definition

Civilian person
“Civilian” means, in an international armed conflict, any person who does not belong to the armed forces [1] and does not take part in a “levée en masse [2]”.
In case of doubt whether a person is a civilian or not, that person must be considered to be a civilian.
“Civilian [3]” means, in a non-international armed conflict, all persons who are neither members of state armed forces nor members of an organized armed group [4].

Civilian population
The civilian population is made up of civilian persons. In international armed conflicts, the presence within the civilian population of individuals who do not come within the definition of civilians does not deprive the population of its civilian character. Appropriate rules protect the whole population of a party to a conflict without any adverse distinction. Both in international [5] and non-international armed conflicts [6], the civilian population enjoys general protection against the dangers of military operations.

Special protection
journalists See Journalists [7]

women See Women [8]
children See Children [9] 
protected persons See Protected persons [12] 

OUTLINE

Chapter 9, 5. Definition of the civilian population [13] 

LEGAL SOURCE

PI, 50 [14] 
CIHL, 5 [15] 

DOCUMENT

ICRC Appeals on the Near East [16] (C. [17], para 7 [18]) 

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Israel, Military Prosecutor v. Kassem and Others [18] 

Case Study, Armed Conflict in the former Yugoslavia [19] (para 27 [20]) 


Sudan, Report of the UN Commission of Enquiry on Darfur (A. paras 291-292 and 422)
South Sudan: Medical Care Under Fire

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Libya, NATO Intervention 2011

ICTY, The Prosecutor v. Radovan Karadzic


Iraq, Forced displacement and deliberate destruction

Yemen, Potential Existence and Effects of Naval Blockade

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Syria, the Battle for Aleppo

ICC, Confirmation of Charges against LRA Leaders

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Colombia Peace Agreement
International Criminal Court, Trial Judgment in the Case of the Prosecutor V. Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo [37]

ECJ, Aboubacar Diakité v. Commissaire général aux réfugiés et aux apatrides [38]


Syria, Syrian rebels treat captured Filipino soldiers as 'guests' [40]

South Sudan, Attack in Malakal UN Protection Site [41]

Iraq, Crimes by Militia Groups [42]

Somalia, IHL violations in Somalia's long-running armed conflict [43]

South Sudan, AU Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan [44]

Somalia/Kenya, Al-Shabab Attacks [45]

General protection

OUTLINE

Chapter 8, 1. Rules benefiting all civilians [46]

Chapter 8, IV. Special rules on occupied territories [47]
Chapter 9, Prohibited attacks

Chapter 5, introductory text

Chapter 9. II. 7. Loss of protection: The concept of direct participation in hostilities and its consequences

Chapter 9, b) the presence of a combatant or military objective among the civilian population

LEGAL SOURCE

HR, 23(b), 25-28

GCIV, 13-26

PI, 48, 51, 52, 57

CIHL, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105

deportation, transfer and forced evacuation (See also Deportation; Displaced persons; Evacuation)

GCIV, 49

PI, 85/4
Prohibition of discrimination

GC Common 3 [86] (see ICRC updated Commentary [87])

GCIV, 13 [54], 27 [88]

PI, 9/1 [89], 10/2 [90], 70/1 [91], 73 [92], 75/1 [93], 85/4(c) [81]

CIHL, 88 [59]

treatment of persons

HR, 44-46 [94], 50 [95]

GC Common 3 [86] (see ICRC updated Commentary [87])

GCIV, 25 [86], 26 [97], 27 [98], 31-34 [99], 147 [100]

PI, 11 [101], 17 [102], 74 [103], 75 [93], 85 [81]

PII, 4 [104], 6 [105], 18 [106]

in occupied territories (See also Occupation [107])
attacks intended to spread terror (See also Terror [115])

prohibition of direct attack

protection against effects of hostilities (See also Precautions against the effects of attacks [119])
loss of protection if DPH (See also Direct participation in hostilities [131])

presence of a combatant or a military objective among the civilian population

in NIAC

GC Common 3 [86] (see ICRC updated Commentary [87])
prohibition of reprisals  (See also Reprisals [134])

GCIV, 33 [135]

PI, 20 [136], 51/6 [137]

CIHL, 146 [138]

prohibition of starvation as a method of war  (See also Starvation [139])

PI, 54/1 [121]

PII, 14 [140]

CIHL, 53 [141]

prohibition of human shields  (See also Human shields [142])

PI, 51/7 [137]

CIHL, 97 [68]

in hospital & safety zones, neutralized zones, demilitarized zones  (See also Hospital and safety zones and localities [143])

GCI, Annex I 1-4 [144]
GCIV, 14 [145] and Annex I 1-4 [146]

PI, 60 [124]

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UN, Resolutions and Conference on Respect for the Fourth Convention

ICRC Appeals on the Near East

ICRC, DPH

ICRC, Interpretive Guidance on the Notion of Direct Participation in Hostilities

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESOURCES

Suggested reading:


**Source URL:** https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/civilian-population

**Links**
[1] https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/armed-forces
[8] https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/women