



INSARAG Guidelines 2026

Appendix 1.3: Document Structure

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Abbreviations

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

1 Introduction

This appendix describes the structure of the INSARAG Guidelines c.a. It explains how the documents are created, how the decision-making process is designed and what the binding effect of the documents is.

Basically, the documents consist of three layers, top down: Guidelines (5 Volumes), Appendices (Appendices to Volumes, Checklist and Handbooks) and Technical References.

For every layer there are differences in the way they are created, are being decided upon and their binding or non-binding effect. These are explained below.

For comprehensive use, some countries and/or regions may decide to translate these Guidelines c.a. into their relevant language(s). For the purposes of international reference, e.g. during meetings, National Accreditation Process (NAP), INSARAG Recognized National Accreditation Process (IRNAP), or INSARAG External (Re)Classification (IEC/R). However, the published English version is the default reference version.

2 Guidelines

The INSARAG Guidelines form the foundation of the document structure of INSARAG.

WHAT:

They comprise five volumes:

Volume 1: Policy

This volume describes the policies on which INSARAG is built, governed and is being developed.

Volume 2: National Capacity Building

This volume describes how a nation can build and develop USAR capacity, how it can implement a national system for quality assurance and how this fits into the international standards INSARAG sets.

Volume 3: Operations

This volume describes the operational USAR cycle and the operational and tactical arrangements USAR teams must adhere to during operations.

Volume 4: INSARAG External Classification & Reclassification

This volume describes the international peer review system known as the INSARAG External Classification & Reclassification and its processes and obligations.

Volume 5: Operational Field Guide

This volume serves as a handbook for field operations. It describes the operational activities for each USAR team component per phase in the operational USAR cycle.

HOW:

Once in 5 years the Guidelines (Volumes) are updated by the Guidelines Review Working Group based on the general decision-making in both the Team Leaders Meeting and the INSARAG Steering Group. The final version of the Guidelines (Volumes 1 thru 5) is endorsed by the INSARAG Steering Group. Normally a period of 9 months after this decision is taken into account for the new Guidelines to be effective.

BINDING EFFECT:

The Guidelines (Volumes 1 thru 5) are binding documents for all member states of INSARAG. INSARAG members base their policies and practices on the binding content of the INSARAG Guidelines and Appendices. If members have policies and/or practices in place that are not in conformity with the binding content of the INSARAG Guidelines and Appendices, they are to forward to the INSARAG Secretariat a plan describing how they will reach conformity.

3 Guidance Appendices

The Guidance Appendices form the second layer of the document structure of INSARAG.

WHAT:

They comprise the next types of documents (basically all Guidance Appendices):

Guidance Appendices to Volumes:

All of the Volumes 1 thru 5 have one or more appendices that hold extra information.

Manuals:

Manuals hold in depth explanations on a certain topic and serve as knowledge base. The USAR Coordination Manual is the best known and most used manual.

Checklists:

Checklists hold overviews of topics to check. The IEC/R Checklist is the best known and most used checklist.

Forms:

Forms are ready-to-fill-in templates, mostly used for USAR coordination. They form the paper backup for ICMS. Forms basically are appendices to Volume 5.

HOW:

Once a year the Guidance Appendices can, not must, be updated by the respective Working Group. A yearly update is not mandatory and only relevant if changes are needed. The final version of the Guidance Appendices is endorsed by either the Team Leaders Meeting (operational topics only) or the INSARAG Steering Group (changes with policy and/or financial implications). Normally a period of 9 months after this decision is taken into account for the new Guidelines to be effective.

BINDING EFFECT:

The Guidance Appendices are an integral part to the Guidelines and thus are binding documents for all member states of INSARAG. INSARAG members base their policies and practices on the binding content of the INSARAG Guidelines and Guidance Appendices. If members have policies and/or practices in place that are not in conformity with the binding content of the Guidance Appendices, they are to forward to the INSARAG Secretariat a plan describing how they will reach conformity.

4 Technical Reference Library

The third layer of the document structure of INSARAG is formed by the Technical Reference Library.

WHAT:

The Technical Reference Library (TRL) is a knowledge repository for the best practices that have been shared by the respective national Operational Focal Point (FP) and the respective INSARAG Working Group (WG).

HOW:

Identified best practices, e.g. from after action reviews, can be shared by Policy and/or Operational Focal Points with the relevant Working Group(s) for knowledge sharing in the INSARAG network. Working Groups themselves can develop technical references to relevant topics. After consultation with and approval of the relevant Working Group(s), the Focal Point and/or the Working Group can request publication in the TRL on www.insarag.org.

BINDING EFFECT:

Technical References are good/best practises and hence are non-binding. However, they may be referred to during meetings, IEC/R's and exercises.