Under IHL, the category of civilians is opposable to that of “combatants [1].” In an international armed conflict [2], all persons who are not combatants are civilians. Persons with civilian status may not be directly targeted in attacks. Civilians who directly participate in hostilities [3], however, lose that protection for the duration of their participation in hostilities. In non-international armed conflicts [4], there is no combatant status. Members of armed groups [5] with a continuous fighting function may, according to doctrine, be targeted like combatants. All other persons must not be directly targeted. The civilian population [6] is a term that refers to groupings of civilian persons. The presence of some combatants within the general civilian population does not render the civilian population as a whole targetable.

IHL contains certain rules applicable to civilians who accompany the armed forces.

See Civilian population [6];

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[1] https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/combatants