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]) |

**CASES**

| 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 [25]

Health Care in Pakistan’s Tribal Areas [26]

Libya, NATO Intervention 2011 [27]

ICTY, The Prosecutor v. Radovan Karadzic [28]

Libya, Report of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2014/15) [29]

Iraq, Forced displacement and deliberate destruction [30]

Yemen, Potential Existence and Effects of Naval Blockade [31]

Iraq: Situation of Internally Displaced Persons [32]

Syria, the Battle for Aleppo [33]

ICC, Confirmation of Charges against LRA Leaders [34]

ICRC, Statement - War in Cities ; What is at Stake? [35]

Colombia Peace Agreement [36]
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]

General protection

OUTLINE

Chapter 8, 1. Rules benefiting all civilians [45]

Chapter 8, IV. Special rules on occupied territories [46]

Chapter 9, Prohibited attacks [47]
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

PII, 17
Prohibition of discrimination

GC Common 3 [85] (see ICRC updated Commentary [86])

GCIV, 13 [53], 27 [87]

PI, 9/1 [88], 10/2 [89], 70/1 [90], 73 [91], 75/1 [92], 85/4(c) [80]

CIHL, 88 [58]

treatment of persons

HR, 44-46 [93], 50 [94]

GC Common 3 [85] (see ICRC updated Commentary [86])

GCIV, 25 [95], 26 [96], 27 [97], 31-34 [98], 147 [99]

PI, 11 [100], 17 [101], 74 [102], 75 [92], 85 [80]

PII, 4 [103], 6 [104], 18 [105]

in occupied territories (See also Occupation [106])

GCIV, 5/2-3 [107], 55 [108], 59-63 [109], 64/2 [110], 65 [111]
attacks intended to spread terror (See also Terror [114])

PI, 51/2 [55]

PII, 13/2 [115]

prohibition of direct attack

HR, 25 [52]

GCIV, 28 [116]

PI, 51/2-3 [55]

PII, 13 [115]

CIHL, 1 [117]

protection against effects of hostilities (See also Precautions against the effects of attacks [118])

HR, 26-27 [119]

GCIV, 28 [116]
loss of protection if DPH (See also Direct participation in hostilities [130])

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

in NIAC

prohibition of reprisals (See also Reprisals [133])
prohibition of starvation as a method of war (See also Starvation [138])

prohibition of human shields (See also Human shields [141])

in hospital & safety zones, neutralized zones, demilitarized zones (See also Hospital and safety zones and localities [142])
CASES

IACHR, Tablada (paras 178 and 189)

Israel, Evacuation of Bodies in Jenin

Sudan, Report of the UN Commission of Enquiry on Darfur (A. paras 263-267)

ICTY, The Prosecutor v. Strugar (para. 282)

Syria, Report by UN Commission of Inquiry (March 2017)

Italy, Use of force against ambulances in Iraq

Germany, Aerial Drone Attack in Mir Ali/Pakistan

Central African Republic/Democratic Republic of Congo/Uganda, LRA attacks

Central African Republic, Coup d'Etat
UN, Resolutions and Conference on Respect for the Fourth Convention \[156\] (E. \[157\] II. 2.)

ICRC Appeals on the Near East \[158\]

ICRC, DPH \[130\]

ICRC, Interpretive Guidance on the Notion of Direct Participation in Hostilities \[159\]

**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
https://casebook.icrc.org/glossary/occupation
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