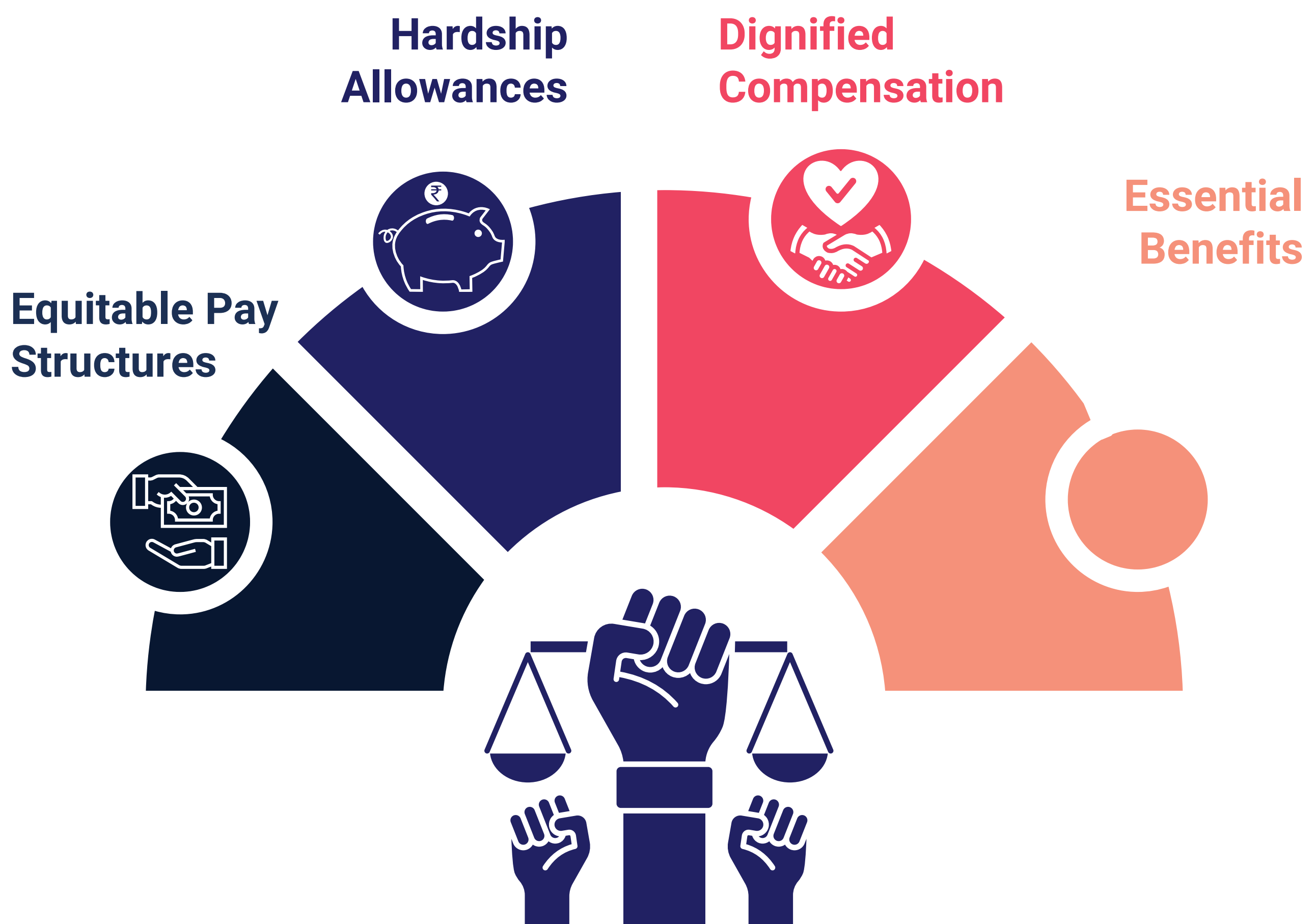
- **Provision of Life-Saving Equipment:** It falls to the organisations to ensure all personnel, especially those in conflict zones, disease outbreaks, or disaster sites, must have access to essential fit-for-purpose, high-quality Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and safety gear, to contextual risk levels.
- **Evacuation and Crisis Preparedness:** Organisations must maintain context-appropriate, clear and actionable evacuation protocols for all locations with tiered preparedness measures for low, medium and high-risk settings.
- **Equal Access to Crisis Support:** All staff, including temporary and short-term, should be included in crisis response systems, with provisions scaled to contract type, risk and operational feasibility, including medical and psychosocial support.
- **Routine Safety Audits:** Routine safety audits shall be conducted proportionately to operational scale and risk level, reducing risk exposure for frontline humanitarian and community workers.
- **Zero Tolerance:** for inaction on all types of violence or harassment —physical, verbal, sexual, discriminatory, or digital.



I

Right to Just and Equitable Compensation

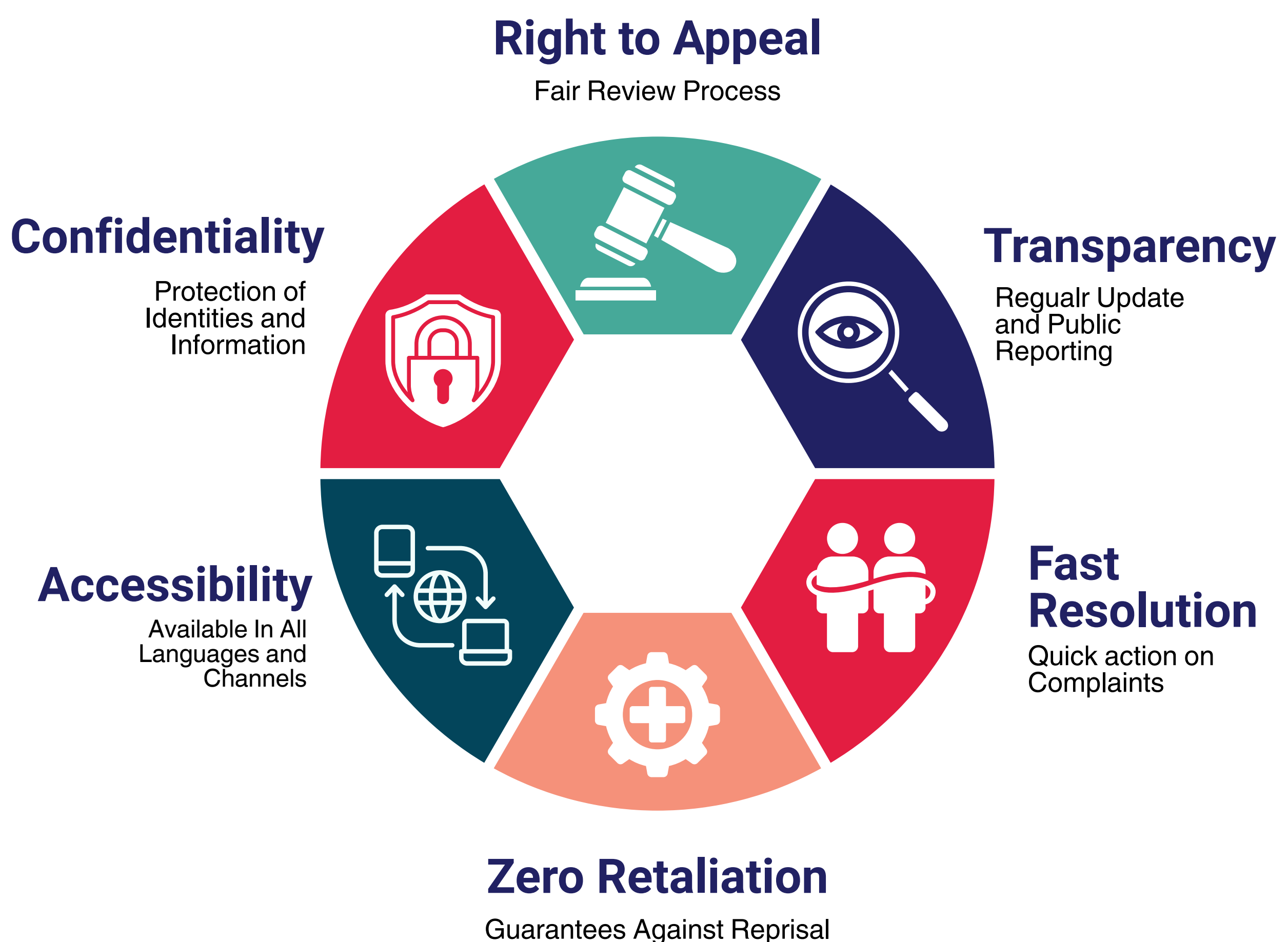
- **Dignified Compensation:** Compensation frameworks should align with responsibilities, risks, and local living standards while complying with national labour laws, ensuring all staff, regardless of contract type, receive fair, transparent, and dignified compensation aligned with their responsibilities, risks, and local living standards.
- **Equitable Pay:** Implement equitable pay structures across roles and locations, eliminating discriminatory disparities. Equitable pay refers to fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory structures, not necessarily identical remuneration across countries.
- **Hardship Allowance:** Provision of hazard or hardship allowances for staff in high-risk or emergency settings with clear criteria based on contextual risk assessments.
- **Essential Benefits:** Organisations will strive to ensure equitable access to core benefits, including health & accident-cover insurance, leave and retirement for all staff, with flexibility for context-based application consistent with national labour laws.



III

Safe and responsive grievance mechanisms to address concerns without fear of retaliation.

- **Accessible to All:** Organisations must instate well-functioning complaints mechanisms accessible to all and ensure grievance-related information is available in every worker's language, with multiple channels—hotline, in-person, digital, and anonymous—so no voice is left unheard.
- **Confidential and Secure:** Ensure strict protection of identities and sensitive information, ensuring workers can speak without fear.
- **Zero Tolerance for Retaliation:** Employers must ensure that no one will face reprisal, formal or informal, for raising a complaint. Performance appraisals and contract renewals must be shielded from adverse action linked to the grievance submitter.
- **Fast and Fair Resolution:** Ensure clear deadlines: acknowledge within days, resolve as effectively as possible. Life-threatening, sexual abuse, exploitation, harassment and safety-related complaints are acted on immediately.
- **Transparent and Accountable:** To ensure regular updates for complainants, plus anonymised public reporting, organisations should encourage adopting third-party oversight or ombuds mechanisms where feasible to foster trust in the systems.
- **Right to Appeal:** Ensure fair and open pathways for review, including third-party or external mediation when needed.



IV

Right to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

We advocate for the following minimum standards:

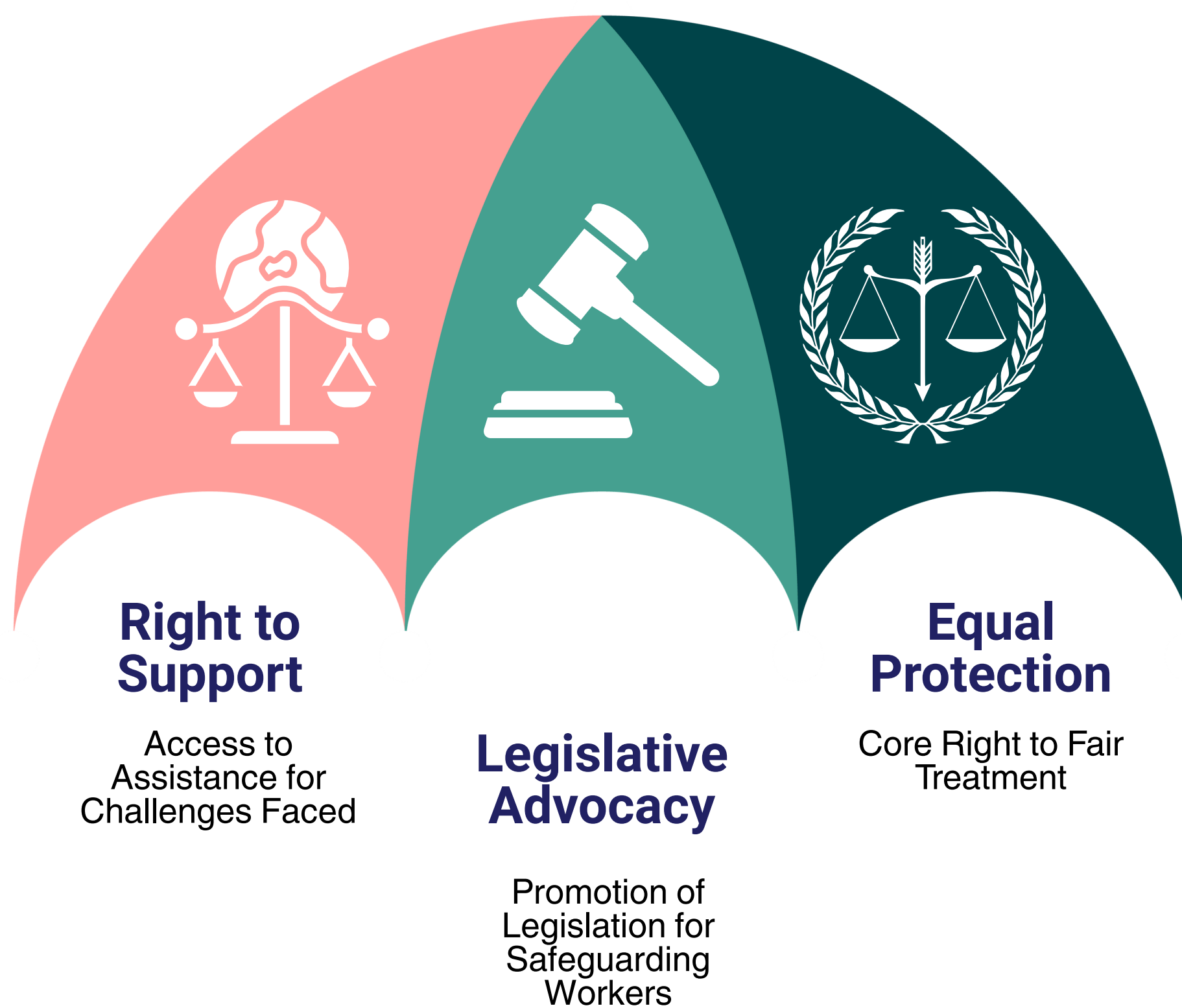
- **Guaranteed Access to Mental Health Services:** Organisations must ensure, at a minimum, basic psychological support for all staff regardless of role, contract type, or location. Enhanced services provided based on resources, partnerships, and operational context would further ensure timely access to quality mental health and psychosocial support.
- **Integration of MHPSS into Staff Development:** Organisations must ensure mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) within all stages of staff development.
- **Protection of the Right to Mental Health Breaks:** Organisations must recognise that rest is not a privilege. Rest and recovery provisions should comply with national labour laws at a minimum, and organisational policies must be set and expanded in high-stress contexts.
- **Leadership Accountability:** Humanitarian leaders should be accountable for creating safe, supportive, and stigma-free workplaces where staff wellbeing is prioritised as integral to organisational performance and ethical practice.



V

Right to Protection and Accessibility

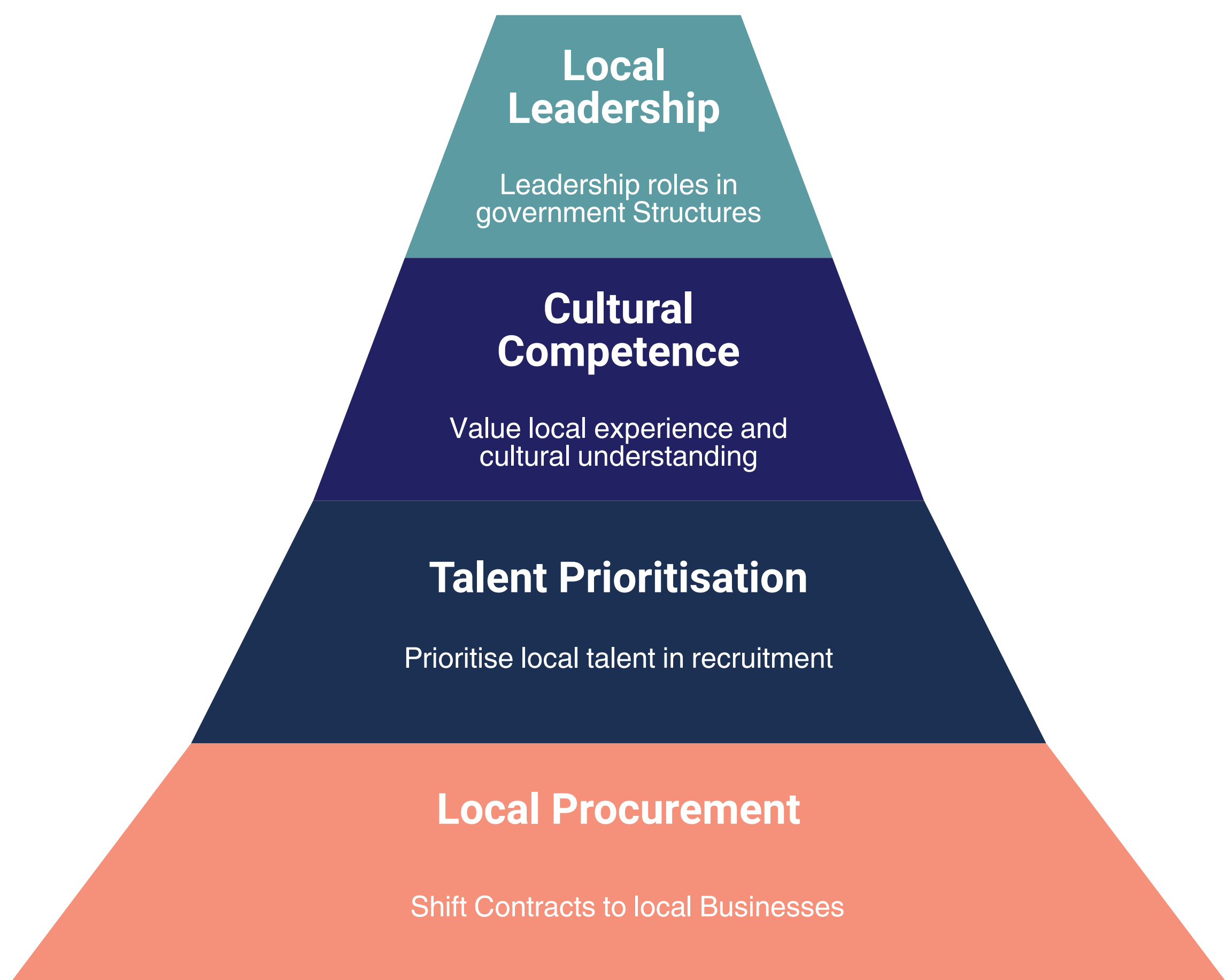
- **Equal Protection:** Organisations must ensure that all humanitarian and community workers, international, national, and local alike, must be recognised and protected equally under labour laws, international humanitarian law, and human rights frameworks.
- **Right to Support:** Organisations must dispense qualified assistance for staff facing threats, arbitrary detention, criminalisation, or other challenges in the line of duty within reasonable parameters under national and international law.
- **Promotion of legislation:** Humanitarian leaders should engage with host governments, inter-agency forums, and international bodies to promote national legislation that safeguards humanitarian and community workers within contextual parameters of reasonable justice and legal redressal.



VI

Right to Local Leadership and Power Redistribution

- **Local Leadership in Decision-Making:** Humanitarian actors must stimulate systematic inclusion of local and national actors in governance structures, country operations, and strategic decision-making bodies to ensure locally led and contextually grounded actions.
- **Value Local Experience and Cultural Competence:** Humanitarian decision-makers must recognise and utilise local experience, cultural competence, and historical understanding as essential assets for achieving sustainable and equitable outcomes.
- **Prioritise National and Local Talent and Knowledge:** Within reasonable parameters, organisations must enforce recruitment processes that prioritise national and local professionals, guided by transparent selection criteria that recognise contextual expertise, community trust, and adaptive problem-solving skills.
- **Shift Procurement and Contracting to Local Actors:** Within reasonable parameters, decision-makers must redirect procurement and vendor contracts toward local businesses, cooperatives, and social enterprises that strengthen community economies and build local resilience.



Endnotes

[1] Humanitarian Outcomes. Aid Worker Security Report 2025: Defenceless – Aid Worker Security amid the Humanitarian Funding Collapse. August 2025. Available at: https://humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/2025-08/HO_AWSR_2025.pdf

[2] Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition. Critical Condition: Violence Against Health Care in Conflict 2023. May 2024.

[3] Humanitarian Outcomes' Aid Worker Security Database consistently shows that nearly all victims of major attacks on aid workers are national staff—over 90% every year—reflecting the localised nature of operational risk and the fact that incidents overwhelmingly occur in the areas where local staff live and work.

[4] Stoddard, A., Harmer, A., & Czwarno, M. (2020). Aid Worker Security Report 2020: Contending with threats to humanitarian action. Humanitarian Outcomes.

[5] Eriksson CB, Cardozo BL, Foy DW, Sabin M, Ager A, Snider L, Scholte WF, Kaiser R, Olf M. Prevalence of mental health problems in aid workers: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMJ Global Health*. 2020;5(7):e002730

[6] World Health Organisation (WHO). Mental Health in Emergencies. WHO Fact Sheet, updated 2022.

Annex

Right to Digital Safety and Information Protection

This Annexe is recognised as a specialised rights domain and will be implemented progressively based on digital infrastructure and national data laws

In an increasingly digital work environment, frontline humanitarian and development workers have the right to digital safety, privacy, and protection of their personal and professional data.

- Collect, store, and process employee data in full compliance with applicable national and international data protection laws.
- Limit data collection to what is strictly necessary, with informed consent from staff and clear communication about its intended use.
- Mandatory and periodic digital literacy training covering phishing, ransomware, fake apps, password security, social engineering, and secure browsing.
- Awareness of digital risks specific to frontline operations, such as surveillance, hacking, and digital harassment.
- Ensure all collected data (e.g., beneficiary information, GPS locations, monitoring photos) is anonymised, encrypted, and ethically managed.
- Train frontline humanitarian and community workers on responsible data collection, informed consent procedures, and minimising digital harm to communities.
- Institutionalise a comprehensive digital safety policy that outlines rights, responsibilities, risk mitigation protocols, and emergency response procedures.

Sources: ICRC reports on digital threats to humanitarian action (2023)



ENDORSEMENT & COLLECTIVE COMMITMENT

Organisations that wish to affirm their support for the Charter of Rights for Frontline Humanitarian and Community Workers may do so through a voluntary endorsement process. Endorsing the Charter reflects an organisation's commitment to progressively strengthening the dignity, safety, and wellbeing of frontline humanitarian and community workers within their means and operational context.

*To endorse the Charter, organisations may **scan the QR code** below, which will redirect them to the online endorsement form. Endorsement does not imply legal obligations; rather, it demonstrates alignment with the Charter's principles and a shared commitment to improving humanitarian practice.*



<https://hai-india.org/charter-of-rights>

Once endorsed, the organisation's name will be added to the public list of supporters, accessible through the same QR code. This list serves as a collective acknowledgement of organisations working together to promote fair, safe, and respectful working conditions for frontline responders.

By joining this growing community of supporters, organisations contribute to a broader movement toward strengthened duty of care, equitable practices, and locally led humanitarian response.



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