

Meeting Overview

The annual International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) Team Leaders (TLs) and Technical Working Groups (WGs) Meeting convened in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, from April 12th to 17th, 2024. This important gathering, hosted by The Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) in collaboration with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), brought together a diverse assembly of over 85 international participants from 34 countries as well as 148 national participants from Brazil of which 117 joined as observers, reflecting a broad international engagement. ([See participants list here](#)).

The implementation of the After-Action Review (AAR) recommendations of the 2023 Türkiye-Syria earthquakes was a key guiding thread of the discussions in the the USAR Team Leaders Meeting 2024 in consultation with stakeholders worldwide.

The year 2024 marks a paramount time for INSARAG, highlighted by the completion of the comprehensive INSARAG Governance Review. This review rigorously assessed the governance framework, enhancing decision-making processes at the policy level by examining Volume I (Policy) of the INSARAG Guidelines. Valuable insights and inputs from all participants were solicited and considered during this year's Team Leaders Meeting.

The meeting featured an update on INSARAG's global and Americas region initiatives, including the status of IEC/R system and the forthcoming programs for the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week (HNPW) in Geneva.

The Technical Working Groups convened internally from April 12th to 14th, sharing updates on their ongoing activities. During the TLs meeting they actively sought feedback and suggestions from participants to identify potential areas for further enhancement.

Brazil, as the co-organizer, utilised the opportunity to showcase its national Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) plan and its specialized expertise in responding to extreme climate events, underscoring the importance of regional collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Overall, the INSARAG TLs and WGs Meeting in 2024 served as a forum for robust discussions, collaboration, and strategic planning, reaffirming the collective commitment to strengthening global search and rescue efforts in the face of evolving challenges.

[All the handouts including the presentations and links to sessions recordings are available here](#)

TL Meeting Day 1

Session 1 – Official Opening, Introduction of Participants, Adoption of the Agenda and Group Photo

The meeting was officially opening by Gen. Commander Erlon Dias do Nascimento Botelho, Minas Gerais Military Fire Department, Winston Chang, INSARAG Global Lead, Rogerio Mobilia Silva, Deputy Head of Office, OCHA Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, H.E. Pedro Aihara, Congressman for Minas Gerais state, President of Parliamentary Group for Humanitarian Affairs, and Mr Wolnei Wolff, Civil Protection National Secretary, Brazil.

The Agenda was presented by Ana Maria Rebaza, INSARAG Secretariat, OCHA, which was formally adopted.

Commemorative plaques were exchanged, and the opening was captured with a group photo.

Session 2 – INSARAG Global Updates

Mr. Winston Chang, INSARAG Global Lead, presented the following 8 key INSARAG global updates:

- The INSARAG Steering Group (ISG) Meeting will take place during the annual Humanitarian Network Partnership Week (HNPW), 6-10 May 2024, in Geneva, Switzerland. Key aspects of this meeting will be the transition of the outgoing and incoming INSARAG Global Chair, the INSARAG Governance review, and the formal launch of the Türkiye Syria Earthquake Global Report, encompassing INSARAG's Türkiye Earthquake After Action Review (AAR) Report.
- The INSARAG website, www.insarag.org, is now being managed by the Information Management Working Group (IMWG), and this specific task will be led by Mr. Peter Wolff.
- The successes and challenges surrounding the IEC/R process were discussed. The success of the IEC/R system is without question. However, the sustainability of this quality assurance process presents a challenge to the network, in particular when not all classified teams are upholding their obligations.
- An overview of new developments in the Asia Pacific and the Middle East was provided.
- A glimpse into INSARAG for the Future was provided, given the expansion into flood response.
- The role of the USAR Team Leader representative/s at the ISG was discussed as previous incumbents have retired. The continued need for this role was identified. Consultations are underway to determine how best to structure and support this role.
- The INSARAG Working Groups (WG) met immediately prior to the USAR TL. During the meeting each of the WGs were provided an opportunity to present their outputs, current and future workstreams to the participants.
- Participants were informed that the Calendar of Events, is a live document that is updated every two months to ensure accuracy. Participants were encouraged to access the Calendar via www.insarag.org, to ensure they were referencing the most accurate version.

Mrs. Ana Maria Rebaza Delgado, OCHA Americas Regional Focal Point, provided an overview of the Americas region highlights:

- One of the key contributions from the region is on localisation, namely the IRNAP process.
- Most countries in the region are affected by flooding, therefore, it is planned to establish a regional working group to address this issue, outputs of which will be shared with the global INSARAG community.
- There is a need to increase the number of IEC/R classified teams in the region and there are some countries consulting to start this process.
- A brief overview of the international Earthquake Response Exercise (ERE) was provided.
- A good practice for the last 11 years is the organisation of joint INSARAG and UNDAC regional meetings.

Session 3 - Implementation of Türkiye AAR recommendations

Dr. Sólveig Thorvaldsdóttir Co-author Türkiye Earthquake AAAR Report

An overview was given of the After-Action Analysis and Recommendations for INSARAG report (AAAR) written by Dr. Sólveig Thorvaldsdóttir and Dr. Andrea Bartolucci: what data was used, how it was collected; how it was used in the development of the report; and how additional information was collected. The consolidated feedback document generated by the Working Groups (WGs) was explained and how the WGs are using that document to plan their activities and support implementing the recommendations. Five recommendations specific to team leaders were highlighted:

1. Section 3.8 of the report on Team Responsibility.
2. The Team Fact Sheet should be seen as a living document that teams update throughout the mission.
3. Draft updates of key forms have been sent to teams for review and will be the basis for ICMS 3.0.
4. Teams need to increase their diversity when training.
5. More emphasis needs to be given to defining survivable voids and timeframes and a slight refinement of the Triage Categories was introduced.

The teams were thanked for their contribution to the After-Action Analysis and Recommendations report.

Mr Belit Tasdemir, AKUT, Being INSARAG Classified and Responding in your Home Country

The Turkish Earthquake was the largest response in INSARAG history, and the affected country received the highest number of classified teams than in any previous international deployments. Local classified teams such as AKUT responded with a field team 20x the size of its classification level, presenting challenges in information management according to the

INSARAG methodology that is designed for team sizes of 20-100 personnel depending on classification level. Interaction and interoperability with the INSARAG network remained efficient and productive throughout the deployment. All affected national teams that are also INSARAG classified should implement the INSARAG methodology when a call for international assistance is made.

Ms. Carolina Futuro, INSARAG Secretariat, Overview of the ERS Response and Key Messages

The INSARAG Secretariat will promote several actions to support the implementation of the Türkiye and Syria After Action Review (AAR) recommendations. Specifically, efforts will be put into sustaining a quick mission activation procedure, supporting the National Capacity Building Working Group (NCBWG) in revising how the network works with LEMAs, investing in regional liaison efforts to better collaborate with non-INSARAG teams, and pursuing consultations with all relevant Emergency Response Section (ERS) units.

The Secretariat further announced that the official launch of the AAR Türkiye and Syria Comprehensive Report will occur at the INSARAG Steering Group (ISG) Meeting in May 2024, and summarized the AAAR's message in 6 points:

1. The INSARAG system worked.
2. The network should invest in localization efforts to strengthen national teams' capacity.
3. Efforts should be put into quality standards and compliance to increase accountability.
4. There is a need to bolster partnerships and synergies between all actors involved in disaster response.
5. Teams should further leverage technologies and operational processes to achieve flexibility and adaptability in every response.
6. For this, we need an energized INSARAG moving forward, with new teams and methods.

Mr Peter Wolf, IMWG Co-Chair, Overview of the AAR Türkiye and Syria Tab

The IMWG is now responsible for the INSARAG website, www.insarag.org. A dedicated tab for the Türkiye and Syria AAR has been developed. Participants were taken through a live walk-through of this newly added tab, which contains the newly published reports, provides a platform for USAR teams that deployed to upload information about their missions and contains other information relevant to that mission.

Session 4 – INSARAG Governance Review

Mr. Patricio Fuentes, OCHA Consultant

The focus of the INSARAG Governance review was to review INSARAG Guidelines Volume I, Policy, assess INSARAG's responsiveness and adaptability, provide recommendations and action plans, and recommend directions for the INSARAG Strategic Plan 2025-2030.

The key deliverables were:

1. Evaluate INSARAG's development over the past decades and its alignment with international humanitarian principals, standards, and guidelines
2. Consult the INSARAG Troika, regional and policy focal points, and develop and review recommendations at the policy level
3. Consult the network to review the key pillars of an extended global strategy for 2025-2030
4. Provide recommendations on organisational structure and working processes
5. Provide guidance and recommendations on membership

To this end, the INSARAG Governance Review Group has produced a set of 53 recommendations, that will be submitted to the ISG in May 2024.

Session 5 – Brazil Presentation on USAR Strategy

Min. José Solla, General Director, Brazilian Cooperation Agency and Brazil INSARAG Policy Focal Point

Brazil is increasingly engaging in humanitarian missions abroad during major disasters in response to appeals received from disaster affected countries, such as Mozambique (2019), Haiti (2021), Turkey (2023) and Canada (2023). After presidential approval, these operations are coordinated by the Brazilian Cooperation Agency, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through the Interministerial Working Group on International Humanitarian Cooperation in Brazil. The command is mainly entrusted to the Ministry of Integration and Regional Development and the operational part to contingents from the

National Public Security Force, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security; Military Fire Brigades of the Federated States and the Federal District; and, in cases of forest fires, also by firefighters from the Ministry of the Environment. Currently, the Brazilian Government has been seeking to establish the conditions so that Brazilian humanitarian teams can be internationally mobilized in disaster situations including floods, forest fires or collapsed structures with more agility and promptness, optimal capabilities, and national and international certifications of the highest level.

Session 6 – IEC/R Secretariat Update and Consultations

Ms. Natallia Burko, Emergency Response Section (ERS), INSARAG Secretariat

The INSARAG Secretariat provided an overview of the IEC/R system from its perspective. This highlighted the successes of the system but also highlighted its challenges, particularly with regarding to being able to meet continued demand as the number of teams entering the INSARAG network and seeking to undergo an IEC grows. Additionally, there are the ever-increasing demands for IERs from previously classified USAR Teams.

Key issues identified included:

1. Growing number of teams and the demands this is placing on the limited resources
2. Expectations for running an IER as part of a European Union (EU) MODEX
3. The commitment (or lack thereof) of classified USAR teams with regard to upholding the obligations of classified USAR teams as articulated in the INSARAG Guidelines, Volume II, Manual C
4. Compliance (or lack thereof) of USAR teams scheduling an IEC or IER adhering to the 2-year planning timeline
5. The recommendation to include additional checklist items to drive better compliance with the obligations of classified USAR teams
6. The role of pre-greening and when and how this can be conducted
7. The challenges created by teams that have dual mentors, as one single entity/individual ultimately has to assume overall responsibility

TL Meeting Day 2

Session 7 – Guidelines Review Working Group

Mr. John Cawcutt, GRG Co-chair, together with Mrs. Yvonne Gutmann and Mr. Emmanuel Chapeau, GRG members

The GRG provided an update on the mandate and activities to date. The GRG priorities from the Türkiye/Syria AAR were outlined along with the large number of outstanding items from the ISG 2023, Interim Guideline Review Group, Team Leaders Meeting and recommendations from the Governance Review.

The challenges associated with managing a large number of direct-action items as well as coordinating across all the WGs was discussed. The GRG consulted with all WG Co-Chairs and Team Leaders, and it was unanimously expressed that due to the exceptional volume of work falling out from the Türkiye/Syria AAR that an extension be sought from the ISG to delay the completion to 2026.

The GRG also took the opportunity to request feedback from Team Leaders on the Guidelines current system of organisation including accessibility, search functionality and structure. In addition, further views were sought on the INSARAG Badge.

Finally, several outstanding items were completed including drafting the Request for Assistance form, the integration of UN 78/119 into Vol I, and completed a “Speed of Mission” draft.

An extension to the completion of the Guideline Review to 2026 recognizing the workload generated by the Türkiye/Syria AAR is to be requested to the ISG. This approach was endorsed by the Team leaders and Working Groups.

Session 8 – Medical Working Group

Mr. Trevor Glass, member of the MWG

The MWG utilised the opportunity to deliver an educational presentation on Crush Syndrome, which was very well received by all. Efforts in raising awareness about crush syndrome must be increased as providing emergency medical care as soon as the patient can be accessed, while they are still in the collapsed structure, is an essential humanitarian activity. Death

from crush syndrome can be prevented in many instances, and teams should seek to integrate rescue operations and the delivery of emergency medical care as part of their standard operating procedures to maximise a patient's chance of survival.

The MWG will be meeting from 6-9 May 2024, in Geneva, Switzerland, coinciding with the 2024 HNPW meeting. This meeting will be utilised to further raise awareness about crush syndrome, support the GRG in its work to update the INSARAG Guidelines, begin drafting a technical reference note on the mental health and well-being of responders and to further examine survivability in relation to voids spaces in conjunction with other WGs.

Session 9 – Information Management

Mr. Jeff Maunder and Mr. Peter Wolff, IMWG Co-chairs, together with Mrs. Whitney Veen, Dr. Sólveig Thorvaldsdóttir, Mr. John Morrison, Mr. Aidan Elliot and Mr. Daryl Rush, members of the IMWG.

While ICMS performed well as a system during the Türkiye earthquake, several challenges were identified due to the scale of the event. These challenges were posed during the Türkiye/Syria AAR and Qatar debriefs.

ICMS posed challenges in several areas:

- The amount of data being collected
- Complexity of the data entry and time to enter
- Flexibility to adapt to larger events needs to be increased
- VOSOCC as a communication tool
- ICMS as a system has some complex areas that should be worked on

The IMWG has sought feedback on the following areas:

- Proposed delinking of the worksite ID from sectors and a proposed new model
- Simplification of the data collection process
- Introducing flexible coordination layers to cope with “out-of-scale” events
- Refining the use of the VOSOCC during events
- Review of the data collected and the introduction of primary and secondary data elements

IMWG will develop a five (5) year strategy and goals. This strategy will include a range of workstreams, including ICMS 3.0 (Next gen), the use of other information technologies (Satellite AI and analysis tools), support functions for both day-to-day support and incident response, as well as how succession and depth is built into the WG to ensure a robust and sustainable service to the INSARAG network.

This program will indicate the need for support for the further development of information systems and acknowledges that information management is an enduring function that requires professional support to develop.

The request for IMWG to seek support for the professionalisation of the development of INSARAG information systems is supported by the WG Co-chairs and the TLs.

Session 10 – Training Working Group

Mr. Ross Bramich, Mr. Paul Courtney and Dr. Sólveig Thorvaldsdóttir, members of the TWG

The TWG reported on their recent progress including the revision of the UC Course, ERE document review along with multiple adjustments that are recommendations from the Türkiye/Syria AAR involving logistics and VO entries.

Participants were advised of the impending call for applications for regional representatives for an increased TWG membership cohort. There was mention of the proposal for an IEC/R Leadership Course later in the year. TWG requested the USAR Team Focal Points ensure applicants adhere to the pre-requisite standards for the IEC/R Leadership Course on application.

TWG used Mentimeter online engagement with TL's that included issues relating to the best quarter of the year to conduct training in each region. The results showed a balanced spread across the regions and quarters of the year. Other interactions involved identifying the preferred method of delivery of for the UC Trainers webinar as a regional approach, and if a global directory of training facilities for USAR teams to utilise, would be beneficial, which was supported.

Recommendation: UC Trainers webinar be conducted on a regional basis to support time zones and localisation where possible.

Session 11 – National Capacity Building Working Group

Mr. Sebastian Mocarquer, NCBWG Co-chair

The National Capacity Building Working Group (NCBWG) briefed the team leaders on the working group's terms of reference and purpose. The Türkiye/Syria AAR significantly influenced the scope of work and expected outcomes. A comprehensive three-year work plan was presented to cover all topics identified.

When consulted, TLs and Operational Focal Points identified ways to contribute to national capacity building, such as providing training opportunities, bilateral arrangements to support requesting member states, supporting regional mechanisms and initiatives, and exchanging best practices.

The NCBWG announced the delivery of the IRNAP training course for the AP region, which will be held in Seoul from September 2 to 5, 2024. The Americas Region is currently working on updating the course and translating it into English, which will be handed over to NCBWG at the ISG in May 2024. A significant number of attendees expressed interest in attending IRNAP training in the future.

Following the 2026 INSARAG Guidelines review process, a proposed structure of the revised Manual A was presented and discussed, being primarily supported by the TLs, with some feedback that will subsequently be analysed. The NCBWG identified and introduced the four main chapters of Manual A:

- Building USAR Response Capability
- National USAR Framework, including National USAR Coordination
- Receiving International Assistance, including Host Nation Support
- National Quality Assurance

When consulted, the participants identified lack of funding and political barriers as the main barriers to implementing capacity-building projects in their country or region.

Session 12 – IEC/R and Quality Assurance Working Group

Mrs. Annika Coll and Mr. David Sochor, IEC/R QA WG co-chairs

The primary focus of the IEC/R process is to ensure quality is maintained within the teams and the network. The growing demand on the system requires a thorough review of the process to ensure the INSARAG network can meet the demands of current and future IEC/Rs, while concurrently maintaining the quality standards of the process.

The need to have appropriately mentors, team leaders, classifiers and Secretariat representatives is critical to the continued success of the system while simultaneously maintaining quality standards.

There is a lot of work to be done with trying to align the IEC/R process with real-world deployments. To be able to do the work that is required, the WG is seeking additional members from the three UN regions.

Session 13 – Search and Rescue in Flood Response Working Group

Mr. Jeremy Stubbs, Mr. Russell Gauden and Mr. José Solla, SAR-FR WG Co-chairs

Flood Response Search and Rescue Working Group Co-chairs: Jeremy Stubbs, Jose Sola, and Russ Gauden consulted 7 of their working group at the 2024 April Working Group meeting.

The working group completed their analysis of the Flood Response Survey, and a Flood Response Directory Team Profile has been drafted. Additional clarification and support was requested from Team Leaders. These responses will contribute to the final recommendation on Flood Response Directory Team Profile content and accessibility.

The Working Group will further turn their focus to the development of the Flood Response Technical Guidance Note to guide national capacity building.

Recommendations of progress of the current Terms of Reference and future options will be presented to ISG in May 2024.

TL Meeting Day 3

Session 14 – WG Open Discussion

This breakout session provided all meeting participants the opportunity to engage in open discussion with each WG. The structure of this session was an informal conversational style approach where participants had the opportunity to ask questions specific to the particular WG or on broader INSARAG matters. This type of engagement format has not been utilised previously but was proven to be very popular and highly successful.

Session 15 – GRG Roadmap

GRG Roadmap and Poll results - Co-Chair John Cawcutt

The GRG presented the results of the current Guideline structure. There was clear direction from the TL that there were benefits in reviewing the structure for better accessibility. At the same time there was support for the current content and that small changes could make a significant difference. Discussion occurred around the Guideline review roadmap with the suggested timelines being endorsed as well as the assignment of each Manual to a Working Group.

Recommendations:

1. That the GRG *considers* ways to simplify the Guidelines. Some options discussions included; change naming convention to 5 Volumes (rather than 3 Volumes and 3 Manuals), change the name from Guidance Notes to Guideline Appendices to better reflect the direct connection to the Guidelines and consider changing the name of Technical Reference Library to Best Practice Library to further encourage teams to contribute.
2. That the INSARAG Classified patch be changed to reflect the original classification year rather than the year of the last classification.
3. Timing and roadmap was endorsed by Team Leaders as per the presented plan.

Session 16 – Brazil Presentation on SAR Response to Extreme Climate Effects

Mr Wolnei Wolff, Civil Protection National Secretary, Brazil

Brazil is a large country that is prone to both natural (geological, hydrological, meteorological, climatological, biological) and technical (radioactive substances, dangerous products, urban fires, civil construction, transportation of passengers and non-hazardous cargo) disasters. Brazil Civil Defense Secretariat (SEDEC) has a set of preventative, relief, assisting and reconstructive actions aimed at avoiding or minimizing disasters, preserving the morale of the population, and restoring social norms. Due to the geographical vastness and variability of the country, it faces different challenges at different times of the year, some of which overlap, placing significant demands on limited resources. Brazil has three tiers of government, namely federal, state and municipal, each with clearly defined roles and responsibilities with regarding to risk identification, risk mitigation and disaster response and recovery. Brazil is actively undertaking national capacity development activities, benchmarking international standards, e.g., INSARAG, as it sets about improving its national resilience.

Session 17 – Summary of Key Outcomes and Closing Ceremony

The TLs welcome and supports the finding and recommendations of the Turkiye AAR.

The TLs support the extension of the launch of the INSARAG Guidelines to 2026.

The INSARAG Secretariat will consult the GRG regarding the USAR TL representative TORs and take into consideration the recommendations of the INSARAG Governance Review.

The TLs support the workplans of the WGs. Both the IEC/R & Quality Assurance WG and the TWG are seeking to expand their member cadre, with representation from all three INSARAG regions.

Guidelines Review Group (GRG): The TL welcomes the GRG's workplan towards the 2026 timeline and the roadmap for its development. All WGs and the TLs agree that the first draft of the Guidelines will be due on the 31 January 2025 as per the responsibilities outlined in the Timetable developed by the GRG.

IEC/R and Quality Assurance Working Group: The TLs agreed that the IEC/R process is a recognised and important tool for quality assurance and supports the review of Volume II, Manual C conducted by the IEC/R and Quality Assurance WG within the GRG process. The review and discussion on compliance will include global consultation at all levels. The WG is seeking the involvement of additional members to join and support its efforts.

Information Management Working Group (IMWG): The IMWG is seeking support to continue the development and integration of information systems into the INSARAG network. Funding of EUR 250K over five years is required to enable the necessary systems to be developed. The IMWG has received endorsement from the WG Chairs and the TLs. This will allow the IMWG to progress and develop ICMS and other IM functions to meet the recommendations of the Türkiye/Syria AAR. The IMWG will produce a 5-year strategy and workplans to facilitate this work. The current licenses being used expire on 31 December 2024; therefore it is essential to ensure funding is secured over the coming months to ensure the continuity of this vital coordination tool.

Medical Working Group (MWG): The TLs welcomed the MWG recommendations that USAR teams integrate emergency medical and rescue operations in the collapsed structure, and this is to be viewed as an essential humanitarian activity. USAR Teams are to train their medical personnel in the identification and treatment of crush syndrome and working within collapsed structures alongside their rescue colleagues to ensure that lifesaving emergency medical care is provided as soon as the victim is accessed.

National Capacity Building Working Group (NCBWG): The TLs welcomes the NCBWG Terms of Reference (TOR) and purpose. The Türkiye AAR significantly influenced the WGs scope of work and subsequent workplan. A detailed 3-year plan was presented to the TLs and highlighted the INSARAG Recognised National Accreditation Process (IRNAP) training course, scheduled to be conducted in Seoul, Korea from 2-5 September 2024. The NCBWG presented the four main chapters for inclusion Volume II, Manual A: Building USAR Response Capability, National USAR Framework, Receiving International Assistance, and National Quality Assurance.

Search and Rescue Flood Response Working Group (FRWG): The TL welcomes the FRWG analysis of the Flood Response Survey and a Flood Response Directory. The TL feedback will inform the finalisation of the Team Profile Form and how this will be shared with the international community. The WG will now focus on the Technical Reference Note.

Training Working Group (TWG): The TWG is looking for qualified members to join the cohort with equal representation from each of the INSARAG regions. The TWG plans to run an IEC/RF Leadership course in the fourth quarter of 2024 for suitably qualified and experienced prospective mentors, IEC/R team leaders and Secretariat representatives. USAR coordination (UC) Trainer webinars utilising the revised program will be presented regionally.

Any Other Business (AOB)

- The Government of Tunisia has expressed its willingness to host the USAR Team Leaders Meeting 2025. The Peoples Republic of China has expressed its willingness to host the USAR Team Leaders Meeting in 2026
- Organisations conducting USAR exercises or training events are encouraged to open these up to the broader INSARAG community. They can contact the INSARAG Secretariat, who will update the INSARAG Calendar accordingly.