



INSARAG Guidelines 2026

Volume 2: National Capacity Building

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Abbreviations

BoO	Base of Operations
EMS	Emergency Medical Services
EMT	Emergency Medical Team
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
ERG	Emergency Response Guide
Hazmat	Hazardous materials
HNS	Host Nation Support
ICS	Incident Command System
IEC	INSARAG External Classification
IER	INSARAG External Reclassification
IRNAP	INSARAG-Recognised National Accreditation Process
INSARAG	The International Search and Rescue Advisory Group
LEMA	Local Emergency Management Authority
NAP	National Accreditation Process
NDMA	National Disaster Management Authority
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OSOCC	On-Site Operations Coordination Centre
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
RDC	Reception/Departure Centre
SOGs	Standard Operating Guides
SOPs	Standard operating procedures
TRG	Technical Recognition Group
TSG	Technical Support Group
UCC	USAR Coordination Cell
UN	United Nations
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination team
UNISDR	United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
USAR	Urban Search and Rescue
VOSOCC	Virtual On-Site Operations Coordination Centre
WHO	World Health Organisation

1 Introduction

United Nations (UN) General Assembly Resolution 57/150 (16 December 2002) states that each country is responsible first and foremost for caring for the victims of disasters and other emergencies occurring on its territory. It has the primary role of initiating, organising, coordinating, and implementing humanitarian assistance within its jurisdiction. Therefore, countries must develop a robust emergency management framework based on their national risk profile.

This Volume defines capacity building as the process of identifying and supporting existing Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) resources or developing new capacity through the creation of systems and processes, recruitment of suitable staff, procurement of equipment, training of personnel, and integration into the existing legal framework for emergency management sufficient to support and sustain the capacity, as well as utilising it efficiently, effectively and coordinated.

The principles of USAR capacity building that support the objectives of UN General Assembly Resolution 57/150, the INSARAG Warsaw Declaration of 2021, and the INSARAG Strategic Plan 2021-25 include:

- Promote capacity development at national and local levels and strengthen community preparedness.
- Encourage Member States to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of frontline emergency response coordination by adapting and localising the INSARAG coordination methodology and concepts to the Member State.
- Encourage Member States, supported by the INSARAG Regional Groups, to establish a National Accreditation Process (NAP). In this regard, it reaffirms the relevance of promulgating the National Accreditation Process (NAP) to strengthen the localisation agenda and improve the capacities of national response teams by establishing a national quality assurance process.

It is recommended that Governments integrate national USAR response systems and mechanisms into their national legal framework and emergency management systems. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) or Local Emergency Management Authority (LEMA), as the government's lead disaster response agency, should be well-versed in the need for and deployment of national resources (including USAR) to disasters of any sort within its sovereign boundary.

A challenging factor is the term "USAR," which is often misunderstood or improperly applied. In recent decades, USAR has frequently been incorrectly used to describe any rescue operation, whether a road traffic accident, a hiker lost in the wilderness, water-related events, or a climber stuck on a rock ledge.

USAR involves locating and rescuing victims trapped or injured in urban environments, most commonly due to the collapse of artificial structures. The cause of the incident can be categorised as accidental, such as natural disasters, or deliberate, such as a terrorist attack. USAR is a specialised field of emergency response that entails rescuing victims from austere environments, typically collapsed structures, using specialised equipment by:

- Searching for the victim using search dogs and technical search equipment
- Lifting and moving of heavy objects
- Cutting, breaking and breaching through debris
- Shoring and stabilisation of damaged structures
- Rope rigging systems for transportation above or below ground level

- Providing emergency medical care during the rescue process

USAR is a specific skill set often found within a “multi-disciplined” technical rescue team. However, the team may also have additional capabilities like flood rescue. These capabilities beyond USAR aim to facilitate a thorough and adaptable humanitarian response by enhancing the flexibility of rescue teams in multi-hazard situations and ensuring they remain aligned with the needs of those affected. For further information on the concept of Flexible Response, refer to Volume 3 Operations, Section 9.2.

This Volume defines response resources as:

- Community-based responders can include spontaneous volunteers who may be involved in various responses, ranging from concerned citizens providing aid at a road traffic accident to others attempting to assist after a sudden-onset event. These individuals may be non-professionals, locally organised, and possess basic or no training.
- First responders: Recognised as an organised response that may be professional (typically provided by fire services, emergency medical services personnel, civil defence units, police, etc.)
- Specialised response: Includes local technical search and rescue teams.
- USAR Teams –National (NAP, IRNAP) and International (IEC), designated as Light, Medium and Heavy based on INSARAG criteria.

This capacity-building Volume has been developed to assist in the early stages of creating and continuously improving already established resources. This Volume is organised as follows:

- Chapter 2 provides an overview of the national USAR capacity-building process and presents recommendations for a holistic approach.
- Chapter 3 outlines the various USAR capabilities that can be developed, including community-based response, first responders, technical rescue teams, and USAR teams.
- Chapter 4 describes establishing a national USAR framework that includes national USAR management and administration systems and coordination capabilities.
- Chapter 5 discusses how an affected country receives international assistance, detailing the process for requesting aid, the host nation’s support for it, the integration of the international response into the national system, and the conclusion of international USAR operations.
- Chapter 6 directs national quality assurance through the National Accreditation Process (NAP) and the INSARAG Recognised National Accreditation Process (IRNAP).

2 Overview of the National Capacity Building Process

From a perspective of developing USAR capacity, the INSARAG Response Framework, as described in Chapter 4, provides a basis for the process sequence: developing a robust national emergency management framework based on risk assessment, developing the management and administration infrastructure, and considering alternative response options.

For those engaged in search and rescue, a continuous capacity-building process is needed at the national or international levels. This chapter presents general requirements, components, and guidelines for consideration when establishing or adapting a national capacity-building process.

To develop a USAR national capacity-building programme, certain foundational elements are necessary, such as the following:

- **Needs Assessment:** a comprehensive analysis to understand the specific needs, gaps, and opportunities within the sector or population targeted by the programme.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** involvement of key stakeholders, including government agencies, community leaders, NGOs, private sector partners, and beneficiaries, to ensure the programme is well-rounded and meets current needs.
- **Funding and Resources:** securing adequate funding and resources, including financial resources, human capital, and infrastructure.
- **Policy Framework:** a robust policy framework that provides legal and regulatory backing for the programme, ensuring alignment with national risk reduction goals.
- **Capacity Development Plan:** develop a detailed plan outlining the programme's objectives, activities, timelines, roles, and responsibilities.

A USAR national capacity-building programme typically consists of several key components that should be considered when establishing such a programme:

- **Training and Development:** provide targeted training programmes and workshops to develop skills and knowledge relevant to USAR capacity response.
- **Institutional Strengthening:** enhance the capabilities of institutions involved in implementing the programme, including their governance, management, and operational processes.
- **Knowledge Management:** develop systems for knowledge sharing and management to foster continuous learning and adaptation.
- **Technical Assistance:** provide technical support and expertise to ensure effective implementation and address challenges.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** implement a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to measure progress, assess impact, and inform ongoing improvements.

When developing a USAR national capacity-building programme, it's essential to adhere to several guiding principles that govern the process:

- **Inclusivity:** ensure the programme is accessible and beneficial to all population segments.
- **Sustainability:** design the programme with sustainability in mind, focusing on long-term impact and the ability of beneficiaries to continue building capacity.
- **Adaptability:** building flexibility into the programme to adapt to changing needs, contexts, and stakeholder feedback.
- **Collaboration:** foster partnerships among various stakeholders to leverage expertise, resources, and networks.

- **Transparency and Accountability:** maintain transparency in programme management and decision-making with precise accountability mechanisms.

Experience reveals that several potential barriers could hinder the development and implementation of a USAR national capacity-building programme:

- **Limited Resources:** insufficient funding, human resources, or infrastructure can constrain programme scope and effectiveness, an issue often cited as a fundamental barrier.
- **Resistance to Change:** stakeholders may resist new methods or approaches, particularly if they challenge established practices or require significant improvements to existing capacity.
- **Political Instability:** changes in political leadership or policy priorities can disrupt programme continuity and effectiveness.
- **Cultural Barriers:** cultural differences and social norms can affect stakeholder engagement and programme adoption, particularly in diverse or multi-ethnic contexts.
- **Lack of Planning or Coordination:** poor coordination among stakeholders can lead to duplicated efforts, wasted resources, and fragmented impact.

Developing a USAR national capacity-building programme requires careful planning, stakeholder engagement, adequate resources, and attention to sustainability and inclusivity. While challenges exist, a well-designed programme that addresses a Member State's specific needs and builds on existing strengths can significantly impact national resilience.

3 Urban Search and Rescue Response Capacity Building

3.1 Introduction

Emergency services (both volunteer and career), civil protection, militaries, and many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have taken on a major role as primary responders to rescue incidents. Rescues can involve structural collapses, trench collapses, confined spaces, industrial and agricultural machinery, water emergencies, and individuals trapped above or below grade level, which are grouped into a category known as technical rescue.

Technical rescue incidents are complex and require specially trained personnel and equipment to complete the mission. Natural forces such as earthquakes, precipitation, extreme temperatures, and swift water currents can complicate these incidents further. The presence of flammable vapours and toxic chemicals can also elevate the level of risk.

The safety of teams conducting technical rescue operations is of special concern. First responders worldwide perform technical rescues daily. Some complex technical rescue incidents may last many hours or even days as rescue personnel carefully assess the situation, obtain and set up the appropriate rescue equipment, monitor scene safety, and remove hazards before reaching, stabilising, providing emergency care and extricating the victims.

Hazardous substances or elements, such as flammable vapours or dust, often force rescuers to take additional precautions to ensure operations are conducted safely. Experience has shown that hasty rescue operations can endanger the lives of both rescuers and victims. At the same time, rescuers know that a victim's survival chances often depend on the rapid provision of emergency medical care and extrication. Some organisations are better prepared than others to perform technical rescue operations. Many organisations have created specialist technical rescue teams for complicated rescue operations. A technical rescue team is a specialised group of personnel with advanced training and specialised equipment to safely and efficiently conduct complex rescue operations.

Considering the mandate, the specialities and capabilities of individual teams vary greatly, depending on their level of training, number of trained personnel, and availability of specialised rescue tools and equipment. For example, some organisations have the training and equipment to perform rescues at collapsed structures by cutting through reinforced concrete and removing heavy debris. However, other teams are limited to working with picks and shovels to remove debris.

Many organisations have single-discipline rescue teams, such as a water rescue team. These teams are trained and equipped to handle one type of rescue. Others have multi-disciplinary teams capable of performing more than one type of rescue operation.

Forming a functional and safe technical rescue team, whether single or multi-disciplinary, requires careful planning, a significant time commitment from the team members, equipment research and acquisition, risk analysis, training, and sustained annual funding.

Appendix 2.1 ("Roadmap for USAR National Capacity") outlines how to establish a technical rescue team, beginning with the formation of the Community-Based Responder, which serves as the foundation for further capacity development, including USAR. It addresses many considerations that must be considered before forming a team, such as:

- Do we need a team for our community?
- What type of team does our community need?

- How do we conduct a risk assessment to identify rescue hazards?
- How do we start a team?
- What training is necessary for team members?
- What dangers are involved in technical rescue?
- How can we fund the team?
- What type of personnel will we need on the team?
- What laws and standards pertain to rescue?
- What equipment will the team need?

Appendix 2.1 (“Roadmap for USAR National Capacity”) describes the stages of development and requirements from a single responder to a national-level USAR capacity.

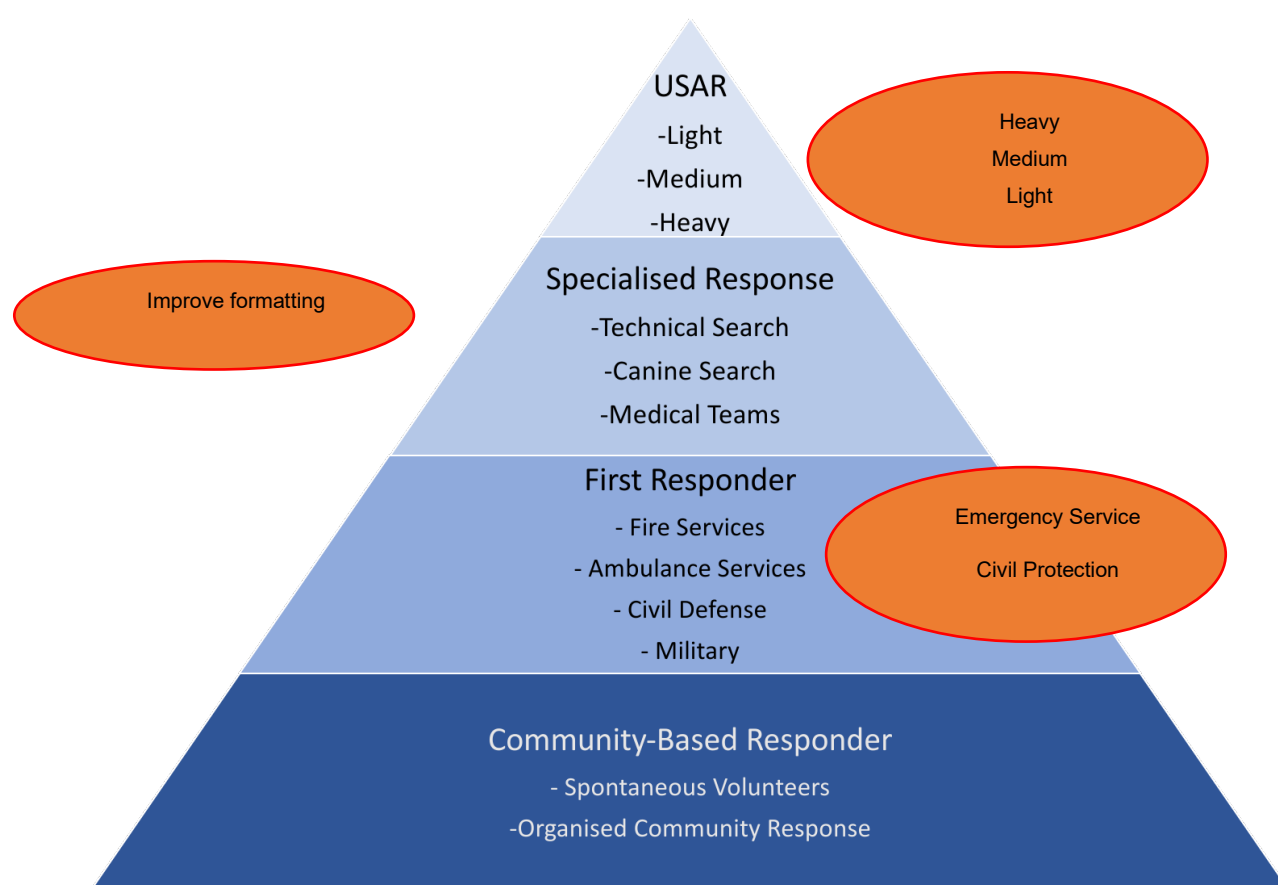


Figure 1: INSARAG Response Framework

3.2 Community-Based Responder

The organisation of community responders is usually the first step any community or organisation takes to equip and train itself to respond to an emergency. This organisation comes in various shapes, sizes, and capabilities and is primarily determined by the types of risks or hazards the community faces. Often, these teams are made up of non-professional volunteers. The INSARAG Community Responders Programme guides the establishment of this tier of response.

3.3 First Responders

For this document, "first responders" refers to entities officially recognised as organised responses typically provided by fire services, emergency medical services (EMS) personnel, civil protection units, police, etc. These entities may be composed of volunteers or career professionals, but all are recognised as professional organisations. The INSARAG First Responders Programme, available at insarag.org, guides the establishment of this tier of response.

3.4 Specialised Response

Responders mandated to perform rescue operations often face unique or complex situations that require special skills and equipment to resolve safely. Some organisations are prepared to handle such events, but in many cases, the skills and equipment needed exceed the capabilities of the responding organisation. As a result, many organisations have formed or are considering forming technical rescue teams to address these complex rescue challenges.

Most newly formed teams begin by training their members in a single discipline, such as rope or water rescue. Once this capacity is developed, the team may expand into other areas of rescue to become a multi-disciplinary unit capable of handling various types of advanced technical rescue. An organisation may also opt to establish different teams with distinct capabilities. Several rescue disciplines exist, and those discussed in this Volume are listed in Appendix 2.1 ("Roadmap for USAR National Capacity").

3.4.1 Considerations Before Forming a Team

Numerous factors must be evaluated when forming a technical rescue team. This volume defines a team as a group of persons trained and equipped to perform technical rescues in one or more specialised areas. As outlined in the introduction to Chapter 3, many considerations must be made before starting a rescue team. Appendix 2.1 ("Roadmap for USAR National Capacity") includes a comprehensive list of considerations to be made by the relevant authorities before attempting to develop a technical rescue team.

3.4.2 How to Form a Technical Rescue Team

The formation and development of a technical rescue team is a considerable undertaking. While forming all aspects of a team, both administrative and operational, is quite intensive, maintaining the capability and providing ongoing training is even more challenging. It can be expensive, requiring new training, equipment, and, most importantly, careful planning.

This chapter outlines steps for establishing a technical rescue team. The suggested steps are organised into four phases of team development, as illustrated in figures 2 and 3.

 Phase I	 Phase II	 Phase III	 Phase IV
Assessment of community risks and rescue needs	Planning	Development of team	Development of SOPs
- a Perform a risk assessment - b Analyse data to project the likelihood of a technical rescue emergency - c Establish a risk threshold - d Determine what type of team is needed	- a Establish a planning committee to develop a plan - b Determine current capabilities - c Prepare a concept of operations - d Determine programme management structure - e Develop a staffing plan - f Identify initial equipment and vehicle requirements - g Identify training requirements - h Consider a plan for delivering recurring training - i Estimate cost of team and develop a budget - j Obtain management support - k Obtain political support - l Look for partnerships	- a Select the team members - b Train the team - c Purchase equipment and uniforms - d Purchase vehicles - e Provide administrative support	- a Obtain or write administrative and operational SOPs for the team - b Review and revise SOPs regularly - c Assessment of community risks and rescue needs - d Planning - e Development of team - f Development of SOPs

Figure 2: The Four Phases of Team Development

Given the complexity of forming a technical rescue team, each step must be carefully considered to ensure that important issues are addressed. The phases and associated steps are available in Appendix 2.1 (“Roadmap for USAR National Capacity”).

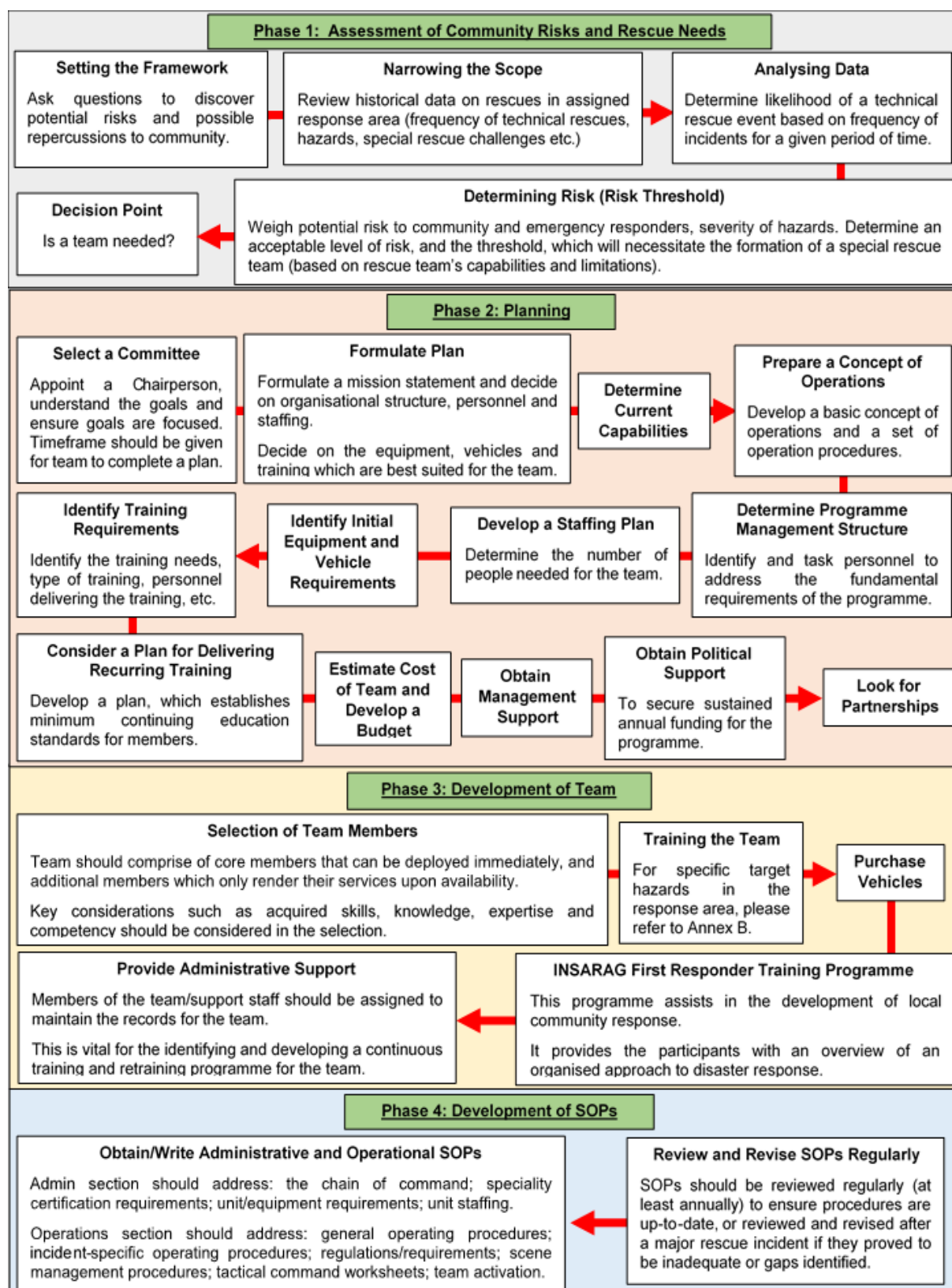


Figure 3: How to Form a Technical Rescue Team

3.4.3 Regulations and Standards Governing Technical Rescue Operations

Care must be taken to ensure that the sponsoring organisation complies with existing regulations and standards related to workplace safety. This applies to national laws and regulations pertinent to the rescue response area, including those from neighbouring jurisdictions and countries. The

most important regulations are those issued by national or state/provincial occupational safety and health agencies, which require employers to adhere to mandatory minimum workplace health and safety protections. These regulations are grounded in laws establishing an employer's obligation to provide a workplace free from recognised hazards. Ignorance of the law is not an acceptable defence.

Team members of a “specialist team,” such as a technical rescue team, are expected to possess a higher level of skill and expertise than other individuals, including other members of the same organisation. Therefore, technical rescue teams should carefully note recruitment criteria and applicable standards.

3.4.4 Technical Rescue Training

No tools or technology can substitute for a lack of training and experience. Adequate training is essential for any rescue team to perform rescue operations safely and effectively. Appendix 2.1 (“Roadmap for USAR National Capacity”) outlines the evolution of technical rescue training, the future of rescue training, training requirements, how to plan training for the USAR Team and a curriculum for different training levels.

3.5 USAR Teams

3.5.1 Structure and Organisation

The INSARAG methodology suggests that a USAR team be developed in stages, as demonstrated for a technical rescue team. This reduces the potential for missed educational opportunities at the foundational level, expands team members' knowledge base, and assists in team building.

The INSARAG methodology strongly suggests that a developing team must build from a strong foundational level rather than from the top down. In this regard, a new USAR Team should not begin development at the Light, Medium, or Heavy level until it can demonstrate proficiency and value at the first responder level.

The entry level in a USAR Team is typically at the First Responder USAR capacity. This progresses from the initial technical rescue team, which employs many of the same structures. The role of a First Responder USAR Team is as follows:

- Reconnaissance and survey of the affected area
- Identify hazards and undertake actions to reduce the level of risk
- Control of public utilities
- Isolation of hazmat and identification of whether it can be safely done
- Surface search and rescue
- Initiating medical care and extrication of victims
- Establishment of Casualty Collection Points
- Assisting international teams in integrating into local emergency management arrangements

The structure of a First Responder USAR Team is designed to maintain a surface rescue capacity at a single worksite. The team can conduct rescues from structures made of wood or light metal components, unreinforced masonry, adobe, raw mud, and bamboo. The search component can perform either a superficial or a physical search. The rescue component of the team will be

equipped with hand-operated cutting tools, ropes, and bars for lifting and cribbing materials to stabilise damaged structures.

3.5.2 General

National Urban Search and Rescue Teams will consist of specialised teams recognised at three capability levels:

- **Light USAR:** National, National (Accredited)
- **Medium USAR:** National, National (Accredited)
- **Heavy USAR:** National, National (Accredited)

The key distinction between accredited and classified teams is that classified teams can deploy internationally to support other countries. Accredited teams possess the same technical capabilities but operate within the country's sovereign borders or cross border bilaterally with a neighbouring through an official agreement between both nations.

The team compositions below are *suggested* compositions and serve as a guidance for capacity building. Other team compositions may be used, depending on national standards and other factors.

3.5.3 Light

A Light USAR Team comprises the five components required by the INSARAG Guidelines: Management, Logistics, Search, Rescue, and Medical. Light USAR Teams can conduct technical search and rescue operations in collapsed or failed structures of wood and/or unreinforced masonry construction, including structures reinforced with steel mesh. The Light USAR Team will also be capable of conducting rigging and lifting operations. Light USAR Teams will possess technical skills similar to those of Medium and Heavy USAR. Light USAR Teams can undertake search and rescue activities up to ASR3 on worksites. A suggested personnel composition for a Light USAR Team is between 17 and 20, with the capability to deploy one member to INSARAG support (RDC/UCC) for the deployment duration. The Team's logistics component will be able to establish a Base of Operations (BoO), including shelter, sanitation, tool repair, nutrition, and hygiene arrangements.

A Light USAR Team:

- Must be adequately staffed and resourced to allow for 12-hour operations at one site (not necessarily the same site; the sites may change) up to five days
- Is required to have the capability of physical- and technical search
- Dog search is NOT mandatory. If dog search is applied, the number of dogs used, is according to the team's decision
- Is required to have the technical capability to cut construction material used in light structures
- Must be able to ensure medical care of its team members (including dogs if present) as well as entrapped victims
- Is required to support international coordination (RDC/UCC) with a minimum of one trained staff
- Must be capable conducting USAR operations to ASR level 3 and be integrated into the standard INSARAG coordination and reporting mechanisms

The following table suggests a staffing level enabling a Light USAR Team to conduct 12-hour operations on one worksite. For further information, refer to Appendix 2.1 (“Roadmap for USAR National Capacity”).

USAR Component	Tasks	Suggested Staff Allocation	Suggested Number (17 to 20)
Management	Command	Team Leader	1
	Coordination / UCC / RDC / On-Site Operations Coordination Centre (OSOCC)	Deputy Team leader	1
	Planning / Information / Communications	Planning Officer	1
	Safety and Security	Safety Officer	1
Search & Rescue	Operations	Crew Leader	1
	Technical Search / Dog Search / Hazmat Assessment / Breaking and breaching; cutting; shoring; technical rope; Lifting and moving	Search and Rescue team (including dogs if deployed)	8 (Plus dogs)
Medical	Medical Component Management: Coordination and administration of medical component. Integration with local health infrastructure Care of team (including dogs) and victims encountered	Medical Doctor and:	1
		Physician / Paramedic / Nurse	1
Logistics	BoO	Logistics Team Manager	1
	BoO	Logistician	1
	Water supply		
	Food supply		
	Transport capacity and fuel supply		

Table 1: Suggested Staffing Level for a Light USAR Team.

3.5.4 Medium

A Medium USAR Team comprises the five components required by the INSARAG Guidelines: Management, Logistics, Search, Rescue, and Medical. Medium USAR Teams can conduct technical search and rescue operations in collapsed or failed structures made of heavy timber and/or reinforced masonry construction, including structures reinforced with structural steel. They must also perform rigging and lifting operations. Medium teams are expected to include RDC/UCC components if applicable to the national framework. The primary differences between the two teams are as follows.

A Medium USAR Team:

- Must be adequately staffed and resourced to allow for 24-hour operations at one site (not necessarily the same site; the sites may change) for a minimum of seven days
- Is required to have the capability of physical- and technical search
- Dog search is only mandatory for NAP/IRNAP teams. If dog search is applied, the number of dogs used, is according to the team’s decision

- Is required to have the technical capability to cut and delayer structural building material typically used for construction in multi-storey structures
- Must be able to ensure medical care of its team members (including dogs) as well as entrapped victims
- Is required to support international coordination (RDC/UCC) with a minimum of two trained staff
- Must be capable conducting USAR operations to ASR level 4 and be integrated into the standard INSARAG coordination and reporting mechanisms

The proposed staffing outlines a level that allows a USAR Team to conduct 24-hour operations on a single worksite for up to seven days. For further information, refer to Appendix 2.1 ("Roadmap for USAR National Capacity").

USAR Component	Tasks	Suggested Staff Allocation	Suggested Number (Total 42)
Management	Command	Team Leader	1
	Coordination	Deputy Team leader	1
	Planning/Follow Up	Planning Officer	1
	Liaison/Media/Reporting	Liaison Officer	1
	Assessment/Analysis	Structural Engineer	1
	Safety and Security	Safety Officer	1
	RDC/UCC	Coordination Officer	2 (if applicable to national framework)
Search	Technical Search	Technical Search Specialist	2
	Dog Search	Dog Handler and dog	4 (if applicable)
	Hazmat Assessment	Hazmat Specialist	2
Rescue	Breaking and breaching; cutting; shoring; technical rope	Rescue Team Manager and Rescue Technicians	14 (2 teams: 1 Team Leader and 6 Rescuers each)
	Lifting and Moving	Heavy Rigging Specialist	2
Medical	Medical Component Management: Coordination and administration of medical team, Integration with local health infrastructure, Care of team (including dogs) and entrapped victims encountered	Medical Doctor	1
		Physician, Paramedic, Nurse	3
Logistics	BoO	Logistics Team Manager	1
	Water supply	Transport Specialist	1
	Food supply	Logistician	1
	Transport capacity and fuel supply	Base Manager	2

	Communications	Communications Specialist	1
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Table 2: Suggested staffing for a Medium USAR Team.

3.5.5 Heavy

A Heavy USAR Team comprises the five components required by the INSARAG Guidelines: management, logistics, search, rescue, and medical. Heavy USAR Teams have the operational capability for complex technical search and rescue operations in collapsed or failed structures that necessitate the ability to cut, break, and breach steel-reinforced concrete, as well as demolish these structures using lifting and rigging techniques, and establish an RDC/UCC component if applicable to the national framework.

A Heavy USAR Team:

- Must be adequately staffed and resourced to allow for 24-hour operations at two separate worksites simultaneously for a minimum of ten days
- Is required to have the capability of dog search (minimum 4 dogs), physical- and technical search
- Must be able to ensure medical care of its team members (including dogs) as well as entrapped patients
- Is required to support international coordination (RDC/UCC) with a minimum of four trained staff
- Is required to have the technical capability to cut and delayer structural building material typically used for construction in multi-storey structures
- Must be capable conducting USAR operations to ASR level 4 and be integrated into the standard INSARAG coordination and reporting mechanisms

A recommended staffing level in table 5 will allow a Heavy USAR Team to conduct 24-hour operations at two worksites simultaneously for at least ten days. For further information, refer to Appendix 2.1 ("Roadmap for USAR National Capacity").

USAR Component	Tasks	Suggested Staff Allocation	Suggested Number (Total 63)
Management	Command	Team Leader	1
	Coordination	Deputy Team Leader	1
	Planning	Planning Officer	1
	Liaison/Follow Up	Liaison Officer	1
	Media/Reporting	Deputy Liaison Officer	1
	Assessment/Analysis	Structural Engineer	1
	Safety and Security	Safety Officer	1
	RDC/UCC	Coordination Officer	4 (If applicable to national framework)
Search	Technical Search	Technical Search Specialist	2
	Dog Search	Dog Handler	6

	Hazmat Assessment	Hazmat Specialist	2
Rescue	Breaking and Breaching: cutting; shoring; technical rope	Rescue Team Manager and Rescue Technicians	28 (4 teams Comprising 1 Team Leader and 6 Rescuers)
	Lifting and moving	Heavy Rigging Specialist	2
Medical	Medical Component Management (Personnel and dogs) Patient Care Integration with local health infrastructure	Medical Doctor	2
		Paramedic or Nurse	4
Logistics	BoO	Logistics Team Manager	1
	Water supply	Transport Specialist	1
	Food supply	Logistician	1
	Transport capacity and Fuel supply	Base Manager	2
	Communications	Communications Specialist	1

Table 3: Suggested Staffing for a Heavy USAR Team.

3.5.6 USAR Training Development Methodology

Training and development, including initial, joint, and reclassification, are essential for successfully implementing any local USAR capacity-building project and must address all the team components.

The USAR management and administration infrastructure is responsible for developing a standardised process to identify training needs.

This might include:

- Identification of existing resources, procedures and competencies
- Self-evaluation to determine actual operational capacity
- A gap analysis will be conducted to identify training requirements
- Identification of pre-conditions for training to be effective

Unlike the single role of the USAR first responders, developing USAR Teams requires training in the different roles that make up a team. Therefore, to support the development of USAR Teams worldwide, INSARAG recommends a training methodology in which training is linked to an individual's position within a USAR Team.

Each functional position within a USAR Team has been identified, and role descriptions have been developed. These role descriptions are common across all levels of USAR Team capacity, with variations to accommodate different levels of skill and knowledge. They can be found in Appendix 2.1 ("Roadmap for USAR National Capacity").

INSARAG recommends generic training requirements linked to team positions and role descriptions within the USAR Team structure. The training requirements are grouped into USAR Modules, which facilitate organisations' development of USAR capacities, as shown in figure 4.



Figure 4: USAR Training Methodology.

3.5.7 Team Positions

To be effective, USAR teams must perform various roles within the team structure. Each functional position in a USAR team is identified, and role descriptions are developed. For further information on USAR roles and responsibilities, refer to Appendix 2.1 (“Roadmap for USAR National Capacity”). These role descriptions are consistent across all levels of USAR team capacity, with variations to accommodate different levels of skill and knowledge.

There are 17 identified positions based on the five components of USAR Teams:

USAR Component	Position	Function
Management	Team Leader	Command
	Deputy Team Leader/ Operations Officer	Coordination/Operational Control
	Planning Officer	Planning
	Liaison Officer/Deputy Liaison Officer	Liaison/Media/Reporting/RDC/UCC
	Structural Engineer	Structural Assessment/Analysis
	Safety Officer	Safety/Security
Search	Technical Search Specialist	Technical Search
	Search Dog Handler	Dog Search
	Hazmat	Hazmat Assessment
Rescue	Rescue Team Officer	Breaking/breaching/cutting/shoring/ tactical rope
	Rescuer	Breaking/breaching/cutting/shoring/ tactical rope
	Heavy Rigging Specialist	Lifting/Moving
Medical	Medical Component Manager	Oversight of medical component

	Paramedic/Nurse	Team and dog care and entrapped patient care
Logistics	Logistics Team Manager	BoO Management
	Logistics Specialist	Food and water supply/base camp operations/transport capacity/fuel supply
	Communications Specialist	Communications

Table 4: Seventeen Identified Roles Based on the Five Components of USAR Teams.

Not all teams will include every identified position, and some may encompass more, depending on the specific local requirements of the team structure and whether it is classified as Heavy, Medium, or Light. The SOPs applicable in their respective countries must be carried out consistently in each defined role and function.

3.5.8 Training Requirements

Appendix 2.1 ("Roadmap for USAR National Capacity") includes details of the role-specific and general training requirements for each position on the USAR Team in the role description.

The recommended training requirements are performance-based and described in terms of learning outcomes and performance criteria. These criteria set out a minimum level of training outcomes suitable for USAR personnel at the identified levels.

It is strongly recommended that the different positions and components also train together to ensure optimal operational results.

Once a USAR Team has been certified by its government for national response, careful analysis should be conducted to determine whether the team should be included in that government's planning for international assistance to collapse structure incidents.

3.6 Multi-Hazard Response

The "Multi-Hazard Response" approach utilises standard emergency management practices to cover a broader scope of incident types. It enhances flexibility and efficiency by recognising and integrating shared emergency management elements across all hazard types, supplementing these familiar elements with hazard-specific sub-components to address gaps as necessary. It emphasises the utilisation of synergies prevalent across all hazards, thereby improving the capacity of emergency management agencies to tackle unknown hazards.

In the context of USAR Teams, it can be considered a provisional use of the preexisting capabilities within a USAR team outside the traditional technical rescue mandate, where appropriate. These modular components (e.g., Incident Management) can support or lead responses outside the traditional USAR role.

Examples of Multi-Hazard Responses include (but are not limited to):

- Flood response
- Fire response (Wildfire/Forest fire/Bush fire)
- Mountain rescue
- Post Event Debris cleaning
- Water purification (production of drinking water)

- WASH expertise (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene)
- Culture Heritage
- CBRN expertise

4 National USAR Framework

The INSARAG network is strongly encouraged to assist disaster-prone countries in developing the capacity of their national USAR teams. In this context, the term “national USAR team” refers to a USAR team utilised at the national level but not designed for international deployment. This can be either a governmental team or a non-governmental team. INSARAG has drawn on the experience gained both from the INSARAG External Classification (IEC) process and from existing capacity-building programmes of its members, including National Accreditation Processes (NAP), to develop recommended organisational and operational standards for national USAR teams, providing Member States with guidance for the development of national USAR capacity.

The guidance provides globally accepted standards for developing operational and organisational capacity in national USAR teams. The INSARAG network aims to guide capacity-building efforts and enhance interoperability with international teams in major emergencies within their countries by promoting common standards for national USAR Teams.

Moreover, the recommended standards for national USAR Teams serve as a valuable resource for the INSARAG community to promote and disseminate the INSARAG Guidelines and methodology to most USAR Teams worldwide that are intended for national use.

The organisational and operational guidelines for national USAR Teams are developed as a guidance document for national teams' capacity building, so there are common operational standards worldwide. Countries with INSARAG-classified international USAR Teams (Classified USAR Team) are strongly encouraged to assist in the capacity-building process in developing countries and provide guidance to other national teams in their own country.

Countries developing a national USAR capacity are encouraged to adopt, at the appropriate level, the INSARAG Guidelines for building the capacity of national USAR Teams. This could serve as a target to be achieved. They may implement suitable processes for confirming the achievement of these standards, such as establishing a national accreditation mechanism. As an initial step, teams are strongly encouraged to self-assess their national USAR Team's capacity based on Appendix 2.1 (“Roadmap for USAR National Capacity”).

These processes and steps are reflected in figure 5 below.

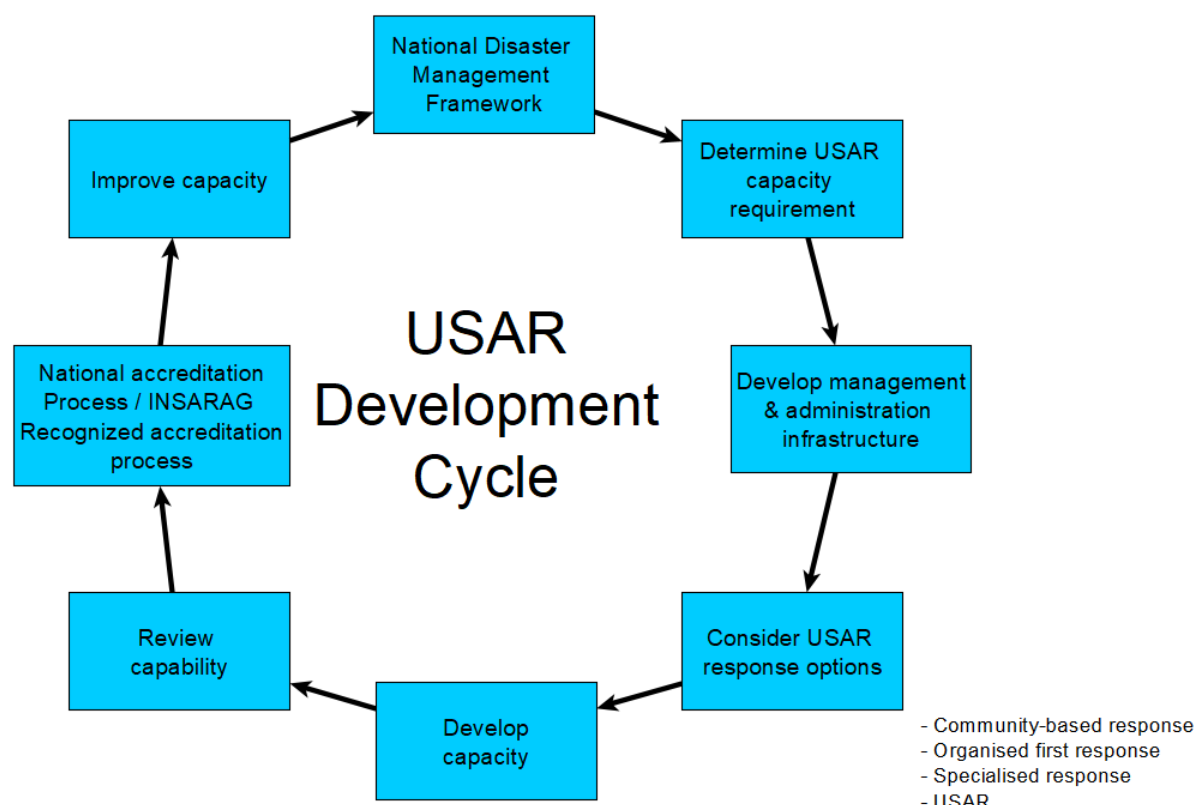


Figure 5: USAR Development Cycle

4.1 Developing National USAR Management and Administration Infrastructure

Once the appropriate government officials (national, regional, and/or local) have identified the necessity for a national USAR capability, development planning should begin for the required USAR capacity. As efforts commence to establish the resource, the government should revise its legal framework for disaster response to encompass the proposed USAR capacity's management, administration, and utilisation infrastructure. This includes commitments to the system as a whole including future personnel and resources needed to continue to facilitate INSARAG's mechanisms supporting all teams globally. Information management is a prime example for this.

The system that is utilised to manage information for coordination is continually improved and maintained by the Information Management Working Group (IMWG). They are also charged with other information management tasks and tools, which is reflected in their Terms of Reference. In order to facilitate these tools and work, all INSARAG members are expected to contribute funds to access the INSARAG Coordination and Management System (ICMS). This programme is essential for coordination and information management and eventually result in more lives rescued.

It will be necessary to design the administrative and financial management tools for the USAR capacity. These documents ought to:

- Define the policy and procedures

- Make provision for initial or 'start-up' funding for the preparation of USAR disaster response
- Make provisions for ongoing annual funding that should be sufficient to allow the USAR capacity to maintain a high standard of operational readiness
- The administrative and financial documents should also define:
 - The duties and responsibilities of management and administrative positions
 - The organisational responsibilities and roles
 - The process through which the USAR Team will administer annual funding
 - The record management processes
 - How property is accounted for
 - How new members are selected
 - How members receive initial training
 - The ongoing training required to allow members to remain operational

Once an effective management and administration infrastructure is in place, the alternative response options need to be considered, which include:

- The approach selected should be based on the likely rescues (number and degree of difficulty) required in the event of a disaster and the ability to procure appropriate equipment, recruit appropriate people and train them (initially and ongoing).
- Most people rescued after a disaster are lightly trapped and recoverable by the first responders and USAR Teams available locally and quickly on the scene. Thus, it is critical to incorporate all response levels into disaster planning.
- Unless more complex and technical rescues are envisioned, there is no requirement to progress to another level and develop a more technically capable team.
- Structured teams with a medium or heavy capacity are more expensive to develop and maintain and are less quick to deploy than teams with light capacity. This is because assembling and moving their staff and equipment takes longer.
- National Disaster Management Framework for urban search and rescue response to identify risk scenarios and/or locations.
- The National Disaster Management Framework includes phases for mobilising and demobilising regional to national USAR-level resources to the disaster location.

When developing a local technical rescue team, it is often more effective and efficient to maintain a lower-level capacity than to attempt to create a larger-capacity resource without being able to sustain the necessary skill and equipment standards.

Structured teams have an advantage over untrained, spontaneous volunteers by offering an organised rescue capacity, thereby minimising the risk of injury or death for rescuers and the victims.

4.2 National USAR Coordination

Coordination is the process of organising resources to work effectively and efficiently together. Implementing Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) coordination facilitates the optimal use of available resources to save lives from collapsed structures and identify the need for additional resources. The results are intended to provide life-saving services to the affected population.

4.2.1 USAR Coordination Key Actors

The National Response Framework should establish a standardised method for controlling and coordinating all forms of emergency response. It should present a common hierarchy so that responders from various agencies can manage an incident using the same organisational structure across the country.

LEMA (Local Emergency Management Authority): Utilises USAR coordination resources as Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) for the USAR resources related to the disaster; oversees response resources; receives situation and resource reports from USAR coordination; may assign priority tasks to USAR.

NDMA (National Disaster Management Agency): Crucial in managing significant emergencies. This agency may need to contribute to integrating international emergency services.

USAR Coordination: Reports to the LEMA responsible for the disaster; provides a USAR SME assessment of USAR needs (ASR); prioritises work sites; assigns USAR assets; sectorises the disaster area if not completed by the LEMA; establishes USAR sector coordination based on needs and the available resources; requests additional resources (such as extra USAR assets, fire engines, heavy equipment, etc.) from LEMA if not already assigned to the USAR sector.

USAR Assets (units, teams): Perform ASRs, perform search and rescue operations at worksites based on capability; report to USAR coordination or USAR Sector coordination.

4.2.2 USAR Coordination at National Response Cycle

The deployment of USAR teams has different phases. The International USAR Response Cycle phases can also be transferred to the national framework.

Preparedness

This phase outlines the preparations needed for the USAR systems. This includes:

- Training and exercises. These can be:
 - Annual mobilisation exercises
 - Tabletop exercises (TTX)
 - Participation in or the organisation of an INSARAG earthquake response exercise (ERE)
- Deployment follow-up
- Updating the standard operating procedures
- Encompassing the USAR team in the national deployment structures

During this interim period, it is essential to plan the interfaces, reporting channels, and the involvement of other teams. The following documents and procedures ought to be prepared:

- A training concept incorporating the latest standard operating procedures
- A process for structured follow-up
- A review and approval process for new standard operating procedures
- Networking with other units to harmonise procedures

Two important elements in this phase are monitoring and alerts. Monitoring involves continuously observing the national situation, particularly in the event of damage, and assessing its potential for deployment. One tool for achieving this could be a regular national situation report from a higher-level situation and reporting centre.

An alert aims to inform the teams about an event and, if necessary, convene a management team. The team can then gather and assess further information, which includes monitoring the situation, contacting the authorities in the affected area, and engaging other key partners. To achieve this, it is essential to network with different teams and organisations and establish methods. Based on this information, a decision can be made regarding whether the team will be deployed to the area of operation. Consequently, this stage may represent the transition to mobilisation.

Mobilisation

The mobilisation phase refers to the period immediately after a disaster occurs. The following points should be prepared for this phase:

- Notification of availability
- A confirmation system must be established for each emergency worker within the team
- A reporting route to potential deployment areas must be established
- Identifying the team configuration
 - The relevant qualifications must be defined
 - Forms must be created for the structured recording of team data
- Reporting the capability of the team for the area of operation
 - Comparing the equipment with the requirements for potential missions
 - Recording missing logistical requirements due to restrictions when travelling to the deployment area (e.g. no fuel can be taken along on a commercial flight)
- Reporting the estimated deployment time
 - Creation of planning tools for calculating the necessary times (average values until the team is assembled, travelling speed on various transport routes, etc.)
- Plan a reporting head for the staging area. This area is to receive arriving teams, release departing teams, and report to operations management.

Operations

The operations phase is the active phase for USAR teams in the affected area. Key steps in this phase include:

- Register and report with the LEMA/NDMA/UCC
- Carry out USAR operations
- The phase concludes when the coordinating authority releases the USAR teams.

The following documents and procedures should be prepared at a national level:

- Develop forms for the structured registration of USAR teams
- Develop forms and reporting channels for registering USAR teams and forward them to the relevant authorities
- Develop forms and communication channels for reporting to various levels of coordination

Demobilisation

This phase commences after the conclusion of USAR activities and encompasses withdrawal from the operational area and demobilisation.

- How is the return journey from the area of operation organised?
- How do operational units sign out of the operational area?

- How is the unit's personnel rehabilitation carried out during demobilisation and upon return?

Post-mission

The post-mission phase refers to the time immediately following the return from the mission. During this phase, the team compiles a mission report and analyses the mission data. This phase gradually transitions into the preparation phase.

- Prepare processes to determine when the team can be operational again for response.
- Prepare documents for a structured after-action review and any corrective action planning.
- Prepare a procedure process for material replacement and/or rehabilitation of the cache.

The after-action review is critical for transitioning from the post-mission phase to the preparedness phase. Involving the relevant forces in the after-action review process is essential, even if they are from overseas.

4.2.3 Elements of National USAR Coordination

In addition to the considerations for the individual phases, two other necessary tools for coordinating USAR teams are assessing the operational situation and sectorisation. If these two measures are implemented consistently, more people can be rescued at the same time using the same personnel and material resources. These considerations must be made before an emergency situation occurs. Refer to the UC Handbook in the Guideline Appendices for more information.

Assessment

Assessment is fundamentally crucial for coordinating USAR operations. This involves evaluating the operational situation. The following should be prepared for this:

- Qualification of the persons carrying out the operation
- Forms for structured implementation and reporting of the recorded data
- Definition of different assessment levels
- Definition of evaluation criteria
- Identify potential areas of application, such as hospitals or schools
- Collect data about the operational area

The results establish a foundation for an ASR 1 assessment in accordance with INSARAG guidelines. One assessment outcome should be the sectorisation of the potential operational area.

Sectorisation

Sectorisation of the affected areas may be necessary to ensure effective coordination of USAR operations by improving the span of control. Sectorisation improves operational planning, more efficient allocation of USAR teams, and overall incident management. The size and number of sectors depend on the level of resources and needs of the affected area, the volume of work, the geographical area and characteristics, the scale of the operation, and other factors. If necessary, the respective sector coordinators can subdivide the sectors into sub-sectors.

The basis for sectorisation can be established in advance by the competent authorities. A known grid can be flanked more quickly with operational measures. The following measures should be taken in preparation:

- Identify possible sector boundaries (e.g., rivers, major roads, county boundaries, etc.)
- Identify critical infrastructure in the possible sectors (e.g., schools, hospitals, etc.)
- Collecting population data (population size, density, vulnerability, etc.)

If sectorisation is carried out effectively, emergency services can use it to identify and assess work sites more efficiently.

Management system

To align the documents and procedures within a unified framework, it is advisable to implement a management system. The benefits may include the following:

- **Structure and Organisation:** A management system provides a clear structure that defines processes and responsibilities within the organisation. This fosters transparency and helps to prevent misunderstandings.
- **Goal Orientation:** It facilitates the definition and pursuit of organisational goals. A management system enables organisations to ensure that all team members work towards common objectives, increasing efficiency and productivity.
- **Risk Management:** An effective management system allows for identifying and assessing potential risks. By taking a proactive approach, organisations can reduce the likelihood of risks occurring and enhance their ability to respond effectively to unexpected challenges.
- **Quality Management:** A management system encourages the continuous improvement of operational capabilities.
- **Compliance with Legal Requirements:** It is also important to note that operational teams are subject to specific legal and regulatory requirements. A management system enables organisations to adhere to these requirements and mitigate legal risks.
- **Improved Efficiency:** By standardising processes and implementing best practices, organisations can improve efficiency, optimise resource utilisation, and reduce costs.
- **Member Engagement:** A well-implemented management system promotes member engagement by providing clear guidelines and objectives, which can lead to higher motivation and job satisfaction.
- **Sustainability:** Management systems can also help to promote sustainable practices by integrating environmental and social considerations into the organisation's activities strategy. Overall, a management system is an indispensable tool for increasing an organisation's performance, managing risks, and promoting a culture of continuous improvement. It helps ensure the organisation's long-term success.

Benefits of integrating incoming National USAR Resources through coordination

The LEMA can make faster decisions to align with objectives, priorities, resources, and key messages, thereby implementing the most effective means to support these goals. This can be achieved by:

- Registering all resources, including USAR resource types (light, medium, heavy), plus conventional fire, vehicle accident, hazardous materials and emergency medical assets to have the total picture of resources available
- Operationally matching the resources to the priorities and objectives
 - This includes combining smaller resources, such as local light USAR resources, with other light teams to create a larger capacity for specific priorities and objectives.

- Assigning medium and heavy USAR teams to specific priorities and objectives best suited to their capacity
- Distributing the conventional fire and emergency medical resources to support USAR operations
- Supporting the Planning cycle for the operational periods to:
 - Record objectives and priorities completed
 - Identify and pass on updated objectives, priorities and key messages
 - Identify the need to increase, decrease or redistribute resources
 - Receive reports and data from teams, as well as brief teams
 - Direct information management collection and distribution
- Supporting logistics by:
 - Best method of communication (cell, satellite, etc.) and posting contact numbers
 - Determining fuel resupply locations and how to arrange delivery or pickup
 - Determining BoO locations for local, regional USAR assets
 - Sanitation pickup and coordination
 - Transportation asset coordination
 - Coordinate heavy equipment (loaders, cranes, etc.)

4.2.4 Integration of International Response to National Structures

Intervention teams can be requested from abroad if the operational situation requires more resources than are nationally available. Figure 6 shows the different models depending on the depth of integration.

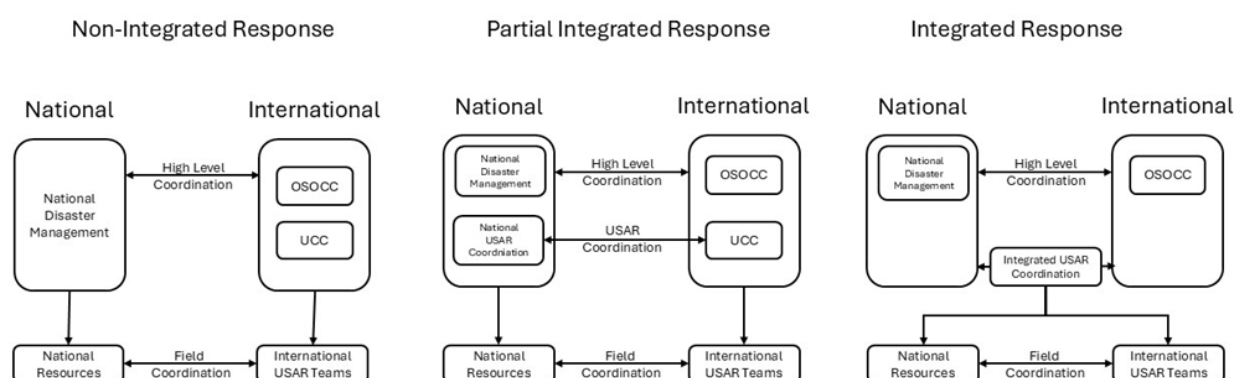


Figure 6: Integration Models of International Response

Each country's legal framework typically incorporates a national command and control centre within the LEMA structure, often referred to as an Emergency Operations Centre (EOC). An EOC operates around the clock as the central command and control facility responsible for implementing the principles of emergency preparedness, functioning at a strategic level during emergencies, ensuring operational continuity in affected areas, coordinating interagency needs and resources, and overseeing recovery phases. The EOC provides a strategic overview of disasters, or the "big picture." It generally does not directly control field assets; instead, it makes operational decisions and delegates tactical decisions to subordinate commands. The standard functions of all EOC include collecting, gathering, and analysing data; making decisions that safeguard life and property; maintaining continuity within the country in accordance with

applicable laws; and communicating those decisions to all relevant agencies and individuals. In most EOC's, the LEMA Emergency Manager supervises the facility.

In the non-integrated model, the incoming international USAR units establish their coordination unit, as there is no national-level coordination unit specifically focused on USAR activities. Coordination occurs at a high level between the EOC and the international coordination unit. The individual teams collaborate with the national operational teams at a lower level. In the partially integrated model, there is a coordination office in the EOC at the national level. This results in high-level coordination between the overall integration of international aid and the EOC and between international USAR and national USAR coordination within the EOC. The EOC coordinates the national units, while the international USAR teams are coordinated by the international coordination cell. The various teams coordinate directly in the operational area.

In the fully integrated model, the INSARAG approach has been thoroughly implemented in the national USAR strategy. At the highest level, coordination takes place between the EOC and international aid. Together, they coordinate the national and international USAR units. By completely implementing the INSARAG methodologies, international forces can be quickly and seamlessly integrated into the rescue operations—the appendices detail integrating the INSARAG methodology into the various National USAR framework response models.

Chapter 5 describes what preparations should be made to request international assistance.

4.3 USAR Capacity Building Assessment Mission and Endorsement

Countries seeking assistance building USAR capacities can do so through INSARAG's extensive network of established USAR Teams. Such requests may be made bilaterally or through a submission to the INSARAG Secretariat, which will forward the request to interested donor countries for consideration.

Upon receiving a request to assist countries and organisations in the national USAR capacity-building process, the INSARAG Secretariat will facilitate an INSARAG USAR Capacity Building Assessment Mission at a mutually agreed-upon date. The mission will be conducted in collaboration with the host country and global USAR experts and is typically funded by donors, in-kind support, or the host country. Additionally, the Secretariat offers a USAR Capacity Assessment Methodology Guide at www.insarag.org to aid countries wishing to pursue this endeavour.

The mission's primary objective is to provide constructive feedback on the status of the host country's national USAR capabilities and offer recommendations in line with the INSARAG Guidelines. The assessment is based on the five components of a USAR Team as required in the INSARAG Guidelines.

The mission may include interviews with key stakeholders, visits to several relevant sites, and observing a skills demonstration for compiling its findings. Please contact the INSARAG Secretariat at insarag@un.org for more details on the USAR Capacity Assessment Methodology User Guide.

5 Receiving International Assistance

5.1 Host Nation Support (HNS)

5.1.1 National Coordination Mechanism for Receiving International Assistance

The overarching principle of international USAR assistance is that it supports and augments the LEMA and the national response capacity of the affected country.

A well-established national coordination mechanism is essential for effectively managing and receiving international assistance during emergencies. This mechanism enables the affected country to respond swiftly and manage incoming international support by optimising national processes such as customs clearance, logistical assistance, and coordinating relief efforts. Effective coordination reduces delays, enhances resource allocation, and ensures that international teams integrate seamlessly into national operations.

One key benefit of such a coordination mechanism is the enhanced interoperability between international and national response teams. It helps prevent potential legal, logistical, and administrative barriers that may obstruct the provision of aid. Furthermore, it provides a clear communication structure that aligns local and international actors, improving the overall response to disasters.

Each country should develop accessible coordination tools, such as diagrams, schemes, or factsheets that outline its HNS system. These tools should specify important aspects, including entry points, command and coordination structures, and the roles of involved actors. Providing international teams with this information beforehand will reduce operational challenges and enhance cooperation. Posting these tools on widely accessible platforms like the VOSOC or the INSARAG website would further improve transparency and preparedness, fostering smoother collaboration during international emergency assistance.

By requesting classified teams, the requesting/receiving country automatically accepts eligibility for these teams to practice USAR medical services.

Refer to the [Oslo Guidelines](#) for further information.

5.1.2 Responsibilities of the Host Nation Government

This section outlines the key stakeholders involved in HNS, their respective responsibilities, and the critical roles they play in facilitating international assistance during emergencies. It also emphasises the importance of building capacities within these stakeholders to manage incoming assistance effectively.

The host nation's government is responsible for coordinating and supporting international relief efforts. Key stakeholders usually include national civil protection agencies, customs authorities, transportation services, and local emergency management agencies. Their roles may include:

- **Civil Protection Agencies:** Responsible for overall coordination, including integrating international teams into national response efforts and ensuring interoperability with local operations.
- **Customs and Border Control:** Facilitates the quick clearance of incoming aid and relief teams and their equipment and consumables, medical substances included, by expediting customs procedures, waiving duties, and ensuring minimal delays.
- **Aviation Authorities:** Facilitates the use of drones during USAR operations.

- **Health Authorities:** To authorise temporary permission to practice USAR medicine.
- **Logistics and Transport Authorities:** Ensure smooth logistics, including transport, or provide a pre-established resource list of transport providers for incoming teams and equipment from entry points to the disaster site. Assist teams with acquiring items such as fuel and oxygen cylinders.
- **LEMA:** Serve as the operational link between the host nation and international teams, ensuring that all relevant information is conveyed and support is delivered on-site.

Building capacity within these stakeholders is crucial for the effectiveness of the HNS system. This involves continuous training, preparation through simulations, and promoting collaboration between governmental and non-governmental entities. By enhancing the skills and resources of the stakeholders, the Host Nation ensures that international aid can be received, processed, and deployed with minimal delays, contributing to a faster and more efficient disaster response.

Stakeholders who are well-prepared enhance operational readiness and bolster the country's strategic resilience in addressing future emergencies.

5.2 Request for International Assistance

5.2.1 Decision-Making Process

The ability to make swift and informed decisions is pivotal for managing international assistance in emergency situations. This subchapter emphasises the principles that underpin an effective decision-making process and outlines the benefits of this approach.

- Principles of Effective Decision-Making:
 - **Clear Communication:** Effective decision-making requires clear communication among all stakeholders involved in the emergency response, including national authorities, local agencies, and international partners. Establishing a common communication framework enhances situational awareness and ensures that relevant information is disseminated promptly.
 - **Pre-established Protocols:** Developing pre-established protocols for various types of emergencies can significantly speed up decision-making. These protocols should outline the steps to be taken, roles and responsibilities, and criteria for activating international assistance.
 - **Training and Preparedness:** Regular training sessions and simulation exercises for decision-makers and stakeholders can enhance their ability to respond swiftly. Familiarity with established procedures facilitates quicker and more confident decision-making during real emergencies.
 - **Integration of Stakeholders:** Engaging all relevant stakeholders, such as government agencies, NGOs, and international partners, in the decision-making process cultivates a collaborative atmosphere. This integration guarantees that various perspectives are acknowledged and that decisions are informed and thorough.
- Benefits of an Effective Decision-Making Process
 - **Timely Assistance:** A prompt decision-making process guarantees that international assistance is requested and mobilised without delay. This promptness can significantly impact the effectiveness of the response and the overall outcomes for affected populations.

- **Resource Optimisation:** Rapid decisions help optimise the use of available resources, minimising waste and ensuring that aid is directed to where it is most needed. Efficient resource allocation can enhance the effectiveness of relief efforts.
- **Enhanced Coordination:** An efficient and systematic decision-making process improves coordination among different response actors. It facilitates better alignment of efforts and diminishes the chances of duplicate actions or gaps in support.
- **Enhanced Resilience:** By fostering a culture of effective decision-making, the Host Nation can develop resilience for future emergencies. Organisations and stakeholders familiar with rapid decision-making are better prepared to manage crises efficiently.
- Ensuring an effective decision-making process during emergencies
 - Conduct a swift assessment of the situation to collect initial information on the extent of the disaster and immediate needs.
 - Initiate a request for international assistance as soon as possible, using initial assessment data, and update the request continuously as more information from the field becomes available.
 - Establish clear levels of impact and assessment criteria that will trigger the request for international assistance. This will ensure a standardised approach to determining when external support is needed.
 - Establish a national legal framework for requesting international assistance, including predefined procedures for authorising, receiving, and facilitating the arrival of foreign USAR teams and resources. All INSARAG Classified USAR teams are required to have the following specialist components to work safely and effectively in the collapsed structure environment:
 - **Management:** Leadership of the team intended to coordinate and integrate efficiently with local emergency management authorities.
 - **Search:** Personnel and equipment, which may include search dogs, to locate individuals trapped in collapsed structures.
 - **Rescue:** Personnel and equipment are needed to stabilise structures and to access and extricate trapped individuals safely and efficiently.
 - **Medical:** Registered medical professionals trained and equipped to treat team members and deliver USAR medicine to patients trapped in collapsed structures.
 - **Logistics:** Personnel and equipment to ensure self-sufficiency, support the team while deployed, and ensure the deployment does not burden the impacted country.
 - In summary, effective decision-making is crucial for managing international assistance during emergencies. By following the principles of clear communication, pre-established protocols, training, and stakeholder integration, Host Nations can significantly enhance their response capabilities and overall outcomes.

5.2.2 Request for International Assistance

To ensure timely and effective international assistance requests within the INSARAG framework, it is recommended that the HNS plan aligns the identified capacity needs from potential disaster scenarios (as derived from national risk assessments) with the available international USAR response capacities. This alignment should consider the host nation's existing capacities and the

assistance options available through the INSARAG network or bilateral agreements, including international USAR teams, technical experts, and specialised equipment.

INSARAG member states should establish clear procedures at the national level for preparing, authorising and disseminating requests for international USAR assistance via the designated national authorities. This includes regularly updating and maintaining national request forms. It is crucial to develop standardised procedures for different types of incidents and forms of assistance, as various agencies may be involved in preparing and validating the request based on the nature of the disaster.

Requests may vary from country to country, and various ways exist to facilitate international assistance. Depending on their needs, affected countries may employ one or more methods according to their national priorities and regulations:

- Through bilateral agreements or diplomatic channels between countries.
- Regional mechanisms includes, amongst others, the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).
- Via the INSARAG network with support from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

By requesting international USAR assistance, the host nation indicates acceptance of all components of USAR teams. Therefore, any specific restrictions, e.g., non-acceptance of search dogs, drones, or permission to practice USAR medicine, need to be clearly stated by the host nation. This will enable USAR teams to make an informed decision regarding deployment.

It is crucial to engage, train, and exercise all stakeholders in requesting international USAR assistance. This can be accomplished by promoting established procedures, communication channels (such as VOSOCC), and templates in national contingency planning, training courses, and exercises to ensure familiarity with requesting and offering international assistance.

One of the primary tools used in disaster response coordination, the VOSOCC, facilitates information exchange among United Nations organisations and other disaster responders. The aim is to help establish better situational awareness in the early stages of sudden-onset disasters, inform deploying responders of the operational environment, and track responses to support decision-making and coordination.

The VOSOCC facilitates preparedness activities such as meetings, training events, expert discussion forums, and simulation exercises. It is generally utilised during major sudden-onset disasters and supports international coordination in the initial weeks of the response.

5.2.3 Type of Assistance

The INSARAG Policy Focal Point of a country affected by a disaster shall immediately provide the INSARAG Secretariat with information about the event, including the updated situation report and the need for international assistance. The affected country may request international assistance through the VOSOCC and bilateral or regional mechanisms. However, the INSARAG Secretariat should acknowledge the request due to the effectiveness and efficiency of the overall USAR response coordination.

The affected country shall conduct a rapid assessment during the initial stage following the disaster. If the affected country requires assistance, the INSARAG Secretariat may facilitate the mobilisation of a neighbouring state or the UNDAC team to provide support. Based on the initial assessment findings, the affected country shall specify the type of assistance needed to manage

the emergency and ensure the effectiveness of the USAR operations. Types of assistance may include, but are not limited to:

- **INSARAG USAR teams:** level of USAR teams' capacity (light, medium, heavy) to support the affected country.
- **Flood Response:** The INSARAG Flood Response Directory provides details on INSARAG classified or national USAR teams that have existing capabilities and are prepared to deploy.
- **Damage Assessment:** conducting an assessment to determine the extent of damage and priority
- **Technology:** utilising advanced technology such as drones and satellite imagery from the affected area for assessment and response planning
- **Other types of assistance, e.g.:**
 - World Health Organisation (WHO) Emergency Medical Teams (EMT)
 - Shelter
 - Food and Water

5.3 Integration of International Response to the National System

Each country has the authority to decide on the acceptance of USAR teams, and it is recommended that they prepare for their arrival, coordination, and integration into their national response plan.

5.3.1 International USAR Teams

The national USAR Coordination System (see chapter 4.2) should establish mechanisms and procedures to integrate international USAR classified capabilities into the national response, as described in chapter 4. Specialised coordination cells would function as central hubs for managing communication, logistics, and operational integration between national teams and their international counterparts during disaster response efforts. By facilitating collaboration and ensuring that international assistance aligns with national priorities and local needs, these cells can enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the overall USAR response. This structured approach will not only streamline coordination but also strengthen the capacity of the national system to respond to disasters in a cohesive and timely manner.

5.3.2 Unclassified USAR Teams

To integrate non-classified teams into the national USAR Coordination System, it is essential to establish clear procedures for exchanging information with the national coordination structures. This ensures alignment with national standards and operational protocols. Establishing clear lines of communication, defining boundaries, and setting operational limits for non-classified teams will help maintain safety, coordination, and effectiveness in disaster response efforts.

5.4 Host Nation Logistical Support to International USAR Operations

Given the logistical challenges associated with international teams providing USAR support, additional items from the host nation will likely be necessary to maximise their effectiveness. These requests could be posted on the VOSOCC before arrival, conveyed at the RDC during initial meetings with the LEMA, or submitted through the ICMS system (once USAR coordination has been established). Consequently, strengthening capacity in the following areas will aid disaster response.

- RDC, UCC and BoO locations: Identifying potential sites for establishing an RDC, UCC and the BoO locations of the responding international teams before a disaster will likely streamline activities following the disaster.
- Transport Arrangements/Vehicles: International USAR teams are likely to need transport from their arrival point to the BoO location and subsequent worksites.
- Heavy lifting machinery and cranes: Access to heavy lifting machinery, such as cranes and other earthmoving equipment, will enhance the responding USAR teams' heavy lifting capabilities.
- Fuel for generators and rescue tools: Due to the stringent restrictions on air transport, rescue teams are unlikely to arrive with fuel, which must be procured locally.
- Compressed gases: Cylinders containing compressed gases (e.g., oxygen) are restricted on commercial flights, so they will need to be procured locally.
- Timber/wood: USAR Teams do not travel with wood and will, therefore, be required to procure it locally to construct shores (structural supports) for damaged buildings.
- Interpreters, local guides and drivers: USAR Teams will most likely require these services, which must be procured locally.
- Shelter, food, water, and hygiene: INSARAG classified teams are required to be self-sufficient in these areas; however, non-classified teams may require assistance in these areas.

Pre-planning in the areas above will improve deployment efficiency during a disaster response.

INSARAG classified teams should be self-sufficient in terms of water, food, and shelter. However, non-classified teams may require assistance in these areas. Moreover, interpreters, local guides, and drivers are likely to enhance the capabilities of the supporting teams.

5.5 End of International USAR Operations

5.5.1 Concluding International USAR Operations

Establishing clear criteria is essential for determining when to conclude international USAR operations. Specific indicators may include the number of individuals still in immediate danger, the availability of necessary resources to sustain ongoing rescue operations, and the stabilisation of critical infrastructure and services. Furthermore, implementing a phase-out timeline based on historical data and situational analysis can help outline expected durations for the internationally supported rescue phase, providing a structured approach to decision-making.

Key aspects to consider when declaring the end of international search and rescue operations:

- Time elapsed since the last live rescue
- Number of individuals still in immediate danger or missing
- Likelihood of survival of potential victims, based on time, collapse patterns and weather conditions
- Availability of local and national resources to sustain further operations
- Coordination with national and local authorities on transitioning responsibilities
- Psychological and social impact on affected communities and responders
- Preparation of a press statement
- Concluding USAR operations is a policy decision

The international USAR teams may begin the demobilisation process from the affected country once that country declares the end of international rescue assistance or when the international

team's days of commitment to the deployment have been reached. The teams must update the VOSOCC and ICMS and coordinate with the affected country through the UCC and RDC to submit their demobilisation plans.

5.5.2 Stages for the End of International Operations

Each country should establish clear operational stages, including the point at which international support is no longer needed. At this juncture, the host nation should formally declare the end of international operations. The HNS Plan should also encompass actions related to the conclusion of operations and the exit strategy. This phase involves the handover of responsibilities, logistical support during demobilisation, and the facilitation of customs procedures to ensure a smooth departure from the country.

5.5.3 Demobilisation of Teams

The demobilisation phase is when international USAR Teams cease operations and commence withdrawal. They coordinate their departure through the UCC/OSOCC, depart from the affected country through the RDC, and travel to their home country.

The post-mission debriefing should occur promptly after a USAR team's return home or once the critical phase has concluded for the affected country, ensuring that the details remain fresh in everyone's minds. Post-mission debriefings are essential for assessing the effectiveness of an operation and fostering continuous improvement for future missions. The objectives of the post-mission debriefing are:

- **Performance Evaluation:** Assess the team's performance, strategies used, and overall mission execution
- **Key Takeaways:** Highlight successful strategies and identify areas for improvement
- **Personal Experience:** Share personal experiences and provide emotional closure
- **Enhance Preparedness:** Provide insights to improve future training, equipment, and operational procedures

5.5.4 Beyond the Rubble

Beyond the rubble extends the role of USAR teams from their traditional search and rescue operations; it aims to offer additional support during the transition from the immediate rescue phase to the early recovery and relief phase following a disaster. This initiative complements the USAR teams that have the resources to provide extra support to the affected country.

5.5.5 Cooperation in Addressing Broader Humanitarian Needs Beyond Immediate Search and Rescue

The USAR teams, while primarily focused on immediate search and rescue operations, can extend their cooperation to assist broader humanitarian needs in various ways. By broadening their cooperation beyond immediate search and rescue operations, USAR teams can play a pivotal role in meeting wider humanitarian needs and ensure a more holistic and effective response to disasters. This collaborative approach enhances the impact of their efforts and contributes to the resilience and recovery of affected communities.

5.6 Donations

When rescue efforts from international USAR teams cease and demobilisation plans are activated, it is foreseeable that various items from the supporting teams' equipment may be donated to the host nation. This can include rescue tools, medical supplies, tents, water purification systems, and more. When effectively managed, donations can positively impact the affected population by alleviating the effects of disasters, supporting the restoration of critical infrastructure, and enhancing resilience and rescue capabilities for future events.

The donation process should prioritise the needs of the affected population and adhere to humanitarian principles. Donations must also comply with the relevant laws and regulations of both donor and recipient countries. This compliance ensures that donations are used effectively and align with identified needs and safety standards.

5.6.1 Managing and Coordinating Donations

Effective donation management and coordination are essential to ensuring that resources reach those in need promptly and securely. The process should involve collaboration among multiple entities, including donors, local authorities, and beneficiaries, to optimise resource utilisation and minimise overlaps.

This process should follow several principles, including:

- **Needs Identification:** Donations must align with the needs identified by the affected country and be communicated through official coordination mechanisms.
- **Legislative Compliance:** All donations must comply with the legal regulations of both the donor and recipient countries, particularly for medicines, medical equipment and perishable goods.
- **Relevance:** Donations should be relevant and directly address the expressed needs, thereby reducing waste, overlaps and logistical challenges.

As with other aspects of disaster response, the OSOCC should act as the central hub where information regarding the affected country's needs and the available donation resources is coordinated.

5.6.2 Needs Assessments, Acceptance Protocols, Distribution and Tracking Systems

A needs assessment ensures that the donated items are fit for purpose and can be effectively used by the host nation. If not done correctly, gaps in knowledge and understanding may render certain items ineffective. Therefore, training on the donated items may also be required and should be factored into plans.

Acceptance protocols, such as completing a transfer of ownership form, will likely need adherence. Both the donor and the recipient must sign this form, which formally transfers the responsibility and accountability of the items to the host nation. This form may also be required for the donating organisation's auditing purposes to facilitate the purchase of replacement items.

To ensure that the donated items are available where they are most needed, a distribution plan is necessary, which should include an audit trail for tracking purposes. Distribution management and asset tracking can also be improved using digital platforms, either by adapting existing systems or creating new, dedicated systems. These should be:

- **Adaptable for local use:** It is crafted for direct use by the authorities in the affected country or in partnership with them, ensuring alignment with local requirements.
- **Functional for all stakeholders:** Allow access for donors and beneficiaries, ensuring transparent and efficient management.

Digital platforms facilitate real-time monitoring of donations, from offer to distribution, ensuring regulatory compliance and traceability of transferred resources.

5.7 Post Mission Review

The post mission review is crucial in the ongoing learning and improvement process for host nation response mechanisms. This process facilitates a comprehensive analysis of the interventions conducted, emphasising strengths and challenges to enact strategic adjustments for future missions.

The main objective is to collect and synthesise relevant information from participating teams and stakeholders, ensuring an efficient and transparent feedback process. This involves integrating the mission's conclusions into updating the host nation's support mechanism, thereby increasing the nation's preparedness to manage international assistance.

Key objectives should include:

- Evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention and the collaboration between the host nation (including all stakeholders) and international teams.
- Identifying lessons derived from both positive and negative experiences from both perspectives. Implementing measures to enhance support mechanisms and operational procedures.

This process greatly enhances national resilience, ensuring a better response capacity for future disasters.

5.7.1 Collecting Feedback from Teams

One of the key functions of the INSARAG Secretariat is to analyse USAR team operations by considering the post mission reports from all USAR teams involved. To assist with this, affected countries are encouraged to actively collect and exchange information with the INSARAG Secretariat to enhance overall systems for future disasters. This collaborative approach ensures that insights gained from real-world operations are systematically analysed and integrated into existing frameworks. By sharing data on challenges faced, solutions implemented, and lessons learned, affected countries contribute to refining international response mechanisms, ultimately strengthening preparedness and resilience for future disasters. This continuous exchange of information is crucial for maintaining an adaptive and effective disaster response system.

Conducting after-action reviews focused on Host Nation Support (HNS) provides a structured opportunity to gather and analyse feedback from all stakeholders, facilitating the identification of areas for improvement. Insights gained during these reviews should be systematically incorporated into revising national mechanisms and procedures, thereby enhancing the host nation's capacity to manage and support future missions effectively. This approach ensures continuous improvement and alignment with operational realities.

5.7.2 Update the Host Nation Support Mechanism

Updating the host nation support mechanism should be an ongoing process informed by feedback and lessons from previous missions. The aim is to establish a flexible framework that addresses the specific needs arising from disasters, ensuring transparent processes and effective support for international interventions. This mechanism should balance simplifying existing procedures and developing new solutions, when necessary, as challenges are identified.

To enhance functionality, the mechanism may incorporate general tools such as diagrams or schemes to understand coordination and communication flows clearly. At the same time, the update must ensure operational continuity by maintaining a system that is easy to comprehend and implement and quickly adaptable to the specific needs of each intervention. Through this process, the host nation strengthens its capacity to respond effectively and in an organised manner to significant disasters.

6 National Quality Assurance

6.1 National Accreditation Process (NAP)

A relevant component in developing national USAR capacity is considering a quality assurance mechanism, which may involve a national accreditation process. Such a mechanism enables a country to establish, monitor, and manage officially approved standards while adhering closely to the INSARAG guidelines in developing its USAR national response systems. In line with the INSARAG response framework, the establishment of a USAR NAP is strongly recommended. Within this context, it is important to distinguish clearly between classification and certification. The term classification refers to the INSARAG External Classification/Reclassification (IEC/R), which is an international assessment used to determine whether a USAR team meets the globally agreed INSARAG standards required for international deployment. Classification serves as the formal mechanism for ensuring alignment with the INSARAG Guidelines and for promoting interoperability among internationally deployable teams. The term certification refers to a country's national accreditation system for its own USAR teams. National accreditation mechanisms are administered by the competent national authority to verify a team's compliance with domestic standards, regulations, and operational requirements. In accordance with national laws and regulations, the national authority is responsible for establishing, implementing, and certifying that USAR teams meet these national requirements, which should, to the extent possible, be aligned with the INSARAG Guidelines but do not constitute, imply, or substitute for INSARAG classification.

6.1.1 NAP Objectives

The main objectives of implementing a national accreditation process for a member state are the following:

- Implementation of national standards
- Ensuring interoperability of resources
- Quality assurance process
- Accountability of all parties involved in the system
- Continuous learning cycle and improvement
- Sharing best practices
- Supporting and updating the policy framework

6.1.2 NAP Implementation

Strong political support and commitment need to be given to the development of the national accreditation framework to ensure a stable and sustainable process. Thus, the USAR programme should be integrated into the national disaster management system to guarantee its development, implementation, and funding completeness. Consequently, commitment to an accreditation system is a crucial prerequisite for the sustainability of standards. It should be an essential part of the member state's national regulations to facilitate development and consolidation within public policy.

The following elements ought to be considered during the development of a national accreditation process:

- Focused planning of the process by the national authority to develop the accreditation system
- Identify stakeholder institutions or organisations that will participate in developing the accreditation process, including training national USAR Teams
- Appropriate, sustainable and qualified staffing for the development of the accreditation process
- Participation of all relevant national players is subject to the accreditation system to validate and support the accreditation process
- Transparency within the system and during the accreditation process
- Framework establishment

6.1.3 NAP Stakeholders

The involvement of USAR national stakeholders is crucial to ensure that the system has sufficient and pertinent representation.

- National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)

The NDMA should lead the national accreditation process, which forms part of the national emergency and disaster management framework. Additionally, the NDMA should incorporate accredited USAR teams into national emergency plans, including protocols for alerting and mobilising USAR teams and the USAR response cycle.

- Accrediting Entity

The NDMA, as the process lead, can mandate an accrediting entity or body through an official document. Suitable entities may include an academy, a national fire and rescue authority, or a civil protection organisation. The entity must ensure a transparent and participative implementation process of the accreditation system.

This entity must further ensure that the development process is consistent with national needs and promote the development and professionalisation of USAR groups, taking advantage of the experiences achieved through the accreditation process.

Control mechanisms should be implemented within the accreditation process to ensure that relevant procedures are conducted transparently and that acceptable technical conditions have been provided.

- Accreditation Technical Committee

An Accreditation Technical Committee should be established with a committed and sustainable legal mandate, financial support, and the necessary technical conditions for functioning. The competent national authority should create and recognise the Committee through publicly available official documentation.

The Accreditation Technical Committee's main task is implementing and managing all aspects of the National Accreditation Process and developing relevant documentation for the accreditation system.

The composition of the Accreditation Technical Committee should include USAR representatives and experts in quality control or auditing. This committee's application and selection processes should be open and transparent to all qualified stakeholders. Procedures will govern the operations of the Accreditation Technical Committee in areas such as composition, organisational structure, scope, and methodologies, among others.

- Sponsoring organisations

The USAR team's sponsoring organisations are responsible for its operations, which may include funding and ensuring that the USAR team fully comprehends the accreditation process and meets national standards.

- National USAR Teams

The national USAR teams are crucial in ensuring their effectiveness and compliance with established standards. Agreement with national standards is paramount, requiring teams to align their operations with the accreditation criteria set by the relevant authorities. Collaboration with national disaster management authorities and other stakeholders is also key; USAR teams work closely with these entities to define roles, responsibilities, and operational protocols necessary for effectively enhancing their capabilities and contributing to establishing a robust national accreditation system aligned with international standards.

- Mentor

Each team should have a national mentor designated by the Accreditation Committee to accompany and guide the national team through the process. Each USAR team could participate in selecting the mentor, and the specific role and responsibilities of the mentor should be clearly defined in the process.

- Accreditation Team

Accreditation team members offer the necessary technical expertise to assess the various components of a USAR Team during the accreditation process. In most cases, they may deliver technical knowledge across multiple functions. The Accreditation Technical Committee should outline the accreditation team's composition, selection, roles, and responsibilities.

6.1.4 NAP Assessment Objectives

The national accreditation process should provide the opportunity to verify compliance with national standards. Such standards should provide information on the critical elements required and the resource composition of USAR teams, which in turn should be consistent with the INSARAG guidelines. There should be standards for light, medium and heavy USAR teams.

The accreditation process should assess two key components of USAR operations i.e., response capability and technical capacity.

- Response Capability

The response capability assessment, including the decision-making role of the sponsoring organisation, will assess a USAR team's ability to monitor for sudden-onset disasters, receive notification of a breaking emergency, mobilise its resources and respond nationally in a timely manner.

- Technical Capability

During an accreditation, the USAR team's technical capacity will be assessed based on how it performs USAR operations. This assessment will differ depending on whether the team is attempting a light, medium, or heavy classification.

USAR teams are required to demonstrate proficiency using their full USAR technical capacity (skills and equipment) during a constantly evolving realistic structural collapse exercise of

minimum 36 hours duration. The exercise challenges the USAR team's ability to operate effectively in a simulated mission and timeline required for the desired classification level.

6.1.5 NAP Evaluation Process

The NAP should consist of at least four stages, and the following sections describe general principles for its design, implementation, timeline and scheduling.

- Team Application

The process shall include the team's self-evaluation and, subsequently, an internal decision by team management and its sponsoring agency regarding the application to the national accreditation process.

Once appointed, the NAP mentor will pre-assess the USAR team's capacity and capability to ensure it is prepared to start the accreditation process. In consultation with its mentor, the USAR team should develop a strategic plan to address any identified administrative or operational gaps. The implementation of this strategic plan needs to be undertaken considering realistic timelines.

The team must formally request to initiate the accreditation process and present the relevant documentation equivalent to the Portfolio of Evidence (PoE) of the IEC/R process. All the supporting documents should be requested at the beginning of the process. Alternatively, abbreviated and full versions of the documentation can be considered in two separate instances.

The accreditation technical committee should provide all standard application formats. USAR teams apply by completing forms that include all accreditation requirements. These requirements must conform to national standards and the INSARAG methodology. The accrediting entity provides these forms to ensure that the accreditation process guarantees uniform parameters for all applying teams.

- Initial Audit and Assessment

The Accreditation Technical Committee nominates an accreditation team to assess the USAR team and inform all involved parties.

The national standards and evaluation criteria should be publicly available. The process should have a verification tool (e.g., a checklist) that allows the USAR team to perform the self-assessment and serves as the instrument used by the accreditation team to verify compliance with national standards.

The process should include an administrative audit of the information and documentation presented by the USAR team (e.g., the portfolio presented), based merely on documents to identify non-conformities. The process shall include an initial visit to the team's main infrastructure to review the team's capacities, as declared in the portfolio. This visit should include where the team's home base is to observe its capacities, including the administrative element, equipment, procedures, staff, logistics, etc.

The field exercise (FIELDEX) should evolve continuously over a minimum of 36 hours. The scenarios should enable the accreditation team to observe all the operational and administrative requirements of the verification instrument. This FIELDEX must incorporate all aspects of disaster response, from breaking the emergency to demobilisation and returning to home base.

- Accreditation

The accreditation team should report to the Accreditation Technical Committee. The reporting should be standardised and include an assessment report with a recommendation to the Committee and a completed verification tool that reflects the accreditation team's assessment and recommendations. The process shall culminate in the team's certification, formal and identifiable recognition, and commitment to form part of the national response assets.

- Re-accreditation

The re-accreditation should occur, at most, within the fifth calendar year following the original accreditation. The Accreditation Technical Committee shall establish the exact term of the re-accreditation. A five-year term is the recommended practice.

The Accreditation Technical Committee shall establish clear and transparent reasons why a team might need re-accreditation. However, re-accreditation should occur for any of the following reasons:

- Expiration of the accreditation period
- Change in USAR team structure
- Change in accreditation level
- Inappropriate response conduct

Figure 7 shows a flow chart of the four stages of a national accreditation process.

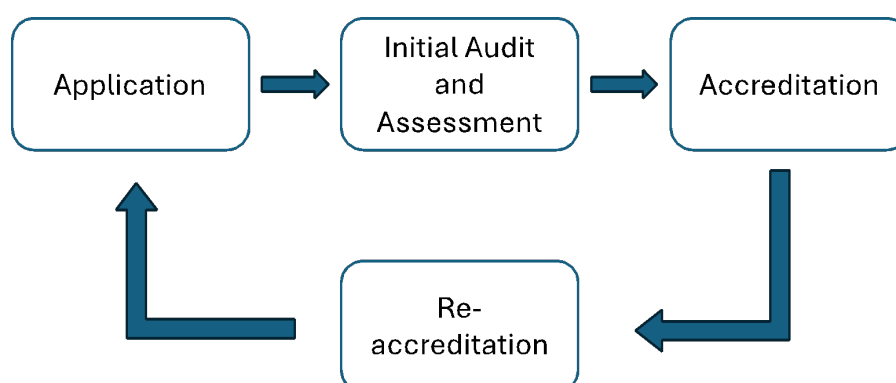


Figure 7: National Accreditation Process (NAP).

6.1.6 National Responsibilities

The member state shall have a national USAR team directory of accredited teams, and the team shall be included in the INSARAG directory as a national USAR team.

Once a national USAR team is recognised by its national authorities, the INSARAG Policy Focal Point may inform the INSARAG Secretariat if desired. The INSARAG Secretariat will register this team as a “nationally accredited USAR team” at the light, medium, or heavy level in the USAR Directory.

Member states may decide to issue nationally accredited teams with standardised patches. This has two purposes: to ensure the standardisation of recognition and visibility and to inform other national and international responders of the teams' capacities.

Note: Any external confirmation is voluntary, optional, and complementary to national processes. It should not be confused with the IEC process, which remains the only classification system for a USAR team planning to deploy internationally.

6.2 INSARAG Recognised National Accreditation Process (IRNAP)

6.2.1 IRNAP Overview

Since 2005, INSARAG has implemented an INSARAG External Classification (IEC) process for USAR teams. This process establishes verifiable operational standards and exemplifies how a peer review mechanism enhances disaster preparedness and response. The IEC process is intended for teams with the mandate and institutional support to respond internationally.

Building on the success of the IEC process, the purpose of the INSARAG Recognised National Accreditation Process (IRNAP) is to provide a general framework for international advisory support on national USAR capacity building and establish an INSARAG recognition system for USAR teams' National Accreditation Processes (NAP).

This recognition by INSARAG of a national accreditation process is executed through an established and clearly defined process, including procedures, verification checklists, and evaluation methodology, through the IRNAP, as explained in the following sections.

Any NAP that meets the INSARAG standards will be referred to as an IRNAP at the global level. Member states that undergo the IRNAP must report to the INSARAG Secretariat on successful nationally accredited teams, whose details will be updated in the INSARAG USAR Directory.

USAR teams with an international deployment mandate must undertake the INSARAG External Classification process (IEC), regardless of whether they have completed a national accreditation process recognised by INSARAG (IRNAP).

6.2.2 Key elements of the INSARAG recognition process

The INSARAG support process for the NAP development and recognition is founded on the following key principles:

- **Voluntary:** The process shall be wholly voluntary, and interested countries shall formally request the INSARAG Secretariat to obtain support.
- **Supported at the regional level:** Each region should form a roster of experts with appropriate profiles (USAR experience, experience with the INSARAG methodology, language, etc.) that will be formed and endorsed by the regional chairs.
- **Member state commitment:** Member states that have received support through this process from the regional roster shall also commit to providing appropriate experts and supporting their participation in the recognition process for other member states.
- **Commitment to the INSARAG methodology:** The requesting member state shall demonstrate that it has adopted the INSARAG methodology in its national framework.
- **Funded by the requesting member state:** The requesting country shall cover the costs related to the support process.

6.2.3 Roles and Responsibilities of the IRNAP Stakeholders

The involvement of many stakeholders is crucial to ensure that the system has sufficient and pertinent representation. The following lists the minimum roles and responsibilities of the IRNAP stakeholders:

- Requesting Member State
 - Follow the INSARAG recognition methodology of the process
 - Provide experts to the regional roster of the TSG/ TRG
 - Commitment to the INSARAG methodology
 - Have a national USAR Framework
 - Have a national USAR team accreditation process
 - Cover the costs of the TSG for at least two visits
- Technical Support Group (TSG)
 - Support and advise national systems on implementing their national USAR team accreditation process in compliance with the INSARAG methodology
 - Undertake document-based and field reviews of the INSARAG criteria, steps and standards implementation
 - Present a report on the support phase and the country's progress to the INSARAG Secretariat
 - Submit a self-evaluation of the methodology to the INSARAG Secretariat at the end of the process
- Technical Recognition Group (TRG)
 - Review the achievements of the INSARAG criteria, steps, and standards for national accreditation processes, and recommend that the Secretariat recognise the national accreditation process externally by INSARAG
 - Apply the format to checklist compliance with national INSARAG criteria, steps, and standards
 - Submit the final verification report
 - Submit a self-evaluation of the methodology to the INSARAG Secretariat at the end of the process
- INSARAG Secretariat
 - Upon request from a country, send the request to the TSG/TRG roster
 - Accompany the TSG and TRG
 - Select the experts of the TRG
 - Support the country visit of the TRG
 - Seek funding for the TRG to cover the travel costs of the verification visit
 - Publish the call for experts for the regional roster
 - Review the applications and verify compliance with the minimum requirements for presenting those with the profile to the regional chair
 - Present the candidates to the regional chair
 - Follow up on countries that have obtained recognition
 - Inform countries of the period of validity of INSARAG recognition
 - Prepare and deliver the certificate of recognition
- Regional Chair
 - Request the INSARAG Secretariat to issue a call for experts on the roster of TSG/TRG
 - Approve roster candidates from the region

6.2.4 Regional Roster of Experts to Support the IRNAP Process

To assist countries in developing their National USAR Team Accreditation Processes and assessing their compliance with the INSARAG methodology, regional groups are encouraged to create a roster of qualified experts approved by the regional chair. From this roster, the experts are selected to form two types of groups: the **Technical Support Group (TSG)** and the **Technical Recognition Group (TRG)**, with these respective functions:

While the TSG is established at the regional level to respond to requests from countries within the region, individual experts can be part of the TSGs of other INSARAG regions, provided they have been approved by the receiving regional troika. Regional groups may encourage inter-regional TSG membership, considering the benefits of multicultural cross-learning from different experiences. However, they need to be mindful of the challenges that arise in coordinating the work of a multiregional TSG, such as time differences and language barriers. The experts should comply with the following minimum criteria:

- USAR experience (USAR processes and training)
- Experienced in USAR operations/coordination
- Experience the INSARAG methodology.
- Experienced with a national accreditation process and/or IEC/R process
- Sufficient knowledge of the regional context and the relevant languages of the region

Regional groups will issue a call for experts to form the regional roster, with the support of the Secretariat. They should use the application form in Appendix 2.2 (“Definition of IRNAP”). The regional troika will review the applications and select suitable candidates for roster membership based on the Secretariat's recommendations. Regions are encouraged to establish two categories of experts on the roster: members and observers.

- **Members:** experts who comply with all established criteria will be approved as “members.”
- **Observers:** Experts with significant experience, yet lacking a specific element (for instance, experience with an NAP or IEC/R), may be approved as “observers” to acquire the necessary experience to become full roster members. The regional chair may recognise them as observers on the roster. If the requesting country consents, the observers may become part of a country-specific TSG.

The regional chair shall determine the frequency of expert calls to ensure that a functional roster of experts is maintained. With each new call, the regional chair shall also assess the status of observers to determine whether they have acquired the necessary experience to become members of the roster.

Applicants wishing to become members or observers of the roster will upload their application form, which includes relevant experience, to the Virtual On-Site Operations Coordination Centre (VOSOCC) using their respective accounts. The Secretariat will then be able to share this information with the country that requests support from the roster.

6.2.5 Requesting the IRNAP Process

The interested member state can submit a request to the INSARAG Secretariat through their INSARAG Policy Focal Point. The request shall contain at least the following information:

- Requesting membership
- Date of request

- Requesting authority
- Implementing authority and all participating institutions
- Information on the request (e.g., support in establishing a process or reviewing an existing process)
- Contact details of the INSARAG Policy and Operational Focal Points
- If the contact person for this request is not one of the INSARAG Focal Points, provide the contact details of the designated person as a counterpart.
- Place of implementation, if relevant
- Estimated dates for the beginning and finalisation of the process

The request shall be accompanied by a commitment declaration of the requesting member state to the Secretariat, in which the member state commits to:

- Comply with the steps and criteria of the IRNAP and align with the INSARAG methodology and guidelines
- Cover the funding of the process and the activities that will emanate from each of its steps, including the possible costs of travel (transport, accommodation, meals, etc.) for the TSG; ensure the security of the TSG when deployed
- Implement the recommendations of the TSG
- Maintain a contact person for the TSG and the appropriate means of communication

In addition to the information mentioned above, the requesting member state must also submit a self-evaluation of the extent of the NAP's achievement, which should be based on the verification checklist found in Appendix 2.2 ("Definition of IRNAP").

6.2.6 Support for IRNAP implementation

If requested, the TSG can advise the member state on implementing the national accreditation process. The requesting member state and the TSG are to jointly determine the methodology, duration, and activities of the advisory phase (such as virtual meetings, electronic correspondence, face-to-face meetings, etc.). The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the support provided by the TSG should be agreed upon before initiating the process. Standard ToR are provided in Appendix 2.2 ("Definition of IRNAP").

The different modalities of support will depend on the progress of the national USAR process, specifically the national USAR team accreditation process. The progress can be characterised in three tiers:

- **Design level:** a member state with no national framework requesting support to establish a standardised national process
- **Advanced level:** a country partially achieving standards and requests support for full implementation
- **Consolidated level:** a country that fully achieves all standards and requests support in the verification thereof

6.2.7 IRNAP Process and Scheduling

The process should not exceed 18 months, with a single extension of up to 6 additional months. A work plan must be in place for each stage of the process, accompanied by a schedule for its implementation. The plan must clearly define when the objectives will be achieved and establish the participants' roles and responsibilities.

The following portrays the main activities of the support and recognition stages. For more detailed information, please see Appendix 2.2 (“Definition of IRNAP”).

- Support process

The following activities should be developed during the support stage:

1. Review and consensus on the self-assessment and verification document of the requesting member state
2. Adopt the TSG’s terms of reference and prepare and agree on the support and recognition stages work plan
3. Submission by the requesting member state of progress/follow-up reports on implementing the national USAR accreditation process, as agreed in the work plan
4. Review of progress/follow-up reports by the TSG and submission of comments to the requesting member state
5. Analysis by the TSG, together with the requesting member state, of the progress made in the implementation of the national accreditation process

Once the TSG and the country ascertain that the standards requested in the support stage of the process have been reached, the next stage is initiated to carry out the final verification visit by the TRG.

- Recognition Process

The following actions should be taken during the recognition stage to determine whether the requesting member state complies with INSARAG standards in its national accreditation process:

1. Designation of the Technical Recognition Group
2. Verify compliance with the standards, guidelines and steps of the national accreditation process.
3. Final report
4. Feedback and improvement of the recognition methodology

6.2.8 IRNAP Checklist

The verification checklist, available in Appendix 2.2 (“Definition of IRNAP”), will be utilised by the requesting member state to complete the self-assessment, by the TSG for the assessment of the NAP, and by the TRG for its final assessment. It also guides the requesting country on the requirements to be incorporated into the national USAR standards. The evaluation methodology implies the determination of the level of progress in the implementation of the INSARAG national standards, categorising the progress into levels using the following colour coding:

- **GREEN** or “Y” (for “Yes”) means that in this aspect, the country fully meets or exceeds the minimum standards
- **YELLOW** or “M” (for “Meet”). This means that this aspect is met, but additional improvement is recommended. When an element is marked as yellow, the reasons shall be given in the observation column of the verification checklist.
- **RED** or “NY” (meaning “Not Yet”) means that this aspect does not meet the minimum conditions. If an element is marked as red, it does not meet the INSARAG minimum standard.

This methodology will review the self-assessment (including the progress reports) and prioritise the areas that require a specific focus. It will also be used to finalise the verification of the national standards' achievement and the accreditation process's criteria and steps.

The final evaluation shall have all aspects in either yellow or green so that the TRG can recommend to the INSARAG Secretariat that the certificate of recognition be issued to the requesting country.

If an element of the checklist is marked red, the TRG, the member state, and the Secretariat shall agree on a timeline for its implementation and a verification method.

6.2.9 INSARAG Recognition

- Certificate and validity period

The Secretariat will issue an administrative recognition through an INSARAG certificate of recognition to the national authority responsible for executing the national USAR accreditation process, which will remain valid for ten years from the date of issuance. After ten years, a re-accreditation process shall be conducted to ensure that processes and accreditation procedures comply with the INSARAG guidelines.

- Badge

Member states whose accreditation processes are recognised by INSARAG may choose to issue nationally accredited teams standardised patches. This serves two purposes: ensuring the standardisation of recognition and visibility and informing other national and international responders about the team's capacities.

The following conditions should be considered for the nationally accredited USAR teams should they decide on visibility in the field:

Rectangle patch of the size 75 mm x 55 mm.

- Support the implementation of the INSARAG Hyogo Declaration and the UN General Assembly resolution 57/150
- Black wording over a white background and a squared light grey outline
- Flag of the accrediting country is of the size 60 mm x 40 mm
- The patch indicates the following:
 - The words "Nationally Accredited"
 - Name of the accredited team
 - The level and the year of first accreditation
 - The INSARAG logo of the size 22 mm x 10 mm

A template for the standardised patch and a generic example are presented as follows:

Template



Figure 8: Template for the standardised patch.

Example



Figure 9: Template for a generic example of a patch.

6.2.10 National Responsibilities

Accrediting countries must report to the INSARAG Secretariat on successful nationally accredited teams, the details of which will be updated in the INSARAG USAR Directory.

To sustain USAR national capacity, national mechanisms must undergo regular testing and validation. This can be accomplished through various exercises, including scenario planning, tabletop simulations, and ground deployment exercises. Involving critical stakeholders—such as local communities, private organisations (including NGOs), and governmental entities—is essential for adequate validation. Establishing a comprehensive governmental approach is crucial for validating national emergency mechanisms and enhancing the overall response system. For some, these validation exercises could also be extended to involve the INSARAG regional group and countries of the region.

The INSARAG network conducts annual earthquake response simulation exercises in disaster-prone countries. The objective is to practice the INSARAG methodology with national and international responding organisations. Disaster-prone countries are strongly encouraged to host such exercises to develop their national capacity. Please refer to Appendix 2.1 (“Roadmap for USAR National Capacity”).

Appendices

Overview of relevant Appendices to Volume 2, hosted on www.insarag.org.

Appendix 2.1: Roadmap for USAR National Capacity

Appendix 2.2: Definition of IRNAP

Appendix 2.3: Request for Assistance Template

Appendix 2.4: National USAR Coordination

Appendix 2.5: INSARAG Information Package for non-classified teams