

INSARAG External Support and Recognition Process for national USAR team accreditation processes



1. Introduction

- 1.1. Since 2005, INSARAG has an external USAR team classification process, which establishes verifiable operational standards and which constitutes an example of how a peer review mechanism can provide an added value in the preparedness and response to disasters. The process, known as IEC, is designed for teams that have the mandate and institutional support for responding internationally.
- 1.2. In this framework, national authorities of each country have the responsibility to provide orientation and verify the achievement of the national standards by their teams. The INSARAG Guidelines (2015) recommend countries to establish national accreditation processes, developed, adapted and within the frame of the realities of each country. In fact, since several years, a growing number of countries are developing their national processes using the INSARAG Guidelines as reference.
- 1.3. Since 2003, and particularly in the Americas region, a series of initiatives have been discussed, analyzed and developed aimed at establishing a process whereby USAR teams should achieve some recommended minimum standards in order to be called National USAR teams. It is in this context that the need is identified to establish a “national USAR team accreditation process”, which would allow to consolidate the national USAR process, using the INSARAG methodology as reference and as a basis the experience, local needs and risk scenarios of each country.

2. Background

- 2.1. The process, known as IEC, is designed for teams that have the mandate and institutional support for responding internationally. IEC teams have the support of the national authorities of their respective country through the INSARAG focal point. The IEC is an independent, verifiable and voluntary process that has received unanimous acceptance by the INSARAG community. The main objective of the process is to provide countries affected by disasters with an additional resource, with proven quality and capacity, according to international standards.
- 2.2. In 2011, and following a global consultation process, the new chapter G on establishing a national urban search and rescue capacity was incorporated in the INSARAG Guidelines. In paragraph G3.5, this version of the Guidelines of 2011 already encourages countries to *"adopt (at the appropriate level) the INSARAG organizational and operational guidelines for capacity building of national USAR teams as a target achievement for its national USAR teams and to adopt appropriate processes for the confirmation of achievement of these standards"*.
- 2.3. The updated INSARAG Guidelines 2015 include a complete manual on strengthening national and local capacity building (Vol. II, Manual A) and goes as far as recommending countries to establish an national USAR team accreditation mechanism to allow a country to “manage, monitor and establish the same standards officially and adhere closely to the INSARAG standards and guidance in developing its USAR national response systems”. This process has been worked on particularly since 2014 in a workshop carried out in Chile on “The creation of a national USAR team accreditation process”¹ and many of the lessons learned in the Americas region in the past few years have been incorporated.

¹ Report of the workshop on « The creation of a national USAR team accreditation process”, INSARAG, Chile, 2014, http://www.insarag.org/images/stories/Americas_good_practices/Sistema_acreditaci%C3%B3n_USAR_guidance_ENG_2014.09.29.pdf

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- 2.4. The INSARAG Guidelines 2015 make the difference between the IEC classification – a process amongst peers, designed by the INSARAG community for the verification of the achievement of the standards for teams with an international deployment mandate; and the accreditation, a process which is by definition at the national level and through which the achievement of national standards is certified by an accrediting entity, in other words the competent national authorities.
- 2.5. Globally and particularly in the Americas region there is extensive experience with accreditation processes of national USAR teams, some developed jointly, some individually by countries and institutions. In general, all have preserved a similar structure, both in terms of processes and in terms of standards, not dissimilar to the process developed by INSARAG methodology. In fact, many have taken as direct reference the IEC process of INSARAG.
- 2.6. The INSARAG Americas Regional Group presented a proposal on this topic to the INSARAG Steering Group in 2016, who in turn requested the Regional Group to lead the initiative to “*design a peer revision/certification process of national USAR team accreditation processes, which confirms to the requesting country that it is complying with the minimum standards for national USAR team accreditation processes*” and present recommendations back to the Steering Group in 2017.
- 2.7. The Americas Regional Group, under the leadership of Colombia, organized a workshop to further elaborate and refine the proposal. The workshop took place from 7 to 9 May 2016 in the Red Cross Training Center in the region of Quindío, Colombia, hosted by the Government of Colombia, and had the participation of 22 representatives from the following 11 countries: Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, France, Paraguay, Peru, Venezuela and from OCHA/ INSARAG Secretariat.
- 2.8. Following the consultation process with the INSARAG community in 2016, during which contributions were received in the Team Leaders Meeting, in the Regional Group meetings of Asia Pacific and Africa, Europe, Middle East, as well as individual contributions, the Working Group incorporated comments in a meeting carried out on 15 November 2016 in Bogotá, Colombia, immediately prior to the Americas Regional Group meeting. The Regional Group then reviewed the proposal, providing additional comments, which were in turn incorporated by the Working Group in the present proposal.

3. Proposal : create an INSARAG external support and validation process for national USAR team accreditation processes

- 3.1. The USAR response framework of INSARAG shows a structure, which aims to ensure **interoperability** between different levels of USAR response and determines that “*it is vital that working practices, technical language and information are common and shared through all levels of the USAR response framework*” (INSARAG Guidelines, Vol I, 2.1). Therefore, the standards developed for the accreditation of national teams **must be aligned with** the INSARAG methodology and therefore should be recognized within this same framework.



Figura 4. Marco de respuesta USAR de INSARAG

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- 3.2. It is desirable that the national accreditation processes form an integral part of the INSARAG process in the wider sense, equally to the INSARAG External Classification process for international teams. This is with the purpose of ensuring interoperability and appropriate interaction between the national and international response capacity.
- 3.3. To this effect, it is suggested to establish a homogenization of national USAR standards, always leaving the required space for national adaptation.
- 3.4. It is not desirable nor feasible that INSARAG takes on the responsibility to accredit or classify the huge amount of national USAR teams. This remains the sole responsibility of the national authorities as again reconfirmed by the INSARAG Guidelines 2015.
- 3.5. However, there is a role for the INSARAG community in promoting the national USAR capacity strengthening in line with the INSARAG Guidelines and ensuring at the same time the complementarity of the international response.
- 3.6. The purpose of the present proposal is to provide a general framework for the advisory work and national USAR team capacity building work in the INSARAG community with the aim to establish a recognition process of national USAR team accreditation processes.

A. The support process

- 3.7. The Working Group elaborated a series of criteria which the support process shall respect:
 - i. Voluntary: above all, this process shall be completely voluntary and interested countries shall make a formal request in order to obtain the support
 - ii. Supported by a regional Technical Support Group: a roster of experts, which the appropriate profile (USAR experience, experience with the INSARAG methodology, languages) shall be constituted and endorsed by the Regional Chairmanship group
 - iii. Country commitment: countries which would have received support through this process from the Technical Support Group shall also commit to provide appropriate experts in turn for the regional roster
 - iv. Commitment towards the INSARAG methodology: the requesting country shall demonstrate its willingness to work according to the INSARAG methodology
 - v. Funded by the requesting country: the requesting country shall cover the costs related to the Technical Support Group but there may be different modalities to carry it out, including through bilateral agreements or with support from donors.
- 3.8. Additionally, the key steps of the process were defined as follows:
 - i. Request: the interested country shall present a request to the Secretariat with a formal document demonstrating the commitment of the country to work according to the INSARAG methodology and presenting a report on the self-evaluation of the achievement of the criteria and steps of the national accreditation process (see under C).
 - ii. Designation of the Technical Support Group: the Secretariat will send a request to the regional roster of experts who will respond with their availability to support the country in its national accreditation process. The requested country will select three experts from three different countries of the region.
 - iii. The support process: the Technical Support Group will advise the country in the implementation of the criteria and steps for the national USAR team accreditation process. The requesting country and the Technical Support Group shall determine the

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methodology and duration of the advisory services (virtual meetings, electronic correspondence, face-to-face meetings, etc.). NB: in some cases, this process may be very short depending on the process of the country, in other cases it may take much longer, including years.

- iv. Verification of the achievement of the criteria and steps of the national accreditation process: the country and the Technical Support Group will determine the appropriate moment to carry out the visit to the country of the latter, during which the entire national accreditation process will be reviewed (final documents, practices, etc.). The technical Support Group will elaborate a report of its activities and the process witnessed in the country and will share it with the requesting country and the Secretariat.

B. External recognition

- 3.9. It is desirable for the INSARAG community to provide some kind of recognition to the national authorities which have demonstrated that they have incorporated and implemented the INSARAG methodology within their own national standards and processes. It is a way for the INSARAG community to promote national capacity strengthening processes and a way to recognise the fact that the efforts undertaken at national level are in line with the INSARAG methodology.
 - i. Recognition issued by the Secretariat: Following the receipt of the final report from the Technical Support Group, the Secretariat issued a recognition in the form of a memo/certificate to the national emergency management authorities, which are in charge of the national USAR accreditation process.

C. The national accreditation process

- 3.10. The current INSARAG Guidelines provide a very general guidance on the establishment of a national USAR team accreditation process – however, they do not provide specific directions nor tools for its implementation at national level.
- 3.11. Therefore, the present proposal includes a series of recommended minimum criteria and steps for the national USAR team accreditation processes. On the one hand, it is suggested that this list serve as guidance to national authorities who are in the process of establishing a national USAR team accreditation process. On the other hand, it is expected that this list be used as reference and checklist for the Technical Support Group in its advisory work to the country. See annex 1: list of criteria and steps for the national USAR accreditation process.

D. The national standards

- 3.12. By definition, the national standards shall be elaborated and promulgated at national level by the competent authority. The present proposal serves to promote the use of the INSARAG methodology by national authorities for its national teams and the national USAR response.
- 3.13. The INSARAG Guidelines in their current version already provide a minimum standard applicable to national teams, see Vol. II, Manual A, Annex C. However, the Working Group found that Annex C was not sufficiently explicit with regards to the differentiation of the standards applicable for light teams; and other aspects were also found to be requiring some improvement.

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- 3.14. Therefore, the Working Group revised and updated Annex C of Vol II, Manual A of the INSARAG Guidelines with the aim of providing more explicit guidance on the different standards applicable to light, medium and heavy teams, as well as the requirements on the national disaster management system (LEMA) with regards to the activation and coordination procedures for the national response. *See annex 2: Annex C INSARAG Guidelines, Manual A updated*
- 3.15. At the same time, the proposal includes a series of supporting documents which national teams shall complete in order to prove that they are achieving the national standards, which in turn should be in line with Annex C of the INSARAG Guidelines. A series of 14 documents is suggested, all of them directly linked to Annex C. Additionally, standard formats are available as practical implementation tool for these documents although it is clear that there may be significant variations from one country to another. *See annex 3: List of supporting documentation*

4. Recommendations presented to the INSARAG Steering Group

- 4.1. Following the consultations carried out in the three regions, and with the USAR team leaders in particular, the Working Group recommends the INSARAG Steering Group to:
- i. Affirm the importance of national USAR team accreditation processes as a key component in the national capacity development process and part of the INSARAG methodology and strategy
 - ii. Welcome the orientation and the tools developed by the Working Group and recommend that this be considered for inclusion in the next revision of the INSARAG Guidelines in 2020
 - iii. Give green light to the Americas Regional Group to establish and pilot the support process through the establishment of the Technical Support Group at regional level. The Working Groups informs in this context that Chile, Colombia and Costa Rica are considering to offer themselves as pilot countries for the support process. Also, the Working Group considers the holding of an initial workshop of the Technical Support Group necessary in the first half of 2017; and several countries are currently considering to offer hosting arrangements for this workshop.
 - iv. Request the Secretariat to support the process in terms of facilitating the conformation of the Technical Support Group and the management of the requests.
 - v. Allow the Secretariat - on the basis of the recommendation from the Technical Support Group – to issue a memo/ certificate to the national system on the achievement of minimum standards in their national USAR team accreditation process based on the INSARAG methodology.