



INSARAG Guidelines 2026

Volume 1: Policy

Endorsed and approved by the INSARAG Steering Group on 10 March 2026

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Note: Every listed appendix is located in the Guidance Appendices on www.insarag.org.

Abbreviations

BoO	Base of Operations
ERS	Emergency Response Section
EMT	Emergency Medical Team
GDACS	Global Disaster Awareness and Coordination System
GRG	Guidelines Review Group
HNPW	Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week
HNS	Host Nation Support
IEC	INSARAG External Classification
IER	INSARAG External Reclassification
IMTST	Information Management Technical Support Team
IRNAP	INSARAG-Recognised National Accreditation Process
INSARAG	The International Search and Rescue Advisory Group
ISG	INSARAG Steering Group
LEMA	Local Emergency Management Authority
NAP	National Accreditation Process
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OSOCC	On-Site Operations Coordination Centre
RDC	Reception and Departure Centre
RSB	Response Support Branch
UCC	USAR Coordination Cell
USAR	Urban Search and Rescue
UN	United Nations
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
VOSOCC	Virtual On-Site Operations Coordination Centre

Foreword

The revision of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) Guidelines, which will inform and guide our collective efforts over the next four years, come at a pivotal moment for the global humanitarian system. The Humanitarian Reset is underway in response to a profound shift in humanitarian financing, compelling us to reimagine how we deliver aid while humanitarian needs are increasing. INSARAG stands at the forefront of emergency response, saving lives in acute sudden-onset crises, and will be central to this transformation. The OCHA 2026-2030 Strategic Plan reflects this ambition. These guidelines are more than operational tools - they embody our core humanitarian values, and INSARAG's collective commitment to evolve alongside the communities we serve.

Amid an increasingly complex humanitarian landscape, INSARAG must adapt - refining coordination methodologies, classification systems, and operations so that these continue to serve their intended purpose while remaining fit-for-purpose. The 2026 edition of the Guidelines incorporates lessons from recent responses, including the 2023 Türkiye and Syria earthquakes, and integrates recommendations from the INSARAG Governance Review. The revised Guidelines also align with the Humanitarian Reset's emphasis on simplification, accountability, and localizing response.

This edition introduces structural changes to the Guideline volumes, clearer definitions of binding and non-binding provisions, and enhanced procedures for medical practice. The Guidelines also embed gender-neutral language and promote quarterly induction for new focal points, ensuring that the INSARAG network remains inclusive and future-ready.

The revised Guidelines is the outcome of collaborative effort and tireless work by the Guidelines Review Group, the INSARAG Steering Group, and our regional and national partners. I extend my deepest gratitude to all contributors and reaffirm our commitment to supporting Member States and Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams in delivering principled, effective, and accountable emergency response.

Tom Fletcher

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and

Emergency Relief Coordinator

United Nations

1 Introduction

The INSARAG Guidelines comprise five volumes:

This Volume 1: Policy describes the INSARAG methodology for international urban search and rescue (USAR) operations and the policy that underpins it. It is targeted at Members States' decision makers, INSARAG Policy Focal Points, regional organisations, sponsors and other personnel who are required to manage and sustain a capability to deploy and receive USAR and humanitarian teams in the event of sudden-onset disasters.

Volume 1 describes:

- INSARAG and how it operates.
- The roles of affected countries and those assisting in international USAR responses.
- Building national USAR capacity.
- The INSARAG External Classification (IEC) and INSARAG External Reclassification (IER) systems.

Volume 2: National Capacity Building defines capacity building as the process of identifying and supporting existing Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) resources or developing new capacities.

Volume 3: Operations is targeted at the INSARAG Operational Focal Point, the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team management, the INSARAG Team Focal Point, and the INSARAG Secretariat with the purpose of providing guidance in the training, preparations and coordination of a USAR team for national and/or international operations.

Volume 4: INSARAG External Classification and Reclassification aims to ensure a USAR Team preparing to undergo an IEC/R has a deep understanding of the expected planning, preparation and delivery requirements.

Volume 5: Operational Field Guide targets all USAR managers and team members and is designed to be a quick-reference guide that assists with field and tactical information for all missions, exercises and training sessions.

The INSARAG Guidelines 2026 have been endorsed by the INSARAG Steering Group. All volumes, Guidance Appendices and materials from the Technical Reference Library can be downloaded from www.insarag.org.

1.1 Purpose of the INSARAG Guidelines

This internationally accepted document provides a methodology to guide countries affected by a sudden-onset disaster causing large-scale structural collapse, as well as international USAR teams responding in the affected country. The guidelines also outline the role of the UN in assisting affected countries in on-site coordination.

The methodology, as defined in the INSARAG Guidelines, provides a process for preparedness, cooperation and coordination of the national and international participants. This should then result in an improved understanding at all government levels in the affected country as to how international USAR assistance can be utilised to augment the national response so to ensure the most effective use of resources.

The INSARAG Guidelines consists of binding, non-binding and advisory content.

INSARAG members base their policies and practices on the binding content of the INSARAG Guidelines and Appendices. If members have policies and/or practices in place that are not in conformity with the binding content of the INSARAG Guidelines and Appendices, they are to forward to the INSARAG Secretariat a plan describing how they will reach conformity.

INSARAG members can use the non-binding and advisory content of the INSARAG Guidelines in their policies and practices and are strongly encouraged to do so.

For comprehensive use, some countries and/or regions may decide to translate these Guidelines into their relevant language(s). For the purposes of international reference, e.g. during meetings, NAP, IRNAP, or IEC/R, the published English version is the default reference version.

2 INSARAG

2.1 What is INSARAG?

INSARAG was created in 1990 following the initiatives of specialised international USAR teams who operated together in the Mexican earthquake of 1985 and Armenian earthquake of 1988. INSARAG is an intergovernmental humanitarian network of disaster managers, government officials, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and USAR practitioners operating under the umbrella of the UN. Within the realm of its mandate they contribute to the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

2.1.1 Essence of UN General Assembly Resolution 57/150

INSARAG successfully achieved the adoption of [UN General Assembly Resolution, GA57/150 in 2002](#), on "Strengthening the Effectiveness and Coordination of International USAR Assistance." This resolution has underpinned much of the progress achieved by INSARAG and focuses on:

- Quality standards
- Sending and receiving arrangements made by member states
- Facilitate access
- Coordinating systems

2.2 Vision and Role

INSARAG's vision is to save lives by promoting efficiency, enhanced quality, and coordination amongst national and international USAR teams on the basis of adherence to common guidelines and methodologies.

INSARAG's role is to prepare for, mobilise and coordinate effective and principled international USAR assistance in support of an affected country in collapsed-structure emergencies and to support capacity-building at the international, regional, sub-regional and national level. INSARAG does this by:

- Developing and promoting common standards for USAR assistance, coordination methodologies and tools, and mobilisation and information exchange protocols between relevant stakeholders.
- Promoting cooperation and experience-sharing amongst, and in partnership with, member states, NGOs, and national, regional and international partners.

The [INSARAG Hyogo Declaration of 2010](#), on the "Recognition and strengthening of international urban search and rescue operational standards," adopted in the first INSARAG Global Meeting, gave INSARAG a renewed impetus and guidance for its work, and emphasised the need for strengthening of national response capacities and recommended that building national, local and community capacity is critical for effective response.

This was followed in by the [INSARAG Abu Dhabi Declaration of 2015](#), on "Strengthening Preparedness and Response Standards of National and International Urban Search and Rescue Operations," endorsed the revised and updated the INSARAG Guidelines 2015. It called upon all USAR teams and their respective institutions responding internationally to earthquakes to make full use of and adhere to the field coordination procedures.

In 2021 the [INSARAG Warsaw Declaration](#) on Strengthening Quality, Predictability, Speed, and Flexibility in Support of National and Local Urban Search and Rescue Capacities was endorsed during the virtual Global Meeting hosted by the Polish State Fire Brigade. This meeting was a virtual one due to the global pandemic situation. It celebrated the 30-year existence of the global network and called upon the network to strengthen the quality and speed of USAR responses, make it more flexible and predictable.

2.3 Mandate of INSARAG

INSARAG is mandated by the INSARAG Steering Group (ISG) to:

- Operate in accordance with the Humanitarian Principles, which form the core of humanitarian action.
- Render emergency preparedness and response activities more effective and thereby save more lives, reduce suffering and minimise adverse consequences.
- Improve efficiency in cooperation among international USAR teams working in collapsed structures at a disaster site, including by managing the IEC/R process.
- Promote the strengthening of national USAR capacities and activities designed to improve search-and-rescue preparedness in disaster-prone countries, thereby prioritising developing countries, including by assisting member states in setting up national USAR team classification processes.
- Develop internationally accepted procedures and systems for sustained cooperation between national USAR teams operating on the international level.
- Develop USAR procedures, guidelines and best practices, and strengthen cooperation between interested organisations during the emergency relief phase.

2.4 Values, Operational Norms and Humanitarian Principles

INSARAG operates in accordance with the Humanitarian Principles, which form the core of humanitarian action.

Adherence to common standards and methodology: Members of INSARAG commit to adhere to the INSARAG Guidelines and methodology as globally accepted and independently verifiable minimum operational standard and procedures, based upon expert knowledge and evidence-based experience. The INSARAG network continues to develop these standards and procedures through shared and continued learning.

Inclusiveness: INSARAG brings together governments, governmental organisations, NGOs and disaster preparedness and response professionals. INSARAG particularly encourages disaster-prone countries to join the network, as well as any country or organisation with USAR response capacity. INSARAG emphasises the importance of utilizing a gender responsive approach during and after rescue operations.

Professionalism: INSARAG promotes responsible, ethical and professional standards amongst USAR teams and stakeholders.

Respect for diversity: INSARAG acknowledges and respects USAR teams' varied operational procedures in achieving common objectives, while disseminating principles and minimum standards agreed upon by the INSARAG network. It also recognises "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations" that diversity of humanitarian staff brings value to humanitarian work and better understanding of

developing countries' contexts. INSARAG is also dedicated to mainstreaming a gender perspective into humanitarian assistance and integrating this perspective into all disaster rescue and risk reduction efforts, including by addressing the specific needs, and promoting the priorities and capacities of women, girls, men and boys in a comprehensive and consistent manner.

Cultural sensitivity: INSARAG promotes awareness and respect by international USAR teams of cultural differences so that international USAR teams can cooperate more effectively with national and international actors.

Needs-driven: Mobilisation and deployment of international USAR teams is only supported when the affected country's capacities are overwhelmed by the impact of a collapsed-structure emergency and national authorities agree to accept international assistance. Moreover, the type of international assistance rendered is based on the needs of the affected country and not driven by the availability of resources.

Humanitarian Principles: Reaffirming the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence in the provision of humanitarian assistance, and reaffirming also the need for all actors engaged in the provision of humanitarian assistance in situations of complex emergencies and natural disasters to promote and fully respect these principles.

Coordination: INSARAG promotes internationally agreed coordination structures managed and advocated by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), promotes coordination of preparedness and capacity building activities, and, throughout an operation, assists member states and affected countries in coordinating the emergency response.

Predictability: INSARAG promotes predictability in search and rescue response operations, both in terms of response capacities available when they are needed, as well as in terms of coordination platforms put in place to ensure a most efficient use of available assets in relation to the identified humanitarian needs.

2.5 Structure and Working Process

2.5.1 INSARAG Structure

INSARAG is composed of a Steering Group, three Regional Groups, and the Secretariat, as well as the USAR team leaders, and the Working Groups (see Figure 1). The Global Chair is coordinating the decision-making process as described in Figure 2 globally. This structure provides the framework for decision-making and associated processes as approved by the Steering Group in 2013.

This structure ensures that INSARAG's aims can be achieved at a regional level, whilst ensuring full ownership and that objectives are in line with best practices as defined and agreed by the global network.



Figure 1: The INSARAG organisational structure.

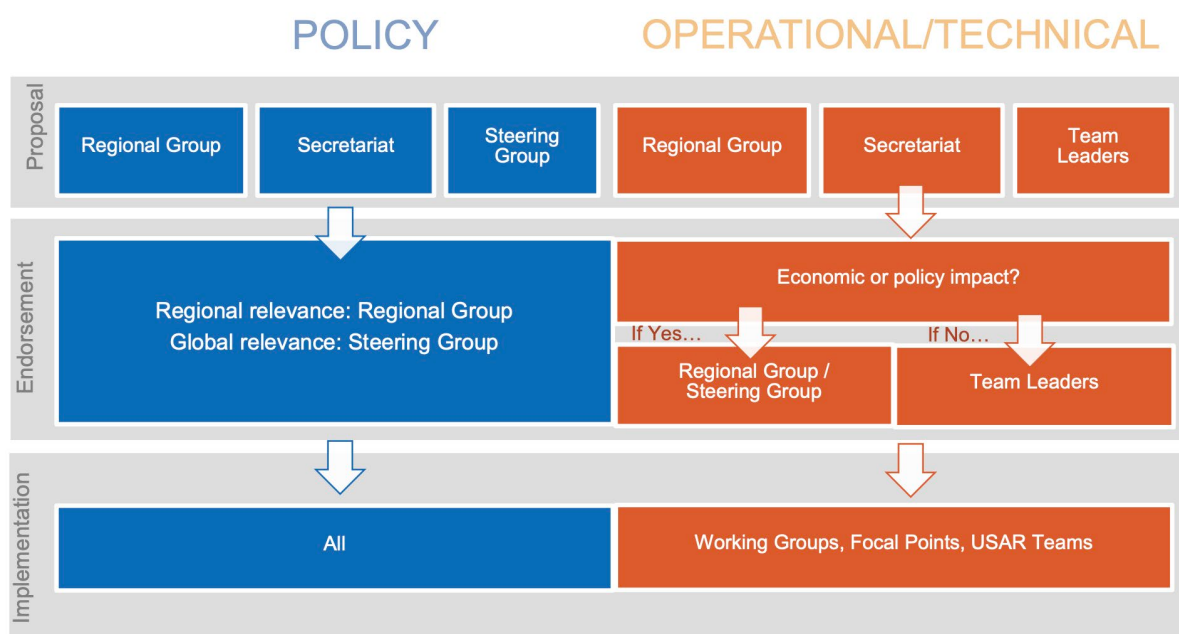


Figure 2: The INSARAG decision-making process.

2.5.2 INSARAG Steering Group

INSARAG Steering Group is an open meeting, presided by the Global Chair, in which policy topics are being discussed amongst the INSARAG Policy Focal Points of all member states. Members of the ISG include the following:

- INSARAG Global Chair
- Chair and Vice-Chairs of each Regional Group
- INSARAG Secretariat
- Working Group Co-Chairs
- INSARAG member states' INSARAG Policy Focal Point (or delegate)
- INSARAG classified NGO teams' representative (or delegate)
- Representative from the INSARAG Team Leaders group
- Representative of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

The ISG Meeting takes place every year. The ISG can be prepared in a prior meeting of the Global and Regional Chairs, where the Global Chair, Regional Chairs, Working Groups' Co-Chairs and the INSARAG Secretariat meet to finalise the discussions on decisions of the past year and to prepare the ISG. The ISG gathers the Global Chair, Regional Chairs and Working Groups' Co-Chairs, the INSARAG Secretariat and the INSARAG Policy Focal Points with representatives from INSARAG USAR teams and partners, to discuss the developments of the previous year and to decide the direction for the year ahead.

ISG decision-making is only reached by consensus by the INSARAG Policy Focal Points. Consensus is reached when nobody eligible objects.

2.5.3 INSARAG Regional Meetings

INSARAG Regional Meetings are open meetings, presided by the Regional Chair. These meetings are (in the respective agendas) divided into policy and operational matters. The former is being discussed with the INSARAG Policy Focal Points only, the latter with the INSARAG Operational and Team Focal Points only. Regional decision-making is reached by consent by the INSARAG Policy Focal Points of the region on policy topics, and INSARAG Operational Focal Points on operational and technical topics.

Decision-making is only reached by consensus. Consensus is reached when nobody eligible objects.

2.5.4 INSARAG Team Leaders Meetings

INSARAG Team Leaders Meetings are open meetings in which INSARAG Operational Focal Points, INSARAG Team Focal Points and team leaders discuss operational and technical matters. The team leaders appoint and/or reappoint the Team Leader's Representative to the ISG. Team leaders' decision making is reached by consent of the team leaders only. No policy and/or financial topics can be decided upon in the INSARAG Team Leaders Meeting.

Decision-making is only reached by consensus. Consensus is reached when nobody eligible objects.

2.5.5 INSARAG Global Meeting

The INSARAG Global Meeting is an open meeting which takes place every 5 years. The Global Meeting brings together all entities of the INSARAG network displayed in figure 1.

Since 2010 in Kobe, Japan, and once every five years, all Regional Groups come together in the INSARAG Global Meeting where the network convenes with the objective of strengthening the global network.

2.5.6 INSARAG Secretariat

The INSARAG Secretariat is housed within OCHA, which is the UN Secretariat mandated to mobilise and coordinate multilateral humanitarian action in response to emergencies. The INSARAG Secretariat sits in the Emergency Response Section (ERS) which is part of the Response Support Branch (RSB) of OCHA-Geneva. RSB also manages the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) mechanism.

The Secretariat serves as a direct link between the Global and Regional Chairs, the INSARAG Focal Points, and the INSARAG network. It co-organises all INSARAG meetings, including

the Regional Group and Team Leaders Meetings, workshops, IEC/R exercises for USAR teams, and training events, in cooperation with host countries.

The Secretariat is also responsible for the management and maintenance of the INSARAG website (www.insarag.org). This includes the directory of INSARAG members and their teams.

The Secretariat also facilitates any relevant projects that have been endorsed by the ISG.

2.5.7 INSARAG Regional Groups

The three INSARAG Regional Groups are:

- The Africa-Europe-Middle East region (AEME).
- The Americas region (Americas).
- The Asia-Pacific region (AP).

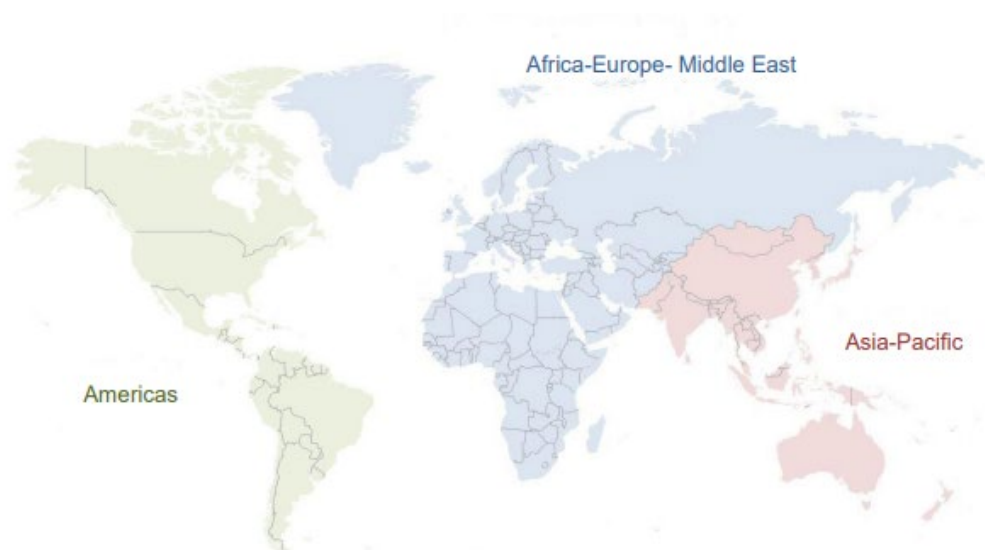


Figure 3: The INSARAG Regional Groups.

These Regional Groups meet annually to strengthen national and regional disaster preparedness, and USAR response. The Regional Groups work to ensure that the strategic direction and policies from the Steering Group are implemented, and to assimilate relevant information from participating member states for submission back to the Steering Group.

Each Regional Group is governed by a troika system where there is a chair and two vice-chairs made up of the incoming chair and the outgoing chair. They have a one-year tenure and represent the region at the Steering Group. Member states and member organisations are represented in the Regional Groups through their INSARAG Policy and Operational Focal Points, as well by the INSARAG Team Focal Points (see details in Appendix 1.1).

The Regional Groups are responsible for the implementation of the Steering Group decisions at the regional level, as well as for carrying out the regional annual work programme and activities planned for the region. Together with the Secretariat, they work closely with OCHA Regional and Country Offices to ensure synergies with OCHA's plans and priorities for the region. They also endorse the creation of sub-regional groups of collaborative partners as relevant.

The sub-regional groups of collaborative partners are initiated in regions where their establishment – due to geographical, cultural and language commonalities – ensures effective implementation of the INSARAG mandate.

2.5.8 INSARAG Working Groups

Working groups are established with the endorsement of the INSARAG Steering Group (ISG). The purpose of a Working Group is to develop solutions for specific issues. Each Working Group has terms of reference that reflects the scope and range of deliverables expected to be provided within a specific timeframe. The membership of Working Groups has to be decided by the ISG and with support of the respective sponsoring organisations.

Each Working Group has minimum two co-chair, and members nominated from each region to ensure a full, worldwide perspective. A co-chair should preferably be a member of an IEC/R USAR team.

The Working Group may suggest to the Secretariat that a suitable USAR team member, with relevant experience and qualifications to address the issue under discussion, be co-opted to the working group. The Secretariat facilitates the selection of these members in consultation with the Regional and Global Chair, and assists in establishing the terms of reference, provides guidance and establishes timelines for work completion. Membership of a working group needs to be endorsed by the ISG.

The Working Groups are to adopt a co-chair model and provide opportunities for qualified members from other IEC/R teams to participate and engage in the process. The working group ceases when they complete their assigned tasks. The ISG decides extensions of the working group beyond the given mandate.

2.5.9 INSARAG USAR Team Leaders

The USAR team leaders are a group of experienced international USAR practitioners and INSARAG Operational Focal Points from member states.

This group may additionally be called upon for nominations to participate in the Working Groups, engage in other INSARAG activities, including capacity building to contribute to the continued development of INSARAG as a whole.

This expert group meets annually at the INSARAG Team Leaders Meeting to share and discuss best practices, technical ideas and operational issues. The USAR team leaders' inputs, advice and experience serve to improve the operational capabilities of the INSARAG methodology for both national and international USAR response. Team leaders are encouraged to constantly exchange technical information and best practices bilaterally and sharing through the Technical Reference Library.

2.6 INSARAG Membership

INSARAG Membership is open to all member states, NGOs and organisations involved in USAR activities, upon recommendation and approval by their respective governments. INSARAG also maintains close cooperation with regional mechanisms.

INSARAG information and knowledge-sharing tools are available through the INSARAG website, and through disaster alert and information sharing platforms such as the Global Disaster Awareness and Coordination System (GDACS), which includes the VOSOCC.

INSARAG member states with USAR teams deploying internationally are encouraged to undertake an IEC. However, this is not a requirement to be a member of the INSARAG network. As a first step, teams are encouraged to undertake the National Accreditation Process (NAP) and the INSARAG Recognised National Accreditation Process (IRNAP). See details in Volume 2: National Capacity Building.

2.6.1 Requirements

To improve preparedness and response, INSARAG members share information and best practices with other INSARAG members and USAR teams, including teams that are developing a response capability or are preparing for classification (IEC).

INSARAG members are encouraged to actively participate in, and contribute to, INSARAG Regional Meetings, earthquake response simulation exercises (ERE), and other INSARAG forums such as the INSARAG Team Leaders Meetings, and to contribute to the Working Groups. INSARAG members are also encouraged to support other INSARAG initiatives such as capacity assessment missions and regional exercises by providing suitable technical experts.

INSARAG classified teams have obligations that are listed in Volume 4.

All INSARAG classified USAR members and/or Teams are expected to uphold the highest standards of integrity and professionalism and are deemed to be representing the INSARAG community in all their actions. Any formal complaints received by the INSARAG Secretariat regarding a USAR member's/team's conduct during international deployments or INSARAG activities, will be reviewed by the ISG. The ISG may elect to establish an ad hoc Team of experts to review the incident and recommend an appropriate course of action. The ISG may determine that a warning is issued or in serious cases, the membership and/or USAR team's classified status be revoked.

2.6.2 INSARAG Policy and Operational Focal Points, and USAR Team Focal Points

It is necessary for the structure to be effective and efficient that all member states participating in INSARAG designate one INSARAG Policy and one INSARAG Operational Focal Point for appropriate and effective information exchange, in accordance with the respective national disaster management structure. It is also strongly encouraged that each USAR team designates an official to act at the INSARAG Team Focal Point. In the preparedness and response phases, INSARAG Focal Points serve as the primary link and information channel between the member state and the INSARAG network. This is particularly important in response to emergencies to ensure an effective information flow between the affected country and the potential international responders. Regional, intergovernmental and international organisations participating in INSARAG are encouraged to designate a Focal Point. All focal points guarantee the national USAR teams' adherence to the INSARAG Guidelines and the minimal standards in preparedness and response.

Member states are to inform the INSARAG Secretariat on the designation of their INSARAG Focal Points and update this information whenever INSARAG Focal Points change (see the terms of reference of INSARAG Focal Points in appendix 1.1).

INSARAG Policy Focal Point

The INSARAG Policy Focal Point is the central point-of-contact for the INSARAG Secretariat. This person represents the Member State's capabilities in providing or receiving USAR assistance. The INSARAG Policy Focal Point normally sits in the central institution or agency of the national disaster management structure or in the agencies responsible for international cooperation and humanitarian response, and represents the member state on USAR policy matters in the Regional Group and the INSARAG Steering Group. The INSARAG Operational Focal Point provides assistance as required. Regarding the role of the Policy Focal Point in the IEC/R process refer to Volume 4.

INSARAG Operational Focal Point

The INSARAG Operational Focal Point of the member state should have national USAR responsibilities as part of their daily function. This person represents the member state primarily on operational USAR matters in INSARAG meetings, workshops and events. Regarding the role of the Operational Focal Point in the IEC/R process refer to Volume 4.

INSARAG Team Focal Point

The INSARAG Team Focal Point is a member of the USAR team management. This person is responsible for liaising with the respective INSARAG Policy and Operational Focal Points.

The responsibilities of INSARAG Focal Points can be described as ensuring the efficient information exchange and validation at the appropriate levels in the preparedness and response phases on USAR matters, including capacity building, trainings, policy matters, emergency alerts, requests or acceptance of assistance, mobilisation and provision of international assistance.

2.6.3 INSARAG Website and Directory

The INSARAG website shares information on INSARAG generally, as well as the summaries from previous events and upcoming activities.

The website holds the INSARAG calendar listing all relevant INSARAG events, such as IEC/R's, ISG, Regional Meetings, trainings and exercises.

The INSARAG Directory is a unique database with the details of all INSARAG member states and organisations and their USAR teams. The directory also contains contact details for relevant INSARAG Policy, Operational and Team Focal Points.

The directory categorises USAR teams into the following:

- INSARAG classified: Light, medium or heavy IEC/R teams
- NAP and IRNAP Accredited: Light, medium, or heavy national teams
- Governmental and non-governmental teams not yet classified
- USAR teams with flood response capabilities

To be part of the USAR Directory, teams need the endorsement of their INSARAG Policy Focal Point. Teams can request registration by the Secretariat via their respective INSARAG Policy Focal Point. Once registered, the INSARAG Operational Focal Point can update the team's entry.

Note: The USAR Directory can be accessed at www.insarag.org.

2.6.4 Guidance Appendices and Technical Reference Library

The INSARAG Guidance Appendices and Technical Reference Library are two “live” knowledge management platforms that can be accessed on www.insarag.org. The key difference is that materials residing in the Technical Reference Library are non-binding unlike those in the Guidance Appendices.

INSARAG endorsed documents, such as the guidance appendices, IEC/R checklist and USAR Coordination (UC) Handbook, would be placed under the Guidance Appendices, while the Technical Reference Library is a knowledge repository for best practices that have been endorsed for sharing by the respective INSARAG Operational Focal Point and the respective INSARAG Working Group. For more information, refer appendix 1.3: *Explanatory Note on Document Structure*.

Note: The information shared in the Technical Reference Library are good practices that are effective and beneficial to specific teams. The INSARAG Secretariat and the authors will not in any way be held accountable to the users, and users are strongly encouraged to contact the authors of the technical reference document for more information, if required.

2.7 INSARAG Partnerships

INSARAG expands its collaboration to relevant partners to strengthen cooperation for preparedness and response. It aims to mobilise and galvanise efforts of different international organisations as partners in building mutually-beneficial support, cooperation and information exchange. INSARAG works closely with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the Directorate General European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), International Civil Defence Organisation (ICDO), International Rescue Dog Organisation (IRO) amongst others. These partnerships have refined USAR teams' abilities to prepare and to respond with specialised and experienced professionals in disaster preparedness and response.

In 2019, INSARAG embarked on partnerships with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the International Police Organisation (INTERPOL), specifically with the Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) Unit and the Organization of American Firefighters (OAF/OBA). The key objectives are: to collectively work towards broadening the objective of the Organisations so as to complement each other with the exchange of information and guidelines; find a common ground on disaster preparedness and response; and host collective activities and exercises.

2.8 INSARAG Guidelines Review

To facilitate continuous improvement in classified teams, while maintaining the relevance of INSARAG in a rapidly evolving environment, the INSARAG Guidelines undergo a regularised five-year review cycle led by the INSARAG Guidelines Review Group (GRG).

The principal considerations of the review are that the final product should reflect an evolution in practice rather than a revolution, embrace new technology and development and act as a lean and easy reference material for policy and decision makers as well as USAR teams for training, preparedness and field operations.

Formed under the mandate of the ISG during the INSARAG Global Meeting, the GRG's tenure runs through the five-year review cycle and comprises members drawn from all three INSARAG regions, existing Working Groups and the INSARAG Secretariat.

During this period, the GRG will work closely with the other Working Groups and consolidate feedback from the INSARAG community through different platforms. The review progress will be tracked at the annual ISG Meeting and the final version will be endorsed by the ISG for launch during the INSARAG Global Meeting.

3 National USAR Capacity Building and Strengthening

When a disaster strikes, people look first to their own communities and governments for help, and second, to neighbouring countries and regional/international organisations. International aid is the third tier of humanitarian assistance, which is called in for specialised tasks such as complex search and rescue after an earthquake.

UN General Assembly Resolution 57/150 recommends that countries build up strong national USAR response capacities to deal with any eventuality as the first step. The Resolution identifies that each country has a responsibility first and foremost to take care of the victims of disasters and other emergencies occurring in its own territory. Countries must be able to initiate, organise, coordinate and provide humanitarian assistance in their own territories if required.

Furthermore, the Resolution “encourages the strengthening of cooperation among States at the regional and sub-regional levels in the field of disaster preparedness and response, with particular respect to capacity building at all levels.”

It is thus essential that countries have an effective and sustainable national USAR capability and a national crisis management system (host nation support included) first, before developing an internationally deployable capability, i.e. an IEC team.

The following paragraphs describe INSARAG’s guidance to member states on building their national USAR capacity. This will be further elaborated in Volume 2: National Capacity Building.

3.1 USAR Response Framework

The USAR response framework (see Figure 4) recognises that search and rescue efforts are chronological and continuous, starting immediately after the occurrence of a large-scale structural collapse disaster.

Rescue efforts start immediately with passers-by rushing in to assist. Within minutes, local emergency services respond. The rescue efforts continue with the arrival of regional or national rescue resources within hours. International rescue teams respond in the days after the event and following an official request by the affected government for international assistance.

The INSARAG response framework represents all levels of response, starting with spontaneous community actions immediately following the disaster, supplemented initially by the local emergency services and then by national rescue teams. The response of international USAR teams supports national rescue efforts.

Each new level of response increases the rescue capability and overall capacity but has to integrate with, and support, the response already working at the disaster.

The speed of mission activation is critical in maximising life-saving opportunities. Swift information sharing and rapid decision-making processes are vital to facilitate early mobilisation. USAR teams must begin preparations for deployment while the decision is being made, allowing them to rapidly depart or stand-down.

To ensure an immediate deployment, procedures for sharing key information and expediting decisions must be regularly reviewed and updated at all levels. Standard operational procedures across all USAR teams and governing bodies alike, must enable the prompt formation of deploying resources. Approval authorities must have systems in place to support immediate decision-making. Delays in deployment approvals will significantly reduce the effectiveness of a USAR team's ability to save lives in the highly critical initial response phase.

To ensure interoperability between the different levels of USAR response, it is vital that working practices, technical language and information are common and shared through all levels of the USAR response framework. Coordination is critical to the success of the overall response.

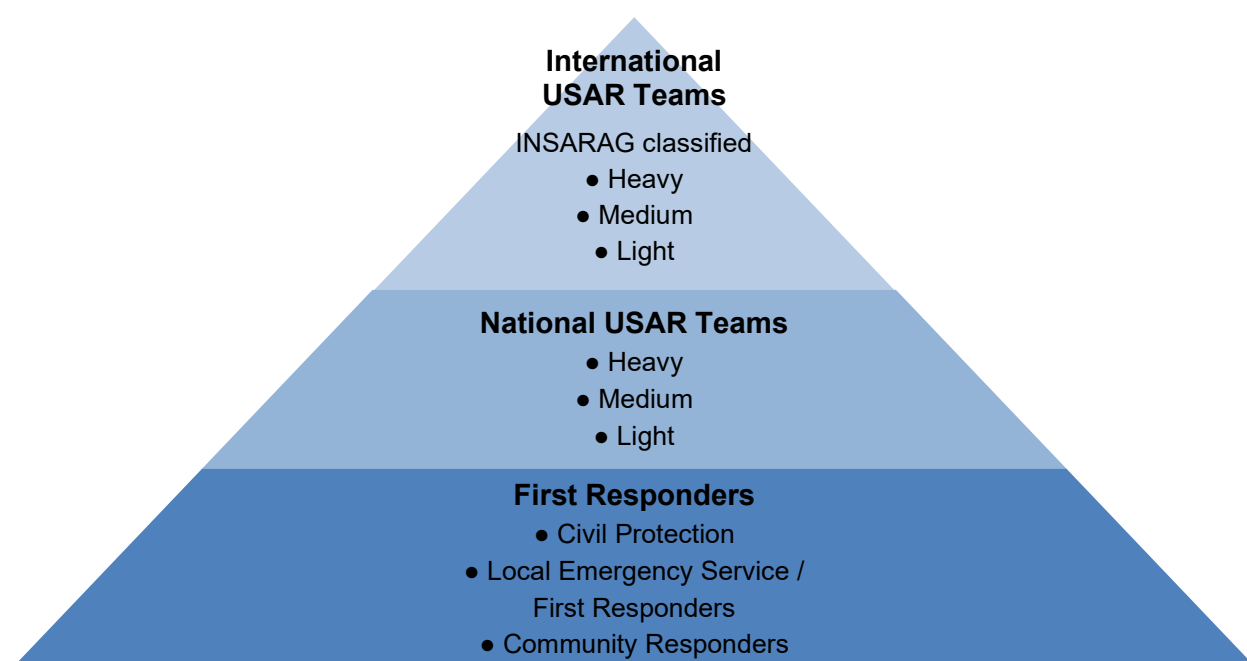


Figure 4: The INSARAG USAR response framework.

3.2 USAR Capacity Building

USAR capacity building is the process of developing a robust and sustainable disaster management framework with a USAR capability. Countries should have the ability to effectively use their own capability and to integrate international assets into the national response. A well developed and trained system of Host Nation Support (HNS) is strongly advised.

Capacity building should cover all five components of USAR capability: management, search, rescue, medical and logistics.

It is recommended that countries seeking USAR capacity building should follow the USAR development cycle (see Figure 5).

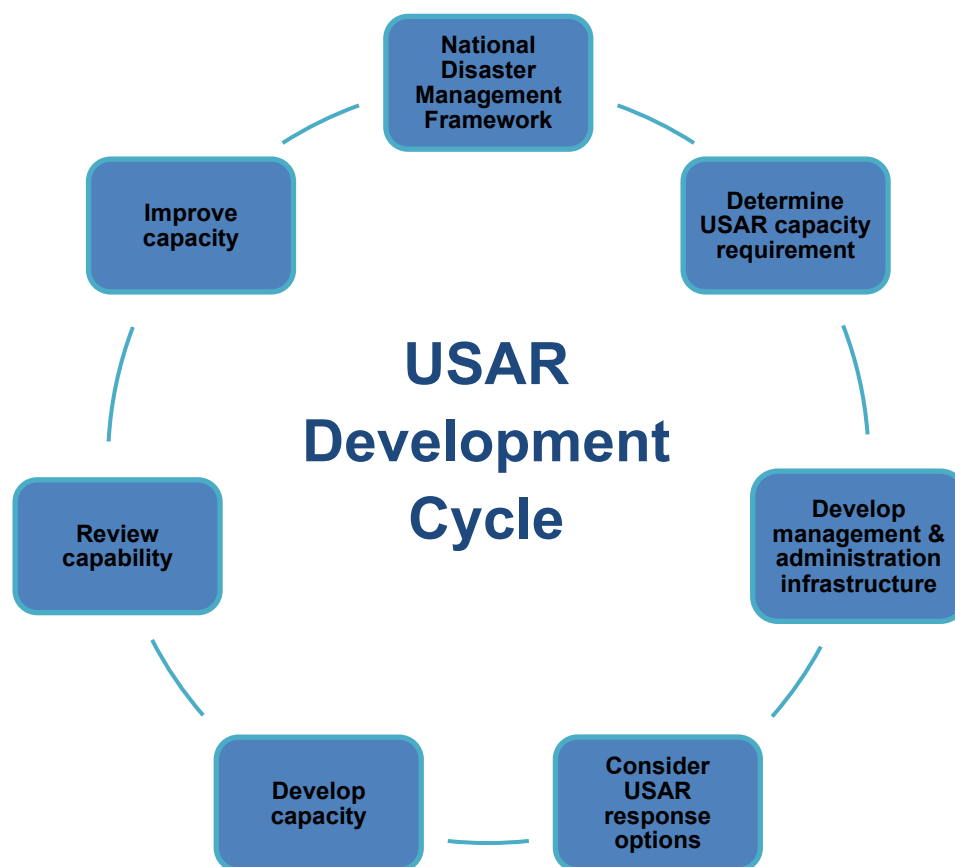


Figure 5: The USAR development cycle.

3.3 USAR Capacity Assessment Missions

To support countries and organisations in the process of national USAR capacity building, the INSARAG Secretariat, when requested by the respective government, can facilitate an INSARAG USAR capacity assessment mission. This would be coordinated by the INSARAG Secretariat between the requesting country and USAR experts from the INSARAG network sponsored by their governments/organisations.

A USAR Capacity Assessment Mission aims to identify existing capacities and determine the required capacities according to the country's USAR objectives and needs. This provides an indication of the gaps between the current capacity and the required capacity, which in turn assists in tailoring the initiatives to be employed in developing USAR capacity.

The INSARAG network provides unique access to a pool of experienced and qualified USAR experts who can assess existing capacity, mapped against needs, and who are then able to provide recommendations on the subsequent implementation of USAR capacity development initiatives. Disaster-prone countries are encouraged to raise this in their Regional Meetings and request support.

3.4 National Accreditation Process (NAP)

One of the critical aspects in developing the national capacity is the establishment of a NAP for the USAR teams. The process allows a country to manage, monitor and establish national standards and adhere closely to the INSARAG Guidelines in developing its USAR national

response system. The national accreditation is a process in which the achievement of national standards is certified by an accrediting entity (i.e. the competent national authorities).

Countries are encouraged to establish NAPs adapted to the context of each country. Figure 6 illustrates the process of establishing a sustainable accreditation system.

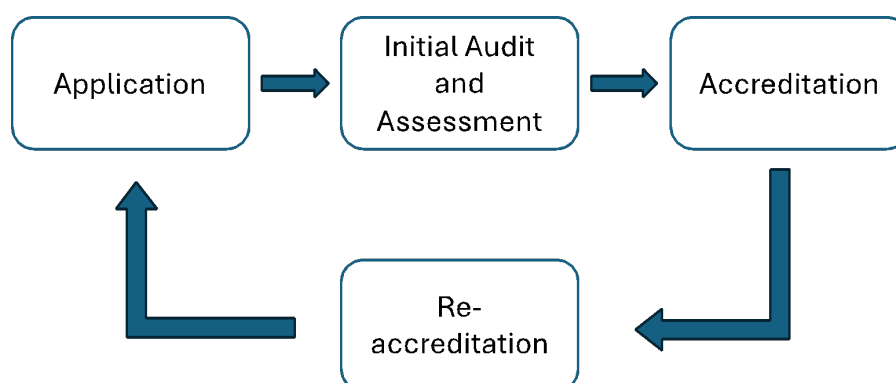


Figure 6: National Accreditation Process.

For more information on building national USAR capacity, please refer to Volume 2: National Capacity Building.

3.5 INSARAG-Recognised National Accreditation Process (IRNAP)

NAPs can be recognised by INSARAG through an established and clearly defined process (including procedures, criteria and steps, verification checklists and evaluation methodology) through the IRNAP process. Regions are encouraged to form Technical Support Groups (TSGs) and Technical Recognition Groups (TRGs), as it is a peer-review process.

At the global level, any NAP which has been accepted by the INSARAG Secretariat as meeting INSARAG standards, will be referred to as an IRNAP. Member states, whose accreditation processes are recognised by INSARAG, can issue nationally accredited teams with a standardised patch as illustrated in Volume Chapter 6.2.9.

Accrediting member states are required to report to the INSARAG Secretariat on successful nationally accredited teams, details of which will be updated in the INSARAG USAR Directory. (For more information on building national USAR capacity and the IRNAP, please refer to Volume 2, Capacity Building).

3.6 Request for International Assistance

As part of national capacity building and strengthening, it is important for countries to develop a receiving mechanism that facilitates decision making in identifying, requesting, accepting and receiving and hosting of international assistance in a timely manner. This is also called Host Nation Support (HNS) and will augment the country's disaster management capacity by analysing national risks and identify possible gaps. The mechanism would enhance the coordination effort of receiving and deploying international assistance (i.e. USAR teams, logistics, etc.) at pre-identified locations (i.e. borders, airports, shipping terminals etc.) and identify priorities to report to the international community. When developing its national

receiving mechanism, it is useful for countries to take reference to UN General Assembly resolution 57/150 that “the affected State has the primary role in the initiation, organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory”. Reference is made to the Oslo [Guidelines](#).

When requesting the assistance of classified (IEC/R) USAR teams, these teams will deploy accordingly to these Guidelines with their 5 components, the medical component included. By requesting classified teams, the requesting/receiving country automatically accepts eligibility for these teams to practice USAR medical services.

4 International USAR Operations

4.1 USAR

USAR involves the location, extrication, and initial stabilisation of people trapped in a confined space or under debris due to a sudden-onset large-scale structural collapse such as an earthquake, in a coordinated and standardised fashion. This can occur due to disasters, landslides, accidents, and deliberate actions.

The goal of search and rescue operations is to rescue the greatest number of trapped people in the shortest amount of time, while minimising the risk to rescuers.

4.2 International USAR Response Cycle

An international USAR response has the following phases, known as USAR response cycle:

- **Phase I – Preparedness:** The preparedness phase is the period between disaster responses. In this phase USAR teams and affected countries conduct training and exercises, review lessons learned from previous experiences, update standard operating procedures, and plan future responses.
- **Phase II – Mobilisation:** The mobilisation phase is the period immediately following the occurrence of a disaster. International USAR teams prepare to respond and travel to deploy and assist the affected country requesting international assistance.
- **Phase III – Operations:** The operations phase is the period when international USAR teams are performing USAR operations in the affected country. In this phase international USAR teams arrive and register at the RDC or the UCC in the affected country, and conduct USAR operations in line with the operational objectives of the Local Emergency Management Authority (LEMA). This phase ends when the USAR team is instructed to cease USAR operations. If necessary and requested by the LEMA, the team can be involved in “beyond the rubble” activities.
- **Phase IV – Demobilisation:** The demobilisation phase is the period when international USAR teams have been instructed that USAR operations are to cease. USAR teams commence withdrawal, coordinating their departure through the UCC, and then depart from the affected country through the RDC.
- **Phase V – Post-Mission:** The post-mission phase is the period immediately after a USAR team has returned home. In this phase the USAR team is required to complete and submit a post-mission report and conduct an After Action Review in order to improve the overall effectiveness and efficiency for response to future disasters. Figure 8 illustrates the INSARAG international USAR response cycle.



Figure 8: The INSARAG international USAR response cycle.

4.3 Stakeholders and Operational Actors

4.3.1 Affected Countries

Affected countries are those experiencing a sudden-onset disaster that may require international USAR assistance. They must undertake several activities throughout the response cycle.

In disasters such as earthquakes, reaching trapped and injured victims quickly is the top priority in successful life-saving rescue operations. Potentially affected countries are encouraged to have a national disaster response mechanism in place such that in the first hours they are able, through their initial response and assessments, to make a decision and announce whether or not the situation is overwhelming, and, therefore, warrants immediate support from international USAR teams.

The INSARAG Hyogo [Declaration](#) of 2010 “invites countries affected by disasters to consider the specific assistance of INSARAG IEC/R classified teams to respond by offering priority access to such teams that will make a genuine and meaningful difference in the life-saving search and rescue phase of an earthquake or other disasters involving collapsed structures.”

As a first priority, affected countries should provide timely information on the scope of the emergency, national response efforts and potential USAR requirements – and keep the VOSOCC updated, either by affected country or INSARAG secretariat.

Affected countries can formally request assistance through their UN Resident Coordinator’s Office, the OCHA Regional or Country Office, directly through the INSARAG Secretariat or bilaterally to countries with whom it may have agreements. In the latter case, affected countries are encouraged to coordinate with and inform the INSARAG Secretariat of the response requirements. As part of the national capacity building, it is important for the country to have a framework and mechanism to receive international assistance, involving many key

stakeholders to assist and effect smooth coordination of resources, personnel and dogs into the country. Refer appendix 2.3: *Request for Assistance Template*.

Countries have the option to request specific INSARAG classified and/or non-classified USAR teams in light, medium and/or heavy configurations, as required for disaster response. This request needs to be stated on VOSOCC at the earliest opportunity after an event.

One of the affected country's main responsibilities is to ensure that its LEMA is functional during the disaster so as to exercise its primary role in initiating, coordinating and organising the international humanitarian assistance on their territories, and that they have overall responsibility for the command, coordination and management of the response operation. This includes having RDCs prepared and operational, locations for Bases of Operations and/or OSOCC/UCC planned.

Given the fact that INSARAG classified USAR teams have a medical component, the affected country accepts that these teams are allowed to perform USAR medicine.

The affected country also establishes or supports the first arriving INSARAG team to establish an RDC and an UCC. They further conduct needs assessments and identify their priorities and where international teams can be best deployed to fill the gaps or augment the national rescue operations. Preliminary sectors can be established in the preparation phase also.

When international assistance is no longer required, the affected country declares the end of USAR operations, through its LEMA via VOSOCC and the UCC.

Countries likely to be affected by such disasters are strongly encouraged to develop and maintain their own national first response USAR capacity according to the INSARAG Guidelines.

4.3.2 Assisting Countries: Bilateral Responders

Many countries, international organisations and NGOs have standby capacity (e.g. INSARAG USAR teams, Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs)) that can be deployed on short notice to assist in disasters in affected countries. Some even have flexible response capabilities. They may coordinate their assistance bilaterally with the affected country or through a regional organisation, such as the European Union or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

The INSARAG Hyogo Declaration 2010 "calls upon all urban search and rescue teams responding internationally to earthquakes to follow the field coordination procedures of OCHA, especially those laid down in the INSARAG Guidelines and Methodology and to coordinate their work with the direction of the RDC and the OSOCC/UCC established in the disaster area by the UN", and in support of the government's overall response plan.

4.3.3 INSARAG Classified USAR Teams

INSARAG classified USAR teams are response assets from the international community that respond to carry out USAR activities in collapsed structures.

Classified USAR teams prepare for international deployment by maintaining their capability in a state of readiness for rapid international deployment. During operations, teams perform tactical operations as required in accordance with the INSARAG Guidelines, coordinate with the OSOCC/UCC, and align their response with the priority needs of the affected country. (For

more information on the USAR team functions, structure and coordination processes, please refer to Volume 3: Operations).

4.3.4 USAR Team Capabilities

USAR is considered to be a multi-hazard discipline designed to respond to sudden-onset events that result in collapsed structures in an urban environment.

USAR teams conduct search and rescue operations in collapsed structures and provide emergency medical care to trapped people. They are equipped with search tools (dogs and electronics) to find survivors. They also need to access and control utilities such as electricity and water and detect hazardous materials (hazmat). They assess and stabilise damaged structures. Such teams are also adaptable when working in challenging environments and can support in assessments, debris removal, victim search, medical assessments/treatment.

Disaster prone countries and member states are encouraged to standardise USAR team capacities at the national level, based on their local needs and using the INSARAG Guidelines as appropriate, and establish corresponding USAR team classification processes at the national level.

Member states' USAR teams deploying internationally should also have the capability to undertake several activities associated with large-scale disasters and augment ongoing national rescue efforts. These include:

- Providing initial Disaster Impact Assessments.
- Supporting establishment of coordination structures.
- Undertaking early relief operations prior or jointly in support of other humanitarian systems.

Some teams have additional resources to support relief operations – often referred to as “Beyond the Rubble” and/or ‘Flexible Response’ – with specific thematic assistance such as medical capabilities, water purification and clearing or making safe of dangerous damaged structures and debris. These tasks must be needs driven, requested and coordinated by the LEMA or a respective agency, and must include from the beginning a clearly defined exit strategy.

USAR teams are expected to be self-sufficient, around the clock for five to ten days of operational deployment (depending the level of classification) and work at more than one site, depending upon the USAR team's classification. They will establish a Base of Operations (BoO) that will support the team for the duration of the response and serve as the communications hub for the team's operations.

If they are the first coordination resource to arrive in an affected country, these teams are also able to set up the RDC and the UCC, if not already established by the national authorities, and to assist the national authorities in coordinating incoming international resources.

When USAR teams augment the UCC in the OSOCC and the humanitarian coordination structure (which includes civil-military coordination platform) with personnel, they should understand the existing LEMA coordination structure and the civil-military coordination platform in place and/or the request for assistance being facilitated/coordinated by the UN

Civil-Military Focal Point in the UNDAC team. This includes being aware of potential needs that USAR teams may request from the military in case of unforeseen developments such as:

- Facilitation of immediate set up of an RDC by the UNDAC/USAR teams.
- Transport for arriving USAR teams from airport to OSOCC/BoO and subsequent tasked areas of operations.
- Fuel for USAR teams' vehicles and generators.
- Helicopters for rapid air assessments by the UNDAC team and partners (extent of impact, key infrastructure constraints, priority needs and areas).
- Maps, if available, for USAR team tasking.
- Security support (route or area security) for USAR teams travelling to/working in insecure areas.
- Standby to receive "Beyond the Rubble" engagements by the incoming USAR teams.

The professional standing and conduct of INSARAG USAR teams when operating at a disaster is of prime concern to INSARAG because every member represents INSARAG. International responders need to consider the cultural, ethical, and moral differences of the country in which they are providing assistance. They must not impose any additional burden on the resources of affected countries and can achieve this by responding in a well-prepared manner, properly trained and equipped to fully support the national authorities.

USAR teams should refer to Volume 3: Operations and Volume 5: Operational Field Guide.

4.3.5 International Coordination: OCHA, UNDAC and the LEMA

OCHA serves as the INSARAG Secretariat and is mandated to support national authorities in the coordination of international assistance in disasters and humanitarian crises exceeding the capacity of the affected country.

Many organisations, such as governments, NGOs, UN agencies, and individuals, respond to disasters and humanitarian crises. OCHA shares timely information and works with all participants to respond to disasters in such a way as to assist the government of the affected country to ensure the most effective use of international resources.

The UNDAC team is an OCHA tool used for deployment primarily to sudden-onset emergencies. OCHA dispatches an UNDAC team when requested to do so by the affected government or the UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator in the affected country.

UNDAC team members are experienced emergency managers from countries, international organisations and OCHA. The UNDAC team is managed by RSB in OCHA-Geneva and works under the authority of the UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator and, where existing, the OCHA Country Office. It also works in support of, and in close cooperation with, the LEMA and the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). The UNDAC team, as manager of the OSOCC, assists the LEMA with the coordination of international response (e.g. the humanitarian clusters, EMTs, USAR, etc.), assessments of priority needs and information management by establishing, amongst other structures, an OSOCC and RDC, when required.

The role of UNDAC in support to USAR operations is described in the [USAR Coordination Handbook](#).

4.3.6 Reception and Departure Centre (RDC)

As part of the needed support and if not already established by national authorities/LEMA, the RDC is established by the first arriving INSARAG classified USAR team or the UNDAC team, in collaboration with local airport/entry points authorities. The RDC is established to coordinate the incoming international USAR teams and other humanitarian assistance, and reports this to the LEMA through the OSOCC.

The RDC also serves as a tool to coordinate the departure of the teams in a proper manner.

Note: The requirements for establishing a RDC are detailed in the UC Handbook and Volume 3: Operations.

4.3.7 On-Site Operations Coordination Centre (OSOCC)

Depending on the situation and in discussion with the national authorities, an OSOCC may be established by the UNDAC team close to the LEMA, and support the national authorities in coordinating international responders. The OSOCC coordinates international responders and supports the initial inter-cluster coordination mechanisms such as health, water, sanitation, and shelter.

The OSOCC has two core objectives:

- To rapidly provide a means to facilitate on-site cooperation, coordination and information management between international responders and the government of the affected country in the absence of an alternate coordination system
- To establish a physical space to act as a single point of service for incoming response teams, notably in the case of a sudden-onset disaster where the coordination of many international response teams is critical to ensure optimal rescue efforts

4.3.8 USAR Coordination Cell (UCC)

The UCC is a specialised and integral part of the operation cell of the OSOCC during an earthquake or collapsed-structure emergency. If not already established by the national authorities/LEMA, it is established by the first incoming USAR team to assist and coordinate multiple international USAR teams during the search and rescue phase of a disaster.

Note: The requirements for establishing an UCC are detailed in the UC Handbook and Volume 3: Operations.

4.3.9 Global Disaster Awareness Coordination System (GDACS)

GDACS services only aim at facilitating near real-time alerts, and connected information among all actors in support of decision-making and coordination. GDACS services build on the collective knowledge of disaster managers worldwide and the joint capacity of all relevant disaster information systems.

4.3.10 Virtual On-Site Operations Coordination Centre (VOSOCC)

The VOSOCC is a web-based information management tool. It is a virtual version of the OSOCC and is part of the GDACS platform.

The VOSOCC is a crucial information sharing portal to facilitate near real-time information exchange amongst international responders and with the affected country, and the UN response mechanisms, following a sudden-onset disaster.

Access to the VOSOCC is restricted to emergency response stakeholders – registration is required. The VOSOCC is managed by the Emergency Response Section in OCHA-Geneva.

Note: USAR teams can access detailed information in Volume 3: Operations. GDACS and the VOSOCC can be accessed at www.gdacs.org and <https://vosocc.unocha.org/> respectively.

4.3.11 INSARAG Coordination and Management System (ICMS)

The ICMS is a web-based information management tool which can be accessed by teams with an associated license. All classified teams pay a yearly fee for the licenses, development and educational tools. During a disaster temporary licenses will be provided to eligible teams and or entities. ICMS is used as a coordination tool for entities involved in disaster management in the affected area. It is managed by the Information Management Technical Support Team (IMTST), which is responsible for creating an “virtual incident” and supporting of the ICMS tools for the duration of the mission. The resulting ICMS dashboard will provide a visual summary of operations in the disaster area which can be viewed by relevant stakeholders such as LEMA, OSOCC, UCC. More details regarding ICMS can be found in chapter 6.3.1 of Volume 3.

5 INSARAG External Classification and Reclassification of USAR Teams (IEC/R)

5.1 Background

Prior to the introduction of the INSARAG External Classification System, USAR teams completed a self-classification as a light, medium or heavy USAR team. This self-classification was then submitted to the INSARAG Secretariat and recorded in its Directory of International USAR teams. INSARAG strongly recommends member states to establish a NAP as an initial step before applying for an IEC.

In 2005, the INSARAG network supported the establishment of independently verifiable, operational standards for international USAR teams through the IEC/R process, and encourages all member states with USAR teams to be deployed internationally to ensure their teams consider the IEC/R process.

In a world in which disaster response is becoming more complex, INSARAG has provided a commendable standard-setting model for the rest of the humanitarian community. The IEC/R system provides a global and strategic approach to ensure that there are well qualified and professional teams all around the world – especially close to potential disaster-prone areas – that are ready to respond at a moment's notice and operating upon globally accepted standards.

Affected countries will now be able to know the type of assistance they can expect to receive, and INSARAG classified USAR teams working alongside each other will be able to know the capacities each can offer. This endeavour promotes a common global USAR language and enhances the professional response, which meets the standards set in the INSARAG Guidelines.

5.2 Categories of Classified USAR Teams

The INSARAG Guidelines classify USAR teams according to their capacity to provide the key components of USAR. The five key components are management, search, rescue, medical, and logistics.

5.2.1 Classified Light USAR Teams

Classified light USAR teams have all five key USAR components. Classified light USAR teams have the ability to conduct search and rescue operations in collapsed or failed structures of wood and/or unreinforced masonry construction, including structures reinforced with steel mesh. They must also conduct rigging and lifting operations. Classified light USAR teams are capable of conducting USAR operations to ASR Level 3 (i.e. Assessment Search and Rescue Levels of the Worksites – see Volume 3: Operations). A classified light USAR team is expected to have the operational capability to work only at one worksite for one work period (12 hours per day for five days).

5.2.2 Classified Medium USAR Teams

A classified medium USAR team comprises the five components listed above and has the ability to conduct complex technical search and rescue operations in collapsed or failed structures of heavy wood and/or reinforced masonry construction, including structures

reinforced and/or built with structural steel. They must also conduct rigging and lifting operations. A classified medium USAR team is expected to have the operational capability to work at one worksite (24 hours per day for seven days).

5.2.3 Classified Heavy USAR Teams

Classified heavy USAR teams comprise the five components listed above and have the operational capability for complex technical search and rescue operations in collapsed or failed structures, particularly those involving structures reinforced and/or built with structural steel. They must also conduct rigging and lifting operations. A classified heavy USAR team is expected to have the operational capability to work at two worksites simultaneously (24 hours per day for 10 days).

Note: A detailed description, including compositions of classified light, medium and heavy USAR teams is outlined in the Volume 2: National Capacity Building.

5.3 INSARAG External Classification and Reclassification (IEC/R)

“Guarantee of effective and professional international assistance.”



Figure 9: The INSARAG patch.

Numerous teams have successfully undergone the IEC/R since it started in 2005, while many others have shown keen interest or are preparing their USAR teams for upcoming IEC/Rs. This process has since facilitated capacity building and ensured minimum standards and matching capabilities to needs and priorities. Classified USAR teams are well recognised by the INSARAG patch that they wear and have most recently proven to be a value-adding resource to earthquake affected countries. This patch may only be worn during USAR responses, trainings, and events.

To this very day, it remains a truly unique process that establishes verifiable operational standards and an example of how independent peer review can provide a benefit in preparedness for response, and at the times of response. Both classifiers and the team undergoing IEC/R learn from one another, and this interaction is indeed highly valuable, because, in an earthquake, they will be the same people working closely together, to help save lives.

To ensure coherence in international USAR response, international teams with the capacity to deploy internationally are strongly encouraged to engage in the IEC/R process.

A list of all classified teams is available on www.insarag.org.

5.3.1 INSARAG External Classification (IEC)

Any USAR team having the mandate to deploy internationally is eligible to apply for an IEC, provided it has the endorsement of its member state's INSARAG Policy Focal Point. Upon successful completion of an IEC, classified USAR teams are included in the USAR Directory at the classification level achieved.

The IEC assesses and classifies two key components of response and technical capability of international USAR operations:

- Response capability
- Technical capacity

USAR teams are required to demonstrate their proficiency during a minimum 36-hour simulated, realistic structural collapse exercise, using their full range of USAR skills and equipment required for the desired classification level. Successful teams are recognised as having met universal USAR standards and are accorded a team patch to identify their professional level in the field.

The INSARAG Secretariat facilitates all IEC/Rs and closely engages all teams throughout their respective IEC/R planning timelines and in close cooperation with their focal points, mentors and IEC/R classifier team leaders.

5.3.2 INSARAG External Reclassification (IER)

IER is the process a classified team is required to periodically undergo to maintain their classification status. If for whatever reasons a USAR team elects not to reclassify its INSARAG classification is voided and, thus the team loses the right to wear the INSARAG patch.

USAR teams may need to reclassify for the following reasons:

- Classification period of five years expires
- Change in the USAR team's structure
- Change in classification level (IER for decrease, IEC for increase)
- Inappropriate international response conduct

Any classified USAR team that is not able to run an IER five years after being classified will have to submit relevant justifications through their INSARAG Policy Focal Points to the INSARAG Secretariat, who will then consult with the INSARAG Global Chair. In such an instance, their classification status would be considered as pending, contingent on future reclassification.

5.3.3 Cost for IEC/R

All costs associated with the planning, preparation and execution of the IEC/R exercise is the responsibility of the host country or the organisation requesting classification or reclassification.

In an IEC/R, the associated costs of individual IEC/R classifiers are covered by their respective sponsoring organisation. The IEC/R requesting host country or the organisation however, determines and manages observers invited.

For more information on the IEC/R process, please refer to Volume 4 INSARAG External Classification and Reclassification.

6 Conclusion

2026 Guidelines - Conclusion

The INSARAG Guidelines, prepared by USAR responders and representatives of INSARAG Member States, are recognised by the UN General Assembly Resolution 57/150 as “a flexible and helpful reference tool for disaster preparedness and response efforts.” It is a relevant document, being improved with the lessons learned from major international USAR operations and/or exercises. It is also the reference document for capacity building at all levels. The Guidelines represent best practice, and all affected and assisting countries are committed to actively implement and practice these internationally accepted procedures and to contribute to its further development. The INSARAG Network has been consulted in the lead-up to the Global Meeting 2026 on the key strategic objectives. For the next four years, INSARAG will continue to focus on reinforcing quality standards and coordination, advancing flexible assistance, enhancing preparedness, and bolstering partnerships. I would like to thank all the members of INSARAG who have supported the work and activities of the network since its establishment. We should be proud of what INSARAG has achieved, and we should continue with even greater determination to implement UN General Assembly Resolution 57/150 at all levels worldwide.



Ambassador Dominik Stillhart
INSARAG Global Chair

Appendices

Overview of relevant Guidance Appendices to Volume 1, hosted on www.insarag.org.

Appendix 1.1: Terms of Reference for INSARAG Focal Points

Appendix 1.2: Terms of Reference for INSARAG Global Chair, Regional Chairs and Vice-Chairs (Troika)

Appendix 1.3: Explanatory Note on Document Structure