

Annual Overview 2024

International Search and Rescue
Advisory Group

www.insarag.org



INSARAG External Reclassification in Hungary of the Hungarian Urban Search and Rescue Team

Reflections on the First Months as INSARAG Global Chair

As I reflect on my first months as INSARAG Global Chair, I am deeply impressed by the strength and unity of this remarkable network. INSARAG is not just a collection of professionals – it is a vibrant and dedicated community, unwavering in its mission to uphold the highest standards of quality and preparedness. The recent governance review exemplifies our collective commitment to continuously raising the bar, ensuring we stay flexible, adaptable, and able to respond swiftly and effectively, regardless of the challenges we face.

Looking ahead, INSARAG is more determined than ever to adapt and strengthen, with a focus on enhancing local capacities, to ensure that governments and communities are better prepared to manage disasters before international support is needed. Our future lies in fostering more resilient communities through seamless collaboration, particularly in disaster zones where effective integration of international efforts with national authorities is essential. Tools like the INSARAG Recognized National Accreditation Process (IRNAP) and the Community First Responders Package (CFRP) are key to this effort, equipping local communities to save lives in the critical first hours of a disaster by integrating INSARAG's life-saving methodologies into their own systems.

We are also evolving to meet new challenges, particularly in responding to climate-related disasters and complex emergencies. INSARAG is expanding its flexible response capabilities, exploring new areas such as flood rescue while maintaining the high standards that define our operations. Leveraging new technologies will continue to play a critical role in improving our search and rescue efforts, with advancements like drones and radar detectors enhancing operational efficiency and coordination, helping teams save more lives more efficiently.

INSARAG's growth is a testament to the steadfast commitment of its members, but it also highlights the need for greater support. As the network continues to expand, we must maintain our high standards and meet the increasing demand for classification and reclassification. I remain inspired by the future of this network and confident in its ability to rise to the challenges ahead. By refining our methodologies, strengthening partnerships, and advocating for further resources, INSARAG will continue to lead in international disaster response, ensuring we remain at the forefront of saving lives. I am deeply grateful for the commitment and hard work of each member in this network. Together, I look forward to advancing INSARAG's mission and fostering a stronger, more resilient network that is equipped to meet the evolving challenges of disaster response worldwide.



Ambassador Dominik Stillhart, INSARAG Global Chair, Deputy Director General Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Credit: ICRC.

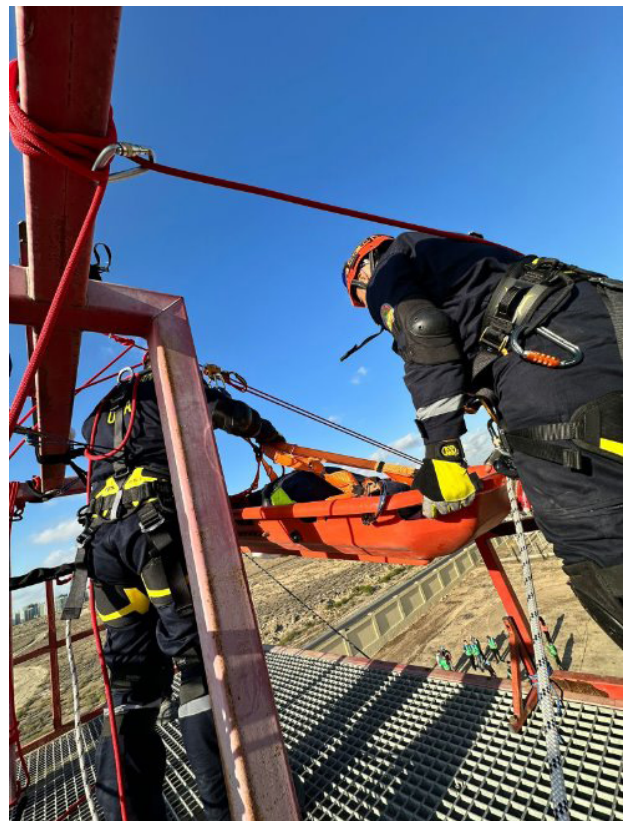
Global Reporting

In 2024, INSARAG made significant strides in enhancing the quality standards of urban search and rescue (USAR) through eight completed INSARAG External Classifications and Reclassifications (IEC/Rs), which bolstered the operational readiness of teams globally. These efforts aligned with INSARAG's four strategic objectives, particularly in localization, supported by seven specialized training sessions, including USAR Coordination Courses and leadership training in South Korea, fostering national capacity building and community preparedness. The commitment to flexible response was illustrated through various international exercises and regional meetings held throughout the year, promoting collaboration with local and international agencies to address evolving disaster needs.

INSARAG held Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Coordination Courses across Qatar, France, Türkiye, Hungary, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Germany. A USAR Capacity Assessment took place in Iran in January, followed by a USAR Training of Trainers (TOT) course in Türkiye in December. Italy also hosted an EU Module Exercise (EU MODEX). Numerous international and regional exercises continued to strengthen response capabilities, including regional meetings in Romania, Pakistan, and Ecuador, as well as Earthquake Response Exercises (ERE) in Tunisia, Pakistan, and Ecuador. These activities culminated in a Team Leaders Meeting, four Strategic Working Group Meetings, and an INSARAG Steering Group Meeting.



Hungary INSARAG External Reclassification (IER).



Azerbaijan INSARAG External Classification (IEC).

Global Milestones in 2024

The Türkiye and Syria Earthquake After-Action Review (AAR)

The AAR was launched in 2024, alongside a comprehensive Governance Review, identifying areas for improvement and implementing targeted reforms to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness of the INSARAG system. These initiatives aim to strengthen governance, operational procedures, and coordination mechanisms, ensuring the network's capability to address new challenges from extreme climate events while emphasizing the importance of government involvement in building local disaster response capacities.

The INSARAG Steering Group Meeting

The annual meeting took place on 7 May in Geneva, Switzerland, as part of the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Weeks (HNPW) 2024, which attracted over 2,000 participants. Chaired by Ambassador Dominik Stillhart, the meeting brought together 173 in-person and 20 online attendees from 45 countries and 10 organizations to discuss the Working Groups' workplans, Governance Review recommendations and INSARAG's flexible response capacities.

IEC Progress

We are pleased to announce that Azerbaijan's International Search and Rescue Team has become the 58th internationally classified USAR team worldwide. The INSARAG Network continues to strengthen, with additional USAR teams from Georgia and Thailand actively preparing for their upcoming IECs in 2025. This growth reflects our commitment to enhancing global emergency response capabilities and reinforces the collaborative spirit of our international community.

Flood Response Teams Roster

The INSARAG Search and Rescue in Floods Response Working Group (SAR-FR WG) is enhancing its capacity for flood emergencies. The group is mapping global flood rescue resources and developing standards for USAR teams specialized in

flood response. A key initiative is the creation of a Flood Rescue Directory and roster to profile teams for rapid deployment, with progress to be highlighted at the upcoming regional meetings and the INSARAG Steering Group (ISG) meeting in March.

2024 ESRI Award

This year, INSARAG's Information Management Working Group (IMWG) was honored with the prestigious 'Special Achievement in GIS 2024 Award' by the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI). This recognition highlights their innovative use of GIS technology to enhance the coordination of international Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams. The IMWG's efforts have significantly improved disaster response operations, underscoring the vital role of smart technology in life-saving missions.

UN Heroes Award

INSARAG and UNDAC were honoured with the prestigious UN Heroes Award during the annual UN Foundation Global Leadership Awards held in New York on Thursday, 21 November. Tracey Reed, Assistant Chief of the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department and INSARAG Team Leader, accepted the award on behalf of INSARAG. This recognition highlights the critical contributions of the UN's emergency first responders during crises and underscores the effectiveness of INSARAG's global network of member states in providing coordinated, life-saving support worldwide.



United Nations Foundation's We the Peoples Global Leadership Awards. Credit: UN Foundation/Diane Bondareff

INSARAG External Classification/Reclassifications (IEC/Rs) in 2024, we congratulate the following teams:

[View full overview](#) of IEC/Rs and teams since 2005.

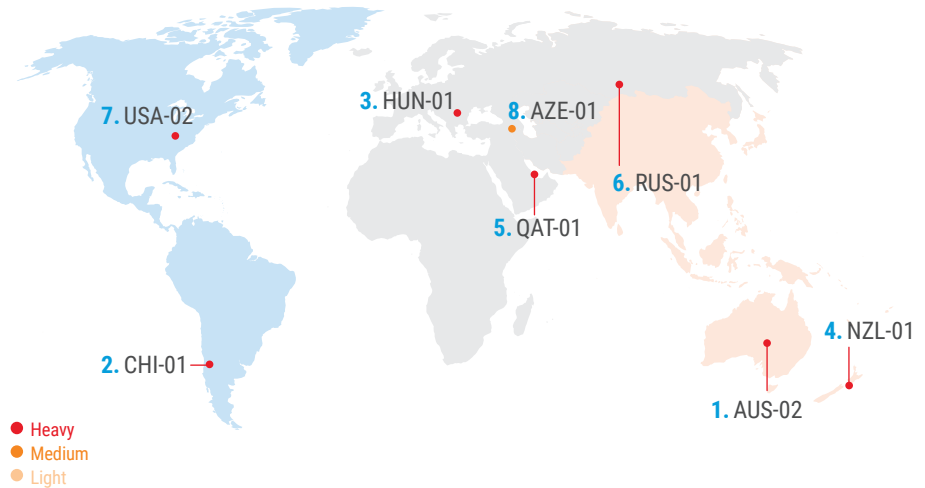
IER

1. Australia - AUS-02 - Heavy
2. Chile - CHI-01 - Heavy
3. Hungary - HUN-01 - Heavy
4. New Zealand - NZL-01 - Heavy
5. Qatar - QAT-01 - Heavy
6. Russian Federation - RUS-01 - Heavy
7. United States - USA-02 - Heavy

IEC

8. Azerbaijan - AZE-01 - Medium

INSARAG REGIONS



2024 TIMELINE OF INSARAG EVENTS

JANUARY

INSARAG New Year Teleconference, Switzerland
USAR Coordination (UC) Course, Qatar

FEBRUARY

UC Course, France
USAR Capacity Assessment, Iran

APRIL

Team Leaders and Working Groups Meeting, Brazil
UC Courses in France and Türkiye

MAY

INSARAG Steering Group Meeting, Switzerland
Heavy IER – USA-02, United States
Heavy IER – NZL-01, New Zealand
Heavy IER – CHI-01, Chile
UC Course, China

JUNE

Heavy IER – RUS-01, Russian Federation

AUGUST

UCC, Hungary

SEPTEMBER

Medium IEC – AZE-01, Azerbaijan
Heavy IER – HUN-01, Hungary
WG Meetings: National Capacity Building WG & Quality Assurance IEC/R WG, Romania
IRNAP Workshop, Korea
GRG Meeting, Türkiye

OCTOBER

AEME Regional Meeting, Romania
Heavy IER – AUS-02, Australia
AP International Earthquake Response Exercise (IERE), Pakistan
AP Regional Meeting, Pakistan
UC Courses in Italy and the United Kingdom

MODEX USAR, Italy
International Rescue Challenge, Pakistan
Americas EXCON ERE Workshop

NOVEMBER

AEME IERE, Tunisia
Heavy IER – QAT-01, Qatar
UC Course, Germany

DECEMBER

Americas IERE, Ecuador
Americas INSARAG & UNDAC Regional Meeting, Ecuador
USAR Training of Trainers (TOT) Course, Türkiye
Regional Humanitarian Partnership Week, Thailand

Timeline of Key Events

Americas

Team Leaders and Technical Working Groups Meeting: The annual INSARAG Team Leaders and Technical Working Groups Meeting occurred in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, from 12-17 April, with over 100 participants from 33 countries and more than 120 observers. The meeting addressed the implementation of After-Action Review (AAR) recommendations from the 2023 Türkiye-Syria earthquakes and highlighted the completion of the INSARAG Governance Review. Brazil showcased its national USAR plan, underscoring the importance of regional collaboration in responding to extreme climate events.



IER of the International Search and Rescue Team of Chile: From 29 May to 2 June, the Bomberos de Chile USAR Team (CHI-01) successfully passed its first IER at the medium level in Talagante, Chile. During the IER, CHI-01 demonstrated full commitment to upholding the standards set by the INSARAG Guidelines, with the IER Classifier Team unanimously affirming their adherence to these requirements. This achievement not only marks a milestone for CHI-01 but also strengthens the INSARAG network, fostering continued collaboration and knowledge-sharing among USAR teams globally.



Africa, Europe and Middle East

INSARAG AEME Regional Meeting: The AEME Regional Meeting in Bucharest, Romania, brought together 101 participants from 24 countries and 36 organizations to integrate outcomes from the May ISG Meeting into the 2025 regional workplans. The sessions focused on aligning INSARAG's strategic objectives and discussing the INSARAG Governance Review, which addressed leadership, accountability, and inclusion. Key outcomes included drafting the AEME position on governance reforms and establishing the 2025 Troika leadership.



IER of the International Search and Rescue Team of Azerbaijan: From 23-26 September, Azerbaijan's USAR team successfully completed the IER at the medium level, making them the 58th internationally classified USAR team. This marks a significant milestone in enhancing global response capabilities.



Asia-Pacific

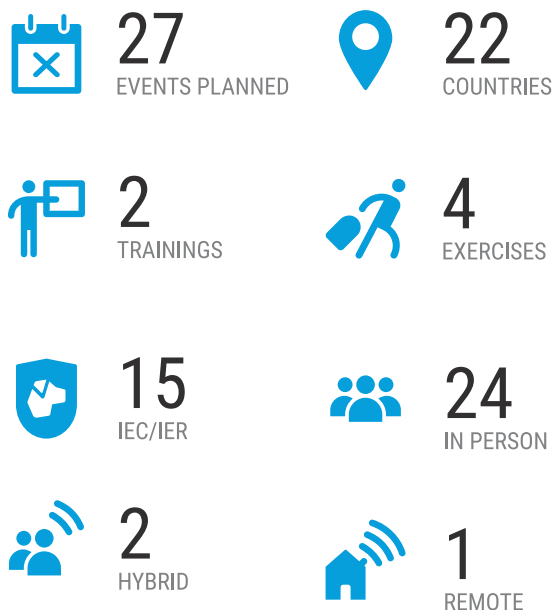
IRNAP Leadership Training: The Korean National Fire Agency hosted the second IRNAP Leadership Course in the Asia-Pacific region from 2-5 September in Seoul, aimed at strengthening regional and global capacity. The course enhanced performance consistency among Technical Support Group (TSG) and Technical Recognition Group (TRG) members by providing a unified methodology and tools for IRNAP implementation and evaluation. This initiative supports INSARAG's localization goals, enabling national USAR teams to adapt global standards to local needs and enhancing disaster response readiness amid increasing climate-related disasters.



APERRE Pakistan: The International Earthquake Response Exercise (IERE) was held from 23-26 October in Lahore, Pakistan. After extensive preparations led by 41 Exercise Controllers, with support from the Regional Coordination Office and OCHA's Pakistan Country Office, the event brought together 244 participants from 23 countries. This exercise serves as a critical platform for enhancing emergency preparedness and fostering international cooperation in disaster response.



Peek into 2025



Changes in the INSARAG Secretariat

Dear INSARAG Family,

The Secretariat is pleased to inform you that **Gaetano Castro** (castrog@un.org), a familiar face within the INSARAG network, has returned to assist with administrative matters related to the IEC/R system. He has successfully taken over from Natallia Hurko, to whom we are deeply grateful for her support over the past year. The handover process is now complete. We are on track with the 15 IEC/Rs planned for 2025, and preparations for the 2026 IEC/Rs are progressing smoothly. Please continue to send all correspondence to insarag@un.org to ensure a prompt response.



Mr. Gaetano Castro
New INSARAG Admin

We would also like to share a message from **Mr. Winston Chang, INSARAG Unit Head and Global Lead:**

"It has been my greatest privilege and honor to serve in OCHA and as the INSARAG Secretariat's Global Lead for a passionate 18 years, making it difficult to say goodbye. I joined OCHA-FCSS in early 2007 when there were only two IEC teams; today, we have 58 teams, with many more in the pipeline. Looking back, I am proud to have coordinated three global meetings in Japan (2010), the UAE (2015), and virtually in Poland (2021). I coordinated responses to several large-scale earthquakes, including the first INSARAG response to the Beirut blast in 2020 during the pandemic, and oversaw the largest INSARAG deployment to the Türkiye/Syria earthquakes in 2023, with participation from over 87% of classified teams. I also contributed to four guidelines reviews (2010, 2015, 2020, and the upcoming 2026 version), two governance reviews (2011, 2024), and advocated for initiatives such as strengthening localization and community first responders, the IRNAP, roles for light teams, NGOs, partnerships, and a flexible flood response framework – my mission here is complete. It has also been a privilege to serve under four Secretaries: Arjun Katoch, Terje Skavdal, Jesper Lund, and Sebastian Rhodes-Stampa and three Global Chairs: Ambassador Toni Frisch, Ambassador Manuel Bessler and Ambassador Dominik Stillhart.

INSARAG is in good shape, and I hope I have met your expectations. Now, it is time for my successor (recruitment is underway) to build on this legacy, with your continued unwavering support, to take INSARAG to new heights.

Thank you again for your guidance and support. It has truly been a privilege to serve!"



Closing Remarks from the INSARAG Secretary

On behalf of the INSARAG global network, we extend our heartfelt thanks to our donors and supporters, whose contributions are vital to the success of our mission. In a world where conflicts and climate challenges dominate the headlines, our teams are continually adapting to meet the demands of an ever-changing landscape, as exemplified by the Hungarian team's response to recent flood emergencies but we must do more to strengthen our abilities to respond flexibly. We must also work to be an inclusive Network and find solutions for those countries for whom the cost of an IEC is prohibitive, to become valuable members of the INSARAG family. As we move forward into a year filled with activities, trainings, and exercises, we are committed to strengthening our network and preparedness to save lives, reduce suffering, and respond whenever and wherever we are needed. Your continued support is indispensable, and we deeply value your unwavering commitment to this shared cause.

Mr. Sebastian Rhodes Stampa,
INSARAG Secretary and Chief of
the Emergency Response Section
of OCHA Geneva



Winston can be reached at:

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/winsarag/>

Acknowledgements

The INSARAG global network expresses profound gratitude to our donors and supporters, whose invaluable contributions drive our vital mission. Your support sustains our efforts to enhance emergency preparedness and response, ultimately saving lives, alleviating suffering, and mitigating adverse consequences. As we embark on a promising year ahead, filled with numerous activities, trainings, and exercises, we are committed to fortifying our network to ensure the seamless effectiveness and coordination of international urban search and rescue assistance.

Drafted by the INSARAG Secretariat, OCHA Geneva, with the guidance from Global and Regional Chairs, and Network partners.

All photos from INSARAG Secretariat unless stated otherwise.

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