

Real Time Evaluation of the IFRC's response to the 2023 Syria Earthquake

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Author:

Lois Austin – Independent

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CO	Country Office
CoC	Committee of Contracts
EA	Emergency Appeal
EMT	Emergency Medical Team
EQ	Evaluation Question
ERF	Emergency Response Framework
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning System
ERU	Emergency Response Unit
GoS	Government of Syria
HDCC	Health, Disasters, Climate and Crises Unit
HEOps	Head of Emergency Operations
HoD	Head of Delegation
HR	Human resources
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
KII	Key informant interview
LRC	Lebanese Red Cross
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NS	National Society/ies
NSD	National Society Development
NWOW	New Way of Working
PMER	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting
PNS	Partner National Societies
RCEC	Red Cross Emergency Clinic
RCRC	Red Cross and Red Crescent
RD	Regional Director
RO	Regional Office
RTE	Real Time Evaluation
SARC	Syrian Arab Red Crescent
SPRM	Strategic Partnerships and Resource Mobilisation
ToR	Terms of Reference

Executive Summary

The 7.8 magnitude earthquake which struck southern and central Türkiye and north-western Syria on 6 February 2023, followed by second earthquake of similar magnitude the next day, resulted in significant damage to infrastructure, some 2,357 people being injured and the death of some 1,474 people.¹ More than six million people in Syria were affected, including 300,000 displaced.² Those affected were already vulnerable due to harsh winter weather conditions and as a result of the protracted conflict which has had ongoing devastating economic impacts on the population, in part due to sanctions being imposed on the country. In addition, the earthquake followed a major cholera outbreak in the north-west of the country.

The Syrian crisis is considered one of the world's most complex humanitarian emergencies with a large percentage of the population suffering from multiple vulnerabilities. Some 16.7 million people were estimated to be in constant need of humanitarian assistance even before the earthquakes.³

Following the earthquake, the IFRC upscaled its support to the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) with a particular focus on implementing the “New Way of Working” (NWOW) and the SARC-led earthquake response.

The objectives of this Real Time Evaluation (RTE) of the IFRC's response to the 2023 Syria earthquake were:

- To identify the effectiveness and efficiency of the response to date.
- To ensure immediate course correction is undertaken where possible.
- To document lessons learned in order to adapt systems for future responses in complex settings.

The **geographical scope** of the evaluation was governorates directly and indirectly affected by the earthquake in Syrian government-controlled areas. The **timeframe** under consideration was February – December 2023.

The evaluation focused on responding to a set of 12 key questions centred on the following three focus areas:



¹ Source: Syrian Arab Red Crescent Earthquake Response Plan (20 February 2023)

² Source: IFRC Emergency Appeal - Operational Strategy (March 2023)

³ Source: Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 Humanitarian Needs Overview (December 2023)

The evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach to data collection to ensure that a full range of information was collected. The focus was on qualitative data collection and analysis, based on a review of secondary data and key informant interviews with 56 people (IFRC, SARC, Partner National Society (PNS) and ICRC representatives).

Key Findings

The evaluation made 52 key findings across the three focus areas mentioned above.

IFRC Secretariat coordination structure and operational intent

The added value and relevance of the IFRC's resource support was evidenced in a number of areas. This included the ability to rapidly raise funds at a global level to support SARC in scaling its response to deliver humanitarian assistance to earthquake-affected populations. The swift release of funds from the Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF), followed by the launching of an Emergency Appeal on the day of the earthquake also provided the opportunity for the IFRC to scale up its structure in Syria in order to support SARC for a further two years – a strategy which was not previously possible primarily due to limited funding availability.

Technical support provided by the IFRC to SARC in a number of areas (including communication, finance, health, information management, logistics, planning/monitoring/evaluation/reporting (PMER), resilience planning, risk management, and shelter) was found to be relevant and valuable, although not always sufficiently rapid.

From the outset, the IFRC Country Office (CO) invested in the practical implementation of the “NWOW”. This saw SARC leading the earthquake response and the IFRC and in-country PNS co-leading sectors where they had existing core competencies. The already well-established relationships between SARC, the IFRC and PNS were vital in helping to rapidly cement Membership coordination structures as well as providing the opportunity to develop longer-term resilience plans beyond the initial earthquake response phase.

The IFRC's decision to focus support on Membership coordination was both valuable and valued as it promoted a Federation-wide approach across the SARC-led response. One of the key aspects of Membership coordination were the regular operational coordination meetings which allowed for information-sharing and alignment of sectoral ambitions. However, the meetings lacked a focus on functional coordination, potentially due to the lack of guidance on the implementation of the “NWOW”. The absence of both guidance and metrics to measure the “NWOW” was a key gap in terms of ensuring the ability to measure the effectiveness of the approach.

In spite of the creation of Membership coordination structures, some Members did not adhere to the Principles and Rules. This included the provision of unsolicited in-kind items (both from the Membership and external actors) which put significant pressure on SARC's logistics capacity. At the same time however, some Members who did not adhere to the Principles and Rules were on the ground with in-kind assistance extremely swiftly. This did facilitate SARC's ability to have an active front line presence but highlighted the friction between the pressure and potential chaos of an uncoordinated approach and rapid operational ability and visibility. In an effort to support SARC, the IFRC advocated to the Membership to remind them of the Principles and Rules but with varying degrees of success.

Another gap identified in the evaluation was the assumption made by the CO that joint CO-SARC strategic level decisions would automatically be filtered down within SARC and approved and actioned at the operational level. In a number of instances this proved not to be the case, leading to confusion and delays, particularly in relation to agreement of surge personnel profiles and visa processing.

IFRC Secretariat internal readiness to respond in complex environments

With regard to decision-making structures at CO level, the pragmatic decision was taken for the CO to set the strategic direction for the response (supporting SARC's lead) even though this was potentially in slight tension with the IFRC's Emergency Response Framework (ERF) which gives this role to the Regional Office (RO). Given the complexity of the operating environment and the critical nature of the existing trusting relationship between the CO and SARC, this decision-making structure was however completely appropriate for this environment.

Significant IFRC operational management support was deployed for the earthquake response. This took the form of a Head of Emergency Operations (HEOps) (deployed under the IFRC's surge mechanism); two deputy HEOps (one bilateral deployment and one deployed initially as a Health Coordinator) and an Operations Manager. For some IFRC, SARC and PNS staff, the roles and responsibilities of these positions, as well as the existence of an IFRC Head and Deputy Head of Delegation were not clear.

Unlike other contexts where a HEOps is deployed, the CO maintained strategic responsibility for the strategic direction of the response, leaving the HEOps to focus on operational priorities. Again, due to the political complexity and sensitivities of the context, this was the most appropriate model to adopt.

When considering human resources (HR) surge a number of findings were made. This included the need to maintain a balance between responding to the IFRC's HR requirements to be able to effectively support SARC's response but without unnecessarily inflating the IFRC HR structure and overwhelming SARC – while also acknowledging a wider Membership desire to have staff on the ground – this was challenging for the CO.

Surge rosters within the region (and globally) were unable to meet surge requirements in terms of rapidly available personnel with appropriate language and technical skills; knowledge and experience of working in Syria; acceptability for the Syrian authorities; and/or availability for a minimum one-month timeframe (taking into account that for some staff the lengthy visa process resulted in them being in-country for less than one month). As a result of a combination of all these factors, the RO supported the response with a small number of surge deployments from its own staff.

In total 16 surge deployments were made through the IFRC's surge mechanism, with the HEOps being the first to arrive (three days post-earthquake). This highlighted the possibility for rapid deployments if personnel with the right profiles were readily available.

Outside the surge mechanism a number of delays have been faced in filling longer term positions. In spite of the Appeal being extended until 2025 and the awareness of the need for long-term

positions in the CO, it has taken time to fill a number of key posts which has caused frustration and the need to rely on short-term surge to cover gaps.

The Emergency Response Unit (ERU) deployment (which was the first health ERU deployment to Syria) has already been the subject of a separate evaluation by the Finnish Red Cross and this evaluation attempted not to duplicate the more-in-depth analysis already undertaken. However, there were a number of key findings in relation to the ERU. A number of challenges were faced deploying health ERUs into Syria and the ERUs (vehicles, hardware and personnel) did not arrive in earthquake-affected areas until four months after the earthquake. This was the result of a combination of factors including:

- Lack of readiness on the part of deploying PNS (none of which were based in the region).
- Lack of initial clarity with regard to the type of ERU which should be deployed.
- The requirement for non-standard ERU vehicles to be deployed.
- Complex import requirements in relation to medical items and vehicles.

In addition, the ERU assets and the ERU personnel's arrival in Syria were not synchronised which was not optimal in terms of fulfilling ERU objectives. This risked the ERU team being considered more of a burden to SARC than a support. Outside the emergency phase, the ERUs were however found to be of added value in terms of provision of treatment and capacity strengthening of SARC.

When considering the IFRC's finance policies and procedures and the extent to which they were fit for purpose for the Syrian context, the evaluation found that the arrival of an IFRC finance delegate was vital in ensuring appropriate support to SARC in terms of meeting finance-related requirements. However, the arrival of the delegate more than one month after the earthquake and six months after the previous delegate had left, meant that neither the IFRC nor SARC were fully prepared for managing the significant amount of funds and finance issues post-earthquake.

Positively, the working advance system which was already being used before the earthquake was sufficiently flexible to ensure the ability to provide bulk transfers to SARC even though the reconciliation procedures were lengthy.

IFRC financial risk tolerance levels were primarily found to be appropriately low. However, in emergency contexts, where difficulties in purchasing items which are essential to the functioning of the CO are further compromised by the existence of political and economic restrictions (access to fuel for example), the lack of flexibility in terms of senior management being able to make decisions on the ground resulted in the need to seek written approval from the highest level in Geneva. This was time-consuming and in some cases risked putting the security of IFRC staff at risk.

Evaluation discussions in relation to the IFRC's procurement and supply chain processes highlighted significant levels of frustration, with a key issue being the lack of clarity in relation to local versus international procurement of relief items. This was in part due to a lack of clarity with regard to the levels of risk that the IFRC is prepared to take in red scale emergencies – in Syria this was characterised with procurement staff sticking to established procedures and CO staff pushing for more flexibility in order to avoid having to seek numerous exceptions. This resulted in a tension between the application of IFRC standards and procedures – which indicated that international procurement for certain items (such as food) would ensure

appropriate quality and cost-efficiency - over SARC's preferred local procurement (which was faster although quality was less assured). Decision-making between the CO and RO on this issue was not timely and contributed to significant delays in the procurement and subsequent arrival in-country of key relief items. Linked to this, the IFRC missed a window of opportunity in importing goods into Syria immediately post-earthquake when customs regulations were eased. This also served to highlight the lack of agility and institutional preparedness to navigate contexts characterised by political and economic restrictions. This slow process risked damaging SARC and the Movement's reputation in Syria. It is however important to highlight that the CO took some time to submit logistics requests to the RO, leaving the RO unable to act in advance of receiving a clear response plan and associated logistics requests. The lack of available guidance to support decision-making during key windows of opportunity resulted in over-compliance and this impacted the ability to rapidly import goods and provide surge staff to support the earthquake response.

Resource mobilisation

The final topic evaluated was the IFRC's resource mobilisation strategy. The strategy of trying to raise unearmarked funds was primarily successful. This was potentially as a result of continued donor awareness-raising efforts by the IFRC at country and global levels both prior to and after the earthquake. The efforts made to highlight that in affected governorates there would be no distinction made between earthquake-affected populations and those affected by the protracted crisis were successful, as was the approach of extending assistance to governorates hosting displaced populations. The early communication of these strategies was key.

Preparedness actions that would have facilitated more effective pledge management and donor liaison would have been the existence of a list of all IFRC donor umbrella agreements which have specific limitations or clauses linked to the economic and political restrictions in Syria; and the availability of key messages with regard to the transfer of funds to SARC. The absence of these tools hampered the ability of resource mobilisation teams to clearly engage with partners and donors early in the response.

In addition, introducing the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system at a time when IFRC staff were unfamiliar with it and not all staff had access resulted in different people having access to different information. This was not optimal during an emergency response.

Finally, the ability of SARC to absorb and manage the funds raised, including funds for National Society Development, was not questioned. However, a key challenge was the burden put on SARC due to different donor requirements.

Recommendations

Using the evaluation's key findings as a foundation, a set of 14 recommendations is proposed in order to support the IFRC's future responses in complex settings.

IFRC Secretariat coordination structure and operational intent

Recommendation 1 Tension between the "NWOW" and the ERF

In order to support the implementation of the "NWOW" the ERF (particularly paragraph 27(b)) needs to be reviewed. A revised ERF should:

- Clarify the role of the Host National Society (HNS), and ensure flexibility which highlights HNS capacity and willingness to lead.
- Reflect the potential for IFRC COs to take responsibility for setting the strategic direction of a response where this is most appropriate. In highly political contexts like Syria, emergency response decision-making should be as close to the nucleus as possible i.e. with the Country Office.
- Reinforce the role of the IFRC as a coordination enabler and not an implementer.

Recommendation 2 Development of guidance for implementation of the “NWOW”

Lessons from the application of the “NWOW” in Syria should be consolidated and form the basis for practical guidance. For example, in Syria documents were developed which set out the structure of the coordination mechanisms put in place and which outlined the information-flow within the mechanisms. The End of Mission report of the Deputy HEOPs responsible for Membership Coordination should be used as a starting point⁴.

Recommendation 3 Development of tools to measure implementation of the “NWOW”

In order to help measure and monitor the implementation of the “NWOW” and the IFRC’s coordination role, there is a need to **develop performance metrics, indicators and timelines for future responses** in which the approach is applied.

Having available data on the IFRC’s coordination role may in turn help to ensure that the IFRC can attract funding to facilitate its ability to fulfil this role.

Recommendation 4 Membership coordination platforms and decision-making processes

In order to ensure that all those with decision-making authority are on board with response-related decisions, Membership coordination platforms need to involve all relevant people. This is likely to differ depending on the HNS in question. In preparedness for an emergency, based on a sound understanding of HNS working modalities and existing decision-making structures, COs and ROs should develop a simple one-page document which sets out which HNS decision-makers need to be involved in which coordination meetings and this should be used to help inform Membership coordination platforms and decision-making processes at the outset of an emergency.

IFRC Secretariat internal readiness to respond in complex environments

Recommendation 5 Surge rosters

There is a need to increase the pool of Arabic speaking surge staff across all talent areas.

⁴ Sarah Parisio EoM Report (6 June 2023)

The MENA RO, led by HDCC, needs to invest in developing its regional surge roster, working with National Societies in the region to build reliable technical surge pools which include Arabic speakers. This requires each technical sector point in the region to develop technical surge pools which ensure sufficient diversity in terms of skillsets, languages and gender.

In order to help fund this, each Emergency Appeal in the region should include a budget line for surge capacity strengthening to help build a dependable surge system at regional level.

Recommendation 6 Operational management surge

In future complex environments where the pragmatic decision has been taken for the CO to maintain strategic direction for the response (see Recommendation 3) **consideration should be given to the HEOps maintaining responsibility only for operational priorities.**

Where the decision is taken to deploy additional operational management surge **clear communication on the IFRC's decision-making structure and roles and responsibilities needs to be developed and documented from the outset.** This needs to be regularly disseminated throughout the response, particularly in light of the fact that new staff arrive in the first weeks of response and staff turnover can often be high.

Recommendation 7 ERU deployments

For future deployments, particularly to complex political environments, it is recommended that:

- In support of the findings of the Finnish RC ERU evaluation, there is a need for **clear and improved information sharing between COs, ROs, and in conflict environments the ICRC**, in order that prior to an ERU deployment there is a solid understanding of the context into which ERUs may potentially be deployed. At a minimum this needs to include information on:
 - The capacity of the HNS.
 - Safety and security.
 - Import conditions.
 - The state of existing health services (for health ERUs).
- **ERU personnel should be deployed at the same time as ERU assets** in order to ensure that ERUs can fulfil their expected roles.
- Where an advance assessment team is deployed, **the arrival of the ERU should be timed to coincide with the advance team's departure** in order to avoid loss of momentum.
- The Syria response has highlighted the need for health ERUs to be more flexible and adaptable. **An assessment needs to be done by each RO to better understand the potential health ERU needs and requirements of NS in preparedness for an emergency. The analysis of this assessment should then be used to identify which PNS are likely to be able to rapidly deploy an ERU if required.**
- Consideration should be given to **identifying PNS with ERUs in each region** and/or developing the capacity of PNS who currently do not have ERUs, in order to speed up ERU deployment in times of emergency. This may require capacity building of PNS.
- In conjunction with the IFRC, PNS need to ensure that **the services which health ERUs can provide are regularly adapted in line with existing trends and contexts.**

Recommendation 8 Preparedness for local procurement in Syria⁵

At country and regional level, the IFRC needs to work with SARC to establish a strategy to decide, in case of an emergency, which relief items should be considered for local procurement and which for international procurement. This strategy should be based on a robust market assessment, and ongoing price monitoring (local and international). The strategy should accommodate the possibility of both local and international procurement taking into account speed, price, and quality. A risk mitigation strategy which sets out what level of risk the IFRC is prepared to accept should be included.

Recommendation 9 Fleet preparedness

In order that IFRC Global Fleet have an understanding of potential fleet requirements for emergency response at country level, **a database should be established which includes details of vehicle specifications for each country/context** (e.g. vehicle type, fuel type, plate requirements) combined with import and registration requirements and timeframes.

Recommendation 10 Cross-regional oversight

In future cross-regional emergencies, consideration should be given to setting up **cross-regional procurement and supply chain task forces** which include the global hubs in order to facilitate the anticipation of needs and availability of relief items for each country.

Recommendation 11 Guidance for complex environments

There is a need for a greater understanding of the implications of working in contexts characterised by political and economic restrictions. IFRC's legal team should consider **developing clear and simple guidance for each context where the IFRC has a presence in order to support CO and RO staff in decision-making in such contexts.**

Resource mobilisation and management

Recommendation 12 SPRM Preparedness

⁵ It is understood that there are already a number of processes underway which are likely to address some of the issues highlighted in this evaluation:

- Review and revision of the current procurement manual which currently contains limited adjustments for red scale emergencies. The revised procurement manual will include provision for local procurement and escalated procurement processes for emergencies.
- The ForeSee project which will look, *inter alia*, at simplification of approval processes, including exceptional approvals.

In addition, once the ERP is fully in place it should provide more easily available data on procurement issues, such as approval status, lead times, and delivery data. The recommendations in this evaluation only aim to cover additional issues for consideration emanating from the Syria response.

In order to ensure that SPRM and Finance teams have the necessary information in advance of an emergency it is recommended that:

- For all countries impacted by political and economic restrictions where the IFRC is present, a list of all IFRC umbrella agreements with donors which have specific limitations or clauses linked to restrictions is developed in order that SPRM is able to easily access this information during donor negotiations.
- Key messages for donors which included details on, for example, how to make transfers in contexts affected by political and economic restrictions should be developed in preparedness for an emergency.

IFRC RTE and Evaluations

Recommendation 13 RTE timing

It is recommended that in future, RTEs should take place within the first two months of an emergency in order to provide the opportunity for course correction.

Recommendation 14 Consolidation of RTE findings and recommendations

In order to consolidate findings and recommendations from recent evaluations and RTEs, a meta-evaluation should be undertaken. This will support the identification of common findings and recommendations, feeding into IFRC's learning for the future.

1. Background of the intervention

In the early hours of 6 February 2023, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck southern and central Türkiye and north-western Syria. A second earthquake of 7.5 magnitude followed later that day.

In Syria, in addition to the collapse of a number of buildings and damage to infrastructure, some 2,357 people were injured and 1,474 people lost their lives.⁶ More than six million people in Syria were affected, including 300,000 displaced.⁷ Those affected were already vulnerable due to harsh winter weather conditions and as a result of the twelve-year long conflict which has had ongoing devastating economic impacts on the population, in part due to sanctions being imposed on the country. The disastrous economic and financial situation which has seen spiralling inflation, and a currency plunge which has left much of the Syrian population unable to provide for their basic needs. The earthquake came on top of a major cholera outbreak in the north-west of the country – an outbreak which was largely attributed to a very fragile infrastructure system and a large gap in the capacities of the health system to cope with increasing and newly emerging vulnerabilities.

Earthquake recovery efforts were complicated due to the strain on the overburdened public services sector, and difficulties in gaining access to those affected. Critical infrastructure such as water and sanitation remain overwhelmed or unable to function at full capacity. Urban areas were severely damaged by the earthquake, with already collapsed infrastructure and substandard housing hosting the vast population needing safe accommodation in small and medium-scale cities. This resulted in population movement between governorates and into governorates not directly affected by the earthquake. The earthquake brought new or increased vulnerabilities to people whose coping capacities and resilience were already depleted after 12 years of war and as a result of ongoing crises.

The Syrian crisis is considered one of the world's most complex humanitarian emergencies with a large percentage of the population suffering from multiple vulnerabilities due to several acute crises in addition to the impacts of the 13 year-long protracted conflict. This protracted crisis and economic collapse have left more than 16.7 million people in constant need of humanitarian assistance, even before the 2023 earthquakes.⁸

SARC has a network of 14 branches and 73 active sub-branches, with more than 5,000 staff and 8,000 volunteers. SARC is the largest provider of humanitarian assistance in Syria, and in partnership with a number of United Nations (UN) agencies, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and all components of the Movement, reaches more than six million people each year. The security context in Syria is complex and the IFRC had no presence in affected areas when the earthquakes struck.

⁶ Source: Syrian Arab Red Crescent Earthquake Response Plan (20 February 2023)

⁷ Source: IFRC Emergency Appeal - Operational Strategy (March 2023)

⁸ Source: Syrian Arab Republic: 2024 Humanitarian Needs Overview (December 2023)

2. Objectives, and scope of this RTE

2.1 Objectives

The Terms of Reference (ToR) set out the following objectives:

- To identify the effectiveness and efficiency of the response to date.
- To ensure immediate course correction is undertaken where possible.
- To document lessons learned in order to adapt systems for future responses in complex settings.

2.2 Scope

The **geographical scope** of the evaluation was governorates directly and indirectly affected by the earthquake in Syrian government-controlled areas.

The **sectoral scope** for the evaluation, as set out in the ToR, focused on the IFRC Secretariat's coordination structure and operational intent; internal readiness to respond; and resource mobilisation.

The **timeframe** under consideration was February – December 2023.

It is important to note that at the time of this evaluation there were a number of ongoing reviews and initiatives, looking at similar systems, processes and procedures covered by this RTE (although this RTE focused only on Syria). These other pieces of work were looking in far greater detail at various aspects of the IFRC's structures and systems than it was possible for this evaluation to cover.⁹ It is likely that these broader pieces of work will complement this RTE.

2.3 Evaluation questions and criteria

The ToR proposed 12 key evaluation questions (EQ) and six sub-questions. These questions were slightly modified during the inception phase and matched to indicators and information sources as found in the evaluation matrix (Annex 3). The key EQs were as follows:

Table 1 Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Criteria	Evaluation questions set out in the ToR
1. IFRC Secretariat coordination structure and operational intent	
Relevance	How relevant has the IFRC's financial, technical and in-kind resource been to SARC in terms of scaling its response to deliver humanitarian assistance? What has the IFRC's added value been in these areas?

⁹ For example: The ForeSee project which is looking at policies and procedures within the Corporate Services Division; Operational Readiness, looking at readiness requirements for all stakeholders in all locations, covering both programmatic and support functions; and a review of Supply Chain structure, following the IFRC Supply Chain Review.

Effectiveness	How effective were/are the existing partnerships and relationships between the IFRC Secretariat, Members and the NS in terms of ensuring an effective response?
Effectiveness	In what ways did the partnerships ensure/facilitate efficient and effective emergency preparedness for the response operation both before and after the earthquakes?
Effectiveness	How has 'New way of working' (Agenda for Renewal), been implemented in this emergency?)
Effectiveness	To what extent were the Principles and Rules for Red Cross Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance respected and implemented?
2. IFRC Secretariat internal readiness to respond in complex environments.	
Efficiency	<p>To what extent are IFRC systems, tools, and decision-making processes fit for purpose for rapid and scaled crisis response in complex settings?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Were the HR surge deployments, including ERUs, timely and relevant to the needs on the ground? ➤ Were IFRC finance policies and procedures [been] sufficiently flexible to allow for smooth implementation, as well as adapted to the needs of the Syrian context? ➤ Have IFRC procurement and supply chain management processes been adequate to meet the evolving needs and intended outcomes of the operation? ➤ Have logistics decision-making structures been clear, effective, and appropriate for a complex setting?
Effectiveness	Are the systems in place fit for purpose to deal in complex environments with logistical and administrative impediments?
Efficiency	<p>To what extent has the status of disaster law in the country affected the goods and services' access to the vulnerable populations?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How did the political and economic restrictions in country affect the delivery of services in a timely and effective manner? ➤ How were the relief efforts affected by the restrictions on movement of goods from neighbouring countries?
3. Resource mobilization (RM)	
Efficiency	To what extent did/does IFRC's RM strategy and regular financial analysis and monitoring influence the funds received for this operation to ensure they were used efficiently and in line with the needs of the target population in Syria?
Efficiency	How efficiently and effectively did the IFRC and SARC coordinate with donors to mobilize resources?
Efficiency	What is the capacity of the National Society to absorb and manage resources being delivered/ mobilized for this operation, including time, and earmarked funding?
Efficiency	How are resources being allocated and maintained to ensure the sustainability of the NS operational capacity?

2.4 Intended users of the evaluation

The intended users of this evaluation, as outlined in the ToR, are:

- The IFRC network
- Other Movement partners

The evaluation report will be made available to the Red Cross and Red Crescent stakeholders and external partners involved in the response via the IFRC Evaluation Databank.

2. Evaluation methodology and limitations

Methodological approach: A mixed-methods approach was used for the evaluation in order to ensure that a full range of data and information was collected to respond to the evaluation questions. The focus was on qualitative data collection and analysis.

A purposeful approach was adopted when selecting key informants for interviews. An initial list of key informants was provided by the Evaluation Management Team (EMT) and a snowballing approach was adopted whereby interviewees proposed additional people to speak to. (See below for further detail on key informants.)

The evaluation was primarily conducted remotely although a short visit to Damascus was undertaken in order to conduct interviews with representatives of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), IFRC Country Office (CO) staff, and Partner National Society (PNS) representatives on the ground.

Data were collected through the following methods:

Document review¹⁰: A review of secondary data provided to the evaluators was undertaken throughout the evaluation timeframe.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): A total of 57 KIIs¹¹ were undertaken as follows¹²:

➤ IFRC Geneva ¹³	16
➤ IFRC Syria CO	15
➤ IFRC MENA Regional Office (RO)	13
➤ SARC	8
➤ PNS	4
➤ ICRC	1

Please see Annex 1 for the list of interviewees.

Interviews were semi-structured in nature.

3.1 Ethical considerations and safeguarding

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with international best practices and standards in evaluation and the evaluators respected the key principles of evaluation including:

- Clarity
- Integrity
- Independence
- Honesty
- Transparency
- Accountability
- Accuracy
- Non-discrimination¹⁴ and impartiality
- Do no harm
- Respect for the dignity of affected persons
- Confidentiality

¹⁰ Please see Annex 2 for a list of the key documents reviewed.

¹¹ KIIs were held with 19 females and 37 males.

¹² A total of 45 interviews were foreseen during the evaluation's inception phase. In spite of limited resources, the evaluation team undertook significantly more interviews than anticipated.

¹³ Two Geneva KIIs were deployed to Syria during the earthquake response

¹⁴ For example, on the basis of sex, disability, race, religion or belief, political opinion, sexual orientation, national origin, age, class, language, or any other characteristic.

The evaluation team complied with the evaluation standards and applicable practices outlined in the IFRC Evaluation Framework¹⁵ and linked to the Real Time Evaluation Guidance¹⁶.

3.3 Limitations

The following limitations were faced during the evaluation:

- ❖ The evaluation ToR foresaw an evaluation team of 3 – 5 people (including a Team Leader). The evaluation team eventually consisted of the Team Leader and a volunteer who was only available for a short period of time during the inception and data collection phases and reviewed the draft evaluation report.¹⁷
- ❖ The evaluation was commissioned as a RTE with one of the evaluation objectives being “immediate course correction”. However, the evaluation took place one year after the earthquake, limiting the possibility for “immediate course correction”. (According to the IFRC’s RTE Guide and Procedures (February 2022), RTEs should ideally be undertaken 4-8 weeks into the response.)

3. Key findings

The key findings are presented in line with the three areas of focus as set out in the evaluation ToR namely:

Figure 1 **Evaluation Focus Areas**



3.1 IFRC Secretariat coordination structure and operational intent

When analysing the IFRC’s coordination structure and operational intent in relation to the Syria earthquake response, the following key issues – centred around relevance and effectiveness - were focused upon:

- ❖ The relevance and added value of the IFRC’s financial, technical and in-kind resources to SARC;
- ❖ The effectiveness and efficiency of existing IFRC partnerships and relations with SARC and Members in relation to preparedness and response before and after the earthquake;
- ❖ Implementation of the Agenda for Renewal:

¹⁵ <https://www.ifrc.org/document/ifrc-framework-evaluation>

¹⁶ [IFRC RTE Guide and Procedures UPDATE_28Feb2022.pdf](#)

¹⁷ An additional five days were provided to the lead evaluator to mitigate this unfortunate unforeseen circumstance.

- ❖ Adherence to the Principles and Rules for Red Cross Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance.

3.1.1 Relevance and added value of IFRC's resource support

*Financial support*¹⁸

Immediately following the earthquake CHF 2m was mobilised through the Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) process.¹⁹

On 7 February 2023, the IFRC issued an Emergency Appeal (the Appeal) seeking CHF 80m in order to support SARC's delivery of emergency assistance to earthquake-affected populations. As humanitarian needs increased, the Appeal was subsequently revised and increased to a total Federation-wide funding ask of CHF 200m of which CHF 100m was the IFRC Secretariat funding ask²⁰. The timeframe of the Appeal was extended until February 2025 and the number of people to be assisted increased from 300,000 to 2,500,000. At the time of this evaluation, approximately 50% of the funds sought for the IFRC Secretariat funding had been raised.

Key Finding 1 **The IFRC reacted rapidly to raise funds at a global level to support SARC in scaling its response to deliver humanitarian assistance to earthquake-affected populations. This included releasing DREF funds and launching an initial Emergency Appeal on the day of the earthquake, and publishing a revised appeal within ten days of the earthquake.**

Key Finding 2 **The earthquake struck at a time when the ability to access funding for Syria was increasingly difficult and the IFRC was downsizing its structure and support. Through the Appeal, the IFRC took the opportunity to scale up its structure and support to SARC for a further two years – a strategy which would not have previously been possible primarily due to limited funding availability.**

The IFRC's ability to raise funds from a range of donors was deemed by stakeholders to be a key added value in supporting SARC to scale its response and deliver humanitarian assistance to earthquake-affected populations. At a time when the IFRC Syria Country Office (CO) was downsizing and fundraising for Syria was becoming increasingly hard, the IFRC was quick to identify the opportunity and need for launching a substantial appeal which would enable the IFRC to provide further two years of support to SARC. The development of an Operational Strategy and Response Plan were critical elements of launching and receiving support for the Appeal, and although SARC was central to this process, the IFRC's support was vital.

Key Finding 3 **The IFRC's technical support to SARC's finance team was critical in ensuring SARC's ability to comply with Government of Syria requirements to have a single bank account for all funds being received for the earthquake response. This switch of approach was challenging for SARC and the IFRC was able to help develop Standard Operating Procedures to**

¹⁸ Resource mobilisation is covered in more detail under Section 3.3

¹⁹ 7 February 2023

²⁰ 16 February 2023. The revised Appeal included an IFRC Secretariat funding requirement of CHF 100m.

ensure SARC could track donor funds while complying with government conditions.

The IFRC's added value in terms of financial support extended beyond being able to raise funds at a global level, and included technical support to SARC to ensure that funds received in response to the Appeal were managed transparently and in compliance with Government of Syria (GoS) requirements. Key to this was providing support to SARC in the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the establishment of a unique bank account into which earthquake response funding could be transferred. This requirement stemmed from a condition established by the GoS for organisations in Syria receiving earthquake response funds.²¹ Previously SARC had bank accounts for each project agreement (IFRC and PNS) which facilitated the tracking of funds and expenditure according to the funds received from each donor, so creating one bank account for funds coming for a range of donors, particularly when SARC was already at stretched capacity due to the scale of the disaster, was a significant challenge. The IFRC's support in the development of SOPs for this change of approach was a key added value to ensure that SARC could meet government requirements as well as reliably track donor funds.

Technical support

At the time of the earthquake, the IFRC's Syria CO was relatively small, staffed by a team of five. In spite of this, the IFRC was able to provide diverse technical support to SARC (see Table 3 below), but the real focus of IFRC's support was Membership coordination.

Key Finding 4 From the outset, the IFRC CO invested in the practical implementation of the “New Way of Working” which saw SARC leading the response and the IFRC and in-country PNS taking the lead in sectors where they had existing core competencies. The IFRC's decision to focus support on Membership coordination was valuable and valued as it promoted a Federation-wide approach across the SARC-led earthquake response.

From the outset, the IFRC Syria team was adamant that the optimal approach to providing support to SARC to ensure that it could address the needs of earthquake-affected populations, was not for the IFRC to take a lead response or implementation role, but to take on a coordination role in acknowledgement of SARC's own and Membership existing technical capabilities.

The approach adopted by the IFRC was to mobilise Membership coordination support for SARC for the delivery of humanitarian services. More specifically, the IFRC focused on establishing a common coordination structure and shared leadership model for in-country Membership²², aligned to SARC's priorities.

A key aspect of Membership coordination that was put in place from the outset was appointing in-country Partner National Societies (PNS) with core competences in relevant sectors to support SARC to lead designated technical sector working groups. Importantly, and in line with

²¹ The opening of a separate bank account was a pre-requisite to receive funding in Syrian Pounds into Syria at a preferential exchange rate set by the Central Bank. The GoS also applied a specific exchange rate, linked to the parallel/black market rate for all funds received into each organisation's unique account. The preferential exchange rate was in practice double the regular exchange rate. This necessitated the opening of a separate bank account for the earthquake response and consequently a change in procedures.

²² The following PNS had an in-country presence at the time of the earthquake: British, Canadian, Danish, German, Norwegian, Swedish, and Swiss RC. The Austrian and Japanese RC were providing bilateral support to SARC.

the “New Way of Working” (NWOW), the IFRC did not take the lead in sectors where it did not already have in-country competence and nor was technical expertise sourced-in where the IFRC historically didn’t have a technical lead. Instead, the PNS took the lead where relevant and supported SARC in developing sectoral operational strategies and budgets and providing support in implementation. The approach was facilitated by the existence of technical working groups pre-earthquake. Evaluation discussions consistently highlighted the value of adopting this pragmatic approach which maintained SARC at the centre of its own response and aimed to avoid overwhelming SARC with IFRC surge personnel.

A key feature of the approach was the creation of single coordination platform to support SARC and ensure a Federation-wide approach in relation to planning, communication, resource mobilisation, technical expertise, quality assurance and accountability. Outputs of this approach included a co-created SARC earthquake response plan (released on 20 February 2023) and an Operational Strategy (released on 12 March 2023).²³

Key Finding 5 Regular operational membership coordination meetings were helpful for information-sharing, and aligning sectoral ambitions, but lacked focus with regard to functional coordination in terms of developing joint plans.

Although the scaling up of the pre-existing technical working groups was successful, the weekly coordination meetings leaned more towards information-sharing than functional coordination (such as establishing joint plans).

The IFRC Head of Delegation (HoD) maintained strategic level coordination with SARC (see Section 3.2.1 below). The IFRC also attended non-Movement country level coordination meetings in order to help identify sector level response gaps.

Key finding 6 The technical support provided by the IFRC was relevant but not always timely. For example, essential support in Health and Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting was of value but was insufficiently rapid.

An overview of some of the other areas in which the IFRC was able to provide an added value are set out in Table 2 below:

Table 2 Overview of key areas of IFRC added value

Sector/Area	IFRC Added Value
Communication	On the day of the earthquake the IFRC set up a Slack channel (covering Turkey and Syria) in order to share information between Movement members in relation to the earthquake.
Health	Issues surrounding the deployment of a health Emergency Response Unit (ERU) are covered below under Section 3.2.2. However, in terms of technical support, while discussions as to whether or not to deploy an ERU were ongoing, an Advance Health Assessment Team was deployed to Syria between 13 February and 3 March 2023 in order to determine health needs and propose appropriate health interventions.

²³ Delays in the GoS’ strategic and operational direction for the earthquake had a negative impact on SARC’s ability to rapidly develop an operational strategy, which was ultimately not released until six weeks after the earthquake.

	<p>The results of the assessment were a recommendation to support SARC's Latakia Branch with a Type 1 Emergency Medical Team (EMT) Red Cross Emergency Clinic (RCEC). The aim was to support operational needs in Latakia, allowing SARC's existing medical health units (MHUs), which were distracted from regular activities, to return to their normal provision of health services.</p> <p>There are different perspectives with regard to the appropriateness of sending an advance team. Given the level of health needs pre-earthquake, there was little doubt that a health response was required, leading some to question the appropriateness of sending an advance team. However, the team was able to define the type of ERU that was most suitable for the response.</p>
Information Management	In close coordination with SARC, the IFRC developed products and infographics to reflect operational data in different formats and on a variety of platforms.
Logistics	The IFRC provided crucial support to SARC in developing a mobilisation table which defined resource and in-kind donation requirements. This was the first time that SARC had developed a mobilisation table as in previous responses and appeals the IFRC has taken on this task.
Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting (PMER)	Within ten days of the earthquakes the IFRC MENA Regional Office (RO) had deployed a PMER Coordinator to support SARC. ²⁴ The IFRC's PMER team led a process of co-creating a single IFRC-wide logical framework and response plan with input from SARC HQ, branches and PNS. This necessitated frequent visits by the PMER team to affected branches involving SARC staff and volunteers. In addition, a comprehensive reporting template was created to capture funds coming through the Appeal in a coordinated manner and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEAL) capacity strengthening was provided to help ensure SARC's ability to undertake robust data collection and reporting for the Appeal. However, some of this work was not undertaken until the arrival of the PMER delegate in August 2023 ²⁵ , so not all the necessary systems and tools were in place when the earthquake occurred. The establishment of these tools in a coordinated manner, which required significant work, was helpful in breaking down existing silos.
Resilience planning	The IFRC provided important support to shift the focus from response to investments in longer-term resilience. This was a significant change from the previous decade where SARC's focus had been on meeting immediate needs. SARC had implemented livelihoods projects with the support of the IFRC since 2016. Between 2016 – 2023 SARC had supported more than 1,700,000 people through livelihoods projects. Support from the IFRC facilitated SARC's exploration of areas where it had less expertise and provided the opportunity for SARC to offer a different type of service to the population and the government than historically. The IFRC worked closely with SARC, holding a workshop in June 2023 to help planning for the post-earthquake response phase. The focus was to bring all Membership stakeholders together to coherently

²⁴ Two further PMER surge deployments were made at a later stage of the response – a PMER Officer arriving in mid-March 2023 and the 2nd rotation of the PMER Coordinator provided by the Lebanese Red Cross in mid-May.

²⁵ There had been no IFRC PMER delegate in Syria since September 2022.

	support SARC's resilience planning. The pre-earthquake livelihoods support provided by the IFRC to SARC played a critical role in this planning process.
Risk management	IFRC advocated for a risk management function within SARC and coordinated a technical group with the RO, SARC and the Saudi RC which resulted in the opening of a risk management function within SARC. The risk management function is currently in the set-up stage.
Shelter	The IFRC shelter team provided technical recommendations on the most appropriate form of shelter response in Syria – a complex political issue in Syria – in the shadow of donor preferences which were not aligned with technical recommendations.

In-kind relief

This issue is discussed further under section 3.2.4 below. Due to significant delays in the provision of in-kind resources, the added value of the IFRC in the first months of the response was limited. However, as discussed below, delays were not only as a result of the IFRC's own systems rigidity, but were also caused by delays in developing a response plan for IFRC's logistics staff to work from; lack of clarity with regard to local versus international procurement procedures; and external factors linked to lack of clarity with regard to the prevailing economic and political sanctions.

3.1.2 Effectiveness of existing IFRC partnerships and relationships with SARC and Member National Societies

Key Finding 7 IFRC and in-country PNS had well-established and trusting relationships with SARC before the earthquake. These existing relationships were vital in ensuring the rapid cementing of Membership coordination structures to support SARC's earthquake response in a coherent and consistent manner.

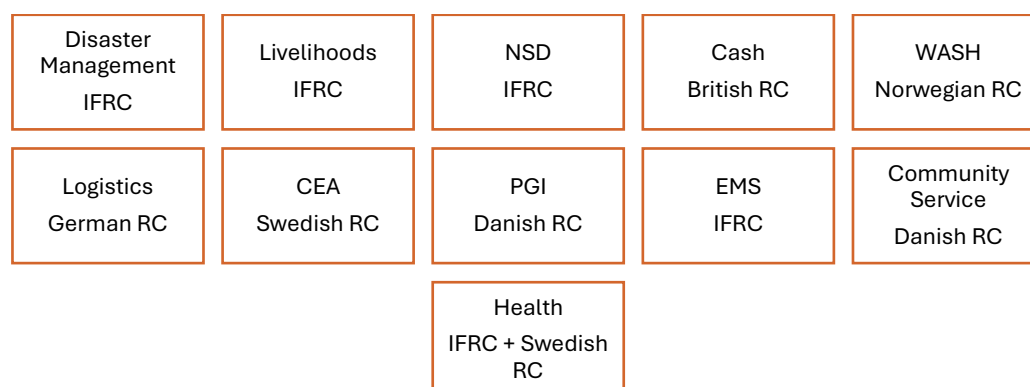
Existing partnerships and relationships between the IFRC, SARC and the Membership were vital in supporting SARC's emergency preparedness and emergency response. Syria is a complex working environment and having trusted partnerships in place was critical in terms of the IFRC's communication with SARC, discussions with SARC at strategic and operational levels, and ability to be of added value for SARC's earthquake response (as noted in Section 3.1.1 above).

Key Finding 8 The PNS in-country prior to the earthquake were key players in the earthquake response, able to provide human resources to help in coordinating the response effort and providing bilateral funding and in-kind support for SARC. Their existing presence facilitated their ability to rapidly ramp up activities in line with the Operational Strategy and Response Plan.

As has been noted above, the IFRC's approach to Membership coordination was built on the already existing approach to technical and strategic coordination, based on robust pre-existing relationships that the IFRC had with SARC and PNS. The existing approach to membership

coordination allowed for the rapid designation of technical sector leads by PNS and the IFRC to support SARC's earthquake response (as noted in Section 3.1.1 above).

Figure 2 – SARC and IFRC-wide coordination structure²⁶



Key Finding 9 **Assumptions were made by the CO that joint CO-SARC strategic level decisions would automatically be filtered down within SARC and approved and actioned at the operational level. In a number of instances this proved not to be the case, leading to confusion and delays, particularly in relation to agreement of surge personnel profiles and visa processing.**

The IFRC CO had a good understanding of SARC pre-earthquake which was helpful during the highly pressurised weeks and months after the earthquake. In spite of this, one key gap in coordination between the strategic and operational levels was the IFRC's assumption that if decisions had been signed off at SARC's strategic level, then this could be interpreted as alignment and agreement at operational level. This incorrect assumption resulted in delays in getting SARC's agreement for some surge profiles and obtaining visas for a number of surge staff.

In addition to the technical support noted in Section 3.1.1 above, the IFRC played a role in humanitarian diplomacy by engaging with a range of actors to ensure that the needs of earthquake-affected populations were addressed. This included working closely with SARC to advocate for access to affected areas and to ensure that the delivery of assistance was not hindered by political or security considerations (see Section 3.2.5 below).

There were a number of activities carried out by the IFRC and the membership in advance of the earthquake which contributed to response preparedness. However, It has not been possible for this evaluation to gather detailed information on all preparedness actions due to lack of time and capacity. The IFRC had set out a number of preparedness actions in its 2023 – 2025 country plan²⁷ (before the earthquake) which included coordination partner support to SARC; enhancing SARC's branch and sub-branch response capacities; and pre-positioning of food and non-food items.

²⁶ The lead for each sector was responsible for programmatic coordination with SARC. Under Health, a number of other PNS were involved in taking the lead for different aspects of the Health response, including the German, Finnish, Danish, Canadian, and Norwegian RCs.

²⁷ IFRC-wide Syria Country Plan 2023 – 2025 (September 2022)

What was absent in terms of preparedness was the readiness to respond to visa challenges; and lack of agility in adjusting to the suspension of political and economic restrictions in relation to humanitarian relief (discussed further in Section 3.2.5 below).

Key Finding 10 The robust relationships between the IFRC, SARC and the Membership were critical in developing longer-term resilience plans beyond the initial earthquake response phase.

In terms of longer-term planning, in April 2023, SARC and the IFRC drafted an approach paper outlining the foundations for medium to longer-term programming following the earthquake.²⁸ This was followed by a workshop for SARC and Movement partners in June 2023 to discuss the revision of the earthquake response plan and medium to long-term recovery and resilience strengthening interventions for the next two years. Forming a vision and approach for the future was relatively new for SARC which had historically focused on the provision of life-saving immediate assistance.

3.1.3 Implementation of the Agenda for Renewal

Coordination of its member National Societies is an IFRC priority and a core statutory obligation, identified in the Agenda for Renewal (the Agenda) and Plan and Budget for 2021–2025. The Agenda (or “New Way of Working” – “NWOW”) places an increased emphasis on making the IFRC a more effective platform for international coordination of emergency operations; and collective representation of the IFRC in relation to policy discussions, National Society Development (NSD) and capacity strengthening. It is important to note that although 14 countries had previously been selected to pilot the “NWOW”, Syria was not one of these countries²⁹. Guidance and tools from the pilot experience were not fully finalised when the earthquake struck.

Key Finding 11 The IFRC CO embraced the “New Way of Working” by focusing on membership coordination as a key area of support to SARC. In the spirit the Agenda for Renewal, SARC, as the best-placed Movement component, led the earthquake response, with coordination support from the IFRC and technical support from the best-placed actors within the Movement.

Key Finding 12 The absence of guidance on the practical implementation of the “NWOW” or metrics to measure implementation of the Agenda for Renewal was a key gap in terms of ensuring the ability to measure the effectiveness of the approach.

Key Finding 13 There is a tension between the IFRC Emergency Response Framework (ERF) and the “NWOW” concept. With no existing guidance on how to implement the “NWOW” in a practical way, and with no updated version of the ERF to take into account the “NWOW”, there is a risk that this tension will arise in future emergencies.

In spite of having limited guidance on the practical implementation of the “NWOW”, from Day 1, the CO developed and invested in a membership-wide coordination structure. The structure

²⁸ *IFRC and SARC – Syria: Resilience Strengthening Approach 2023 – 2025 Strategic Vision* (April 2023)

²⁹ The “NWOW” initiative received the formal go ahead in a meeting with the 14 selected Host National Societies, PNS and the IFRC at Secretary General level on 15 December 2021 and was formally launched in January 2022. Implementation of the approach began in June 2022.

capitalised on existing relationships between membership actors already working with SARC. This approach reduced the burden on SARC and avoided duplication of effort. In addition, it provided the opportunity for increased synergy between PNS. However, there is a potential tension between the IFRC's Emergency Response Framework (ERF)³⁰ (specifically Paragraph 27(b)) which tasks the IFRC Regional Office (RO) with taking the lead in setting and maintaining the overall strategic direction of the operation.

In order to facilitate this approach, a surge Operations Manager was deployed from the end of February to mid-May 2023, tasked with supporting Membership coordination. Membership coordination focused on ensuring information sharing and collaboration on a range of issues such as human resources (HR) coverage for key positions; funding gap analyses; and development of the operational strategy. The early arrival of PMER surge supported (highlighted in Table 3) and followed by a longer-term position, was also critical in supporting implementation of the "NWOW" from a practical perspective.

Key Finding 14 Having IFRC PMER surge support in the initial phase of the response was vital in order to help ensure that SARC would be able to fulfil its role in terms of developing an operational plan and ensuring that tools were in place to collect data and undertake Appeal reporting.

Key tools that were put in place to ensure implementation of the "NWOW" included:

- The development of a Membership-wide MEAL framework for planning and reporting which included a single set of indicators for all IFRC and PNS-supported activities.
- The co-creation of SARC MEAL and technical teams.
- The creation of a shared leadership structure.
- The establishment of technical working groups.
- The creation of a coordinated gap analysis which included ongoing analysis of opportunities for bilateral and multilateral support to SARC's response plan; and direction to ensure a balance of PNS presence and funding across sectors.
- The development of a unified MEAL plan

Although the establishment of coordination structures, following the "NWOW" were deemed successful, some interviewees highlighted the different interpretations of "coordination". Many confirmed that coordination meetings, particularly at operational level, as noted in Section 3.1.1 above.

Implementing the "NWOW" in the height of a large-scale emergency and in an operating environment as complex as Syria required a significant cultural and mindset shift across the Movement, but primarily for the IFRC. The IFRC had to accept the potential of less tangible outputs than seen with the organisation's previous approach to emergency response, with a focus on joint agenda-setting and accountability.

Although not covered in this evaluation's ToR, the issue of Movement relationships between the IFRC, ICRC and the HNS, particularly in light of Seville 2.0 should be mentioned due to the heightened importance of having clearly defined roles and responsibilities when a natural disaster occurs on a conflict environment. Some interviewees perceived Movement coordination to have been strained due to the inability of the IFRC and ICRC to agree in-country

³⁰ *IFRC Secretariat Emergency Response Framework - Roles and Responsibilities* (April 2017)

or at Geneva levels on the co-convenor role. It has not been possible for this evaluation to dig deeper into this issue, but the understanding is, that if this tension existed, it did not impact on SARC's ability to lead the response. In spite of this lack of clarity, two key aspects of Seville 2.0 were put in place (albeit somewhat late):

2 March 2023 Mini Summit to confirm the organisation of the Movement's collective response, based on respective mandates and added value.

11 June 2023 Joint Statement setting out the roles and responsibilities of Movement members.

3.1.4 Adherence to the Principles and Rules

Although interviewees and the review of key documents were not able to provide detail in relation to adherence (or not) with the Principles and Rules, many of those spoken to highlighted how challenging the arrival of unsolicited donations was for SARC.³¹

Key Finding 15 The provision of unsolicited in-kind items, both from the Membership and external actors, put a significant pressure on SARC's logistics capacity. In an effort to support SARC, the IFRC advocated to the Membership to remind them of the Principles and Rules with varying degrees of success.

SARC was responsible for accepting and offloading in-kind goods sent both by the Membership and other actors. A number of deliveries, coming from land, sea and air, arrived with no packing lists and with no reference to or alignment with SARC's response plan. Without respecting the need for coordination, particularly in a response of this size, was an issue of concern. SARC was responsible for receiving plane loads of goods, many with no packing lists and which were not in alignment with SARC's response plan. Although the IFRC did not have a role on the ground in this regard due, the RO did advocate to the Membership to remind them of the Principles and Rules requirements.

Key Finding 16 Some Members who did not adhere to the Principles and Rules were on the ground with in-kind assistance extremely swiftly. This did facilitate SARC's ability to have an active front line presence but highlighted the friction between the pressure and potential chaos of an uncoordinated approach and rapid operational ability and visibility.

In spite of the challenges of non-adherence to the Principles and Rules, according to a number of stakeholders, many Gulf countries/NS were on the ground within twenty-four hours of the earthquake, providing in-kind assistance and facilitating SARC's front line presence, highlighting a tension between an uncoordinated approach which provided rapid visibility and adherence to the Principles and Rules.

³¹ As a result of its auxiliary role, combined with its position as a member of the country's High Relief Committee, SARC has a first-line strategic leadership role in emergency response. SARC is the lead implementing partner of the UN and a number of international organisations have been required to partner with SARC in order to register in Damascus.

3.2 IFRC Secretariat internal readiness to respond in complex environments

When analysing the IFRC's readiness to respond in complex environments, the following key issues which centred on efficiency, were focused upon:

- ❖ The extent to which the IFRC's systems, tools and decision making processes were fit for purpose for rapid and scaled crisis response in complex settings;
- ❖ The extent to which the status of disaster law in Syria affected the ability of vulnerable populations to access goods and services.

In addition, consideration has been given to the decision-making approach adopted between the IFRC's RO and CO.

3.2.1 Decision-making structures

This evaluation was not tasked with assessing the decision-making structures between the CO and the RO. However, interview discussions emphasised the importance of the approach adopted by the CO and RO in relation to the Syria earthquake, particularly as it somewhat deviated from the standard IFRC approach, including that outlined in the ERF.³² The established approach in terms of roles and responsibilities of the CO, RO and Geneva HQ is set out in Figure 2 below:

Figure 3 Country, regional and HQ emergency roles and responsibilities



Key Finding 17 The pragmatic decision was taken for the CO to set the strategic direction for the response (supporting SARC's lead here) but this is in tension with the IFRC Emergency Response Framework.

Within 48 hours of the earthquake the IFRC Regional Director (RD) had travelled to Damascus. Discussions between the RD and the IFRC's Syria Head of Delegation (HoD) concluded that the most effective way for the IFRC to manage the response would be to divert from the standard approach (Figure 2 above) and instead for the CO to take the lead in decision-making and in

³² IFRC Secretariat Emergency Response Framework – Roles and Responsibilities (April 2017)

setting and maintaining the strategic direction of the operation. This approach was deemed to be pragmatic due to the complexities of working in Syria, the CO's existing knowledge of the context and the CO's well-established relationships with SARC. While there was consensus that this approach was the most practical and effective, it was not in line with the IFRC's ERF. The decision to manage the response at the local level did have some implications in terms of adjusting normal practices such as the provision of procurement support from the RO to maintaining responsibilities at country level.

Key Finding 18 Unlike other contexts where a HEOPs is deployed, the CO maintained responsibility for the strategic direction of the response with the HEOPs focusing on operational priorities. Due to the political complexity of the context, and the well-established relationship of trust between the CO and SARC, this was an appropriate model to adopt.

Another shift in standard emergency response decision-making was that on the arrival of the HEOPs, the HoD maintained responsibility for developing a response strategy with SARC – a role which in less politicised and complicated environments would normally be taken on by the HEOPs. As a result, the CO maintained responsibility for the strategic aspects of the response and the HEOPs took the lead on operational aspects (drawn from the Operational Strategy). This approach was deemed successful and avoided a number of pitfalls which may not have been foreseen by a HEOPs who was new to a highly politicised and complicated country such as Syria.

Key to the CO's response coordination structure was the HoD's familiarity with the context, and understanding that having too many incoming staff (such as surge staff) who were unfamiliar with Syria risked disrupting existing relationships with SARC and ultimately negatively impacting the response.

Key Finding 19 Significant operational management surge support was deployed for the earthquake response both through the IFRC's surge mechanism as well as bilaterally from PNS. This took the form of a HEOPs; two deputy HEOPs; and an Operations Manager. For some IFRC, SARC and PNS staff the roles and responsibilities of each of these positions, as well as of the HoD and DHoD were not clear.

As seen in Figure 4 below, the IFRC's management structure for the earthquake response consisted of a HoD who was already in post before the earthquake, supported by:

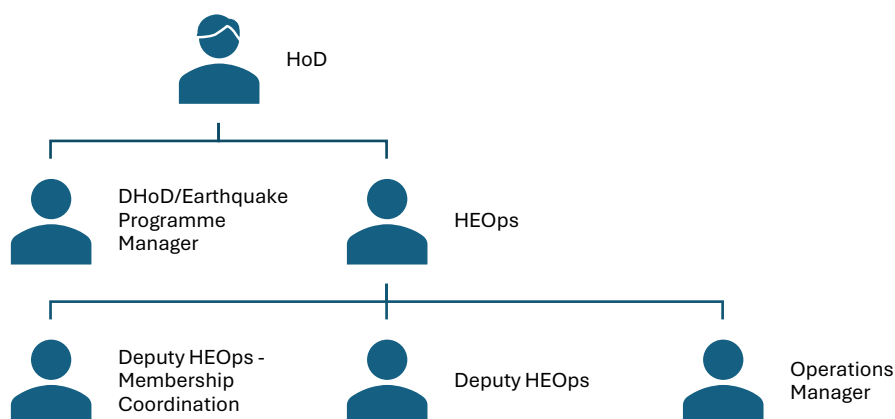
- A Deputy HoD³³ (in place before the earthquake)/Programme Manager (focusing on longer-term support)
- HEOPs
- Two Deputy HEOPs³⁴

³³ The Deputy HoD (DHoD) does not feature on the IFRC-wide response structure organigram but interviews emphasised the role of the DHoD in the response, including in humanitarian diplomacy efforts.

³⁴ It is important to note that the Deputy HEOPs roles were not deployed through the IFRC's surge mechanism into these positions. One Deputy HEOPs was deployed as the Health Coordinator with the aim of then replacing the first HEOPs on his departure. However, upon arrival in Syria, the Health Coordinator was given the joint role of Health Coordinator/Deputy HEOPs by the CO. The second Deputy HEOPs was deployed bilaterally by a PNS and embedded into the earthquake response structure but was not deployed through the IFRC's surge mechanism.

- Operations Manager (originally supporting from the RO before becoming in-country Operations Manager for the earthquake response and in place after the second HEOps rotation)

Figure 4 Earthquake management structure



In addition, a Strategic Support Coordinator was deployed for three months, partially based in Beirut and partially in Damascus, focusing on strategic operations management. However, adding this post with the already relatively heavy operations structure in place resulted in the position focusing more on the transition from acute emergency response to longer-term resilience and humanitarian diplomacy matters, both issues which were beyond the capacity of the Operations Manager.

Although the IFRC's management structure was clear to those who were part of it, a number of other stakeholders from IFRC, SARC, and the PNS, stated that it was difficult to understand the roles of the HEOps, Deputy HEOps, Programme Manager and Operations Manager. Organigrams were shared to try and facilitate an understanding of roles and responsibilities but this was not necessarily sufficiently helpful at the height of an emergency response with so many moving parts.

3.2.2 Timeliness and relevance of HR and ERU surge deployments

Human Resources - surge deployments

Key Finding 20 Maintaining a balance between responding to IFRC's HR requirements to effectively support SARC's response without unnecessarily inflating the IFRC HR structure and overwhelming SARC, whilst also acknowledging a wider Membership desire to have staff on the ground was challenging.

Key Finding 21 Surge rosters within the region (and globally) were unable to meet surge requirements in terms of personnel with appropriate language and technical skills; knowledge of the Syrian context; rapidity of deployment; security clearance from the Syrian authorities; and/or availability for the

minimum one-month deployment timeframe. Partly as a result of this, the MENA RO supported with a small number of surge personnel.

There were a number of key factors surrounding the IFRC's approach and challenges linked to the deployment of rapid response HR. These included:

- The lack of Arabic speakers within the IFRC's surge system at regional and global levels and the under-developed MENA regional surge roster and surge system. This resulted in the RO proposing some of its own staff (whose capacity was already stretched, having responsibility for 17 countries) for surge deployments.
- A reluctance by the CO to bring excess staff into Syria due to the potential risk of endangering the existing CO rapport with SARC and concerns about overwhelming SARC and the CO with surplus staff. This led to the adoption of a strategy of bringing in surge capacity that the CO could manage efficiently and which would be of genuine added value to SARC.
- The need for the Syrian authorities to approve surge personnel profiles – some potential surge staff were unable to receive security clearance if they had previously worked for specific organisations.

From the outset, the CO felt under pressure to receive surge personnel from the MENA RO. While this was appreciated, the CO found itself having to push back on offers of surge support. An important factor behind this was the CO's practical approach of ensuring that SARC consented to the profiles being deployed (see Section 3.2.1 above regarding some challenges faced). SARC was keen to maintain a small and trusted team around them as opposed to having to manage multiple new surge personnel into the operation and while SARC welcomed membership support, the NS was clear with regard to which positions would be an added value and which would not. Taking this into account, the CO adopted the strategy of mapping the existing in-country profiles across the Membership and then identifying the gaps which needed to be filled in order for the IFRC and Membership to be able to support SARC's operational response plan.

In spite of this practical approach, which aimed to ensure a balance between managing political sensitivities and ensuring appropriate IFRC surge support to SARC, the CO felt obliged to accept certain positions which were not in its original thinking - in part because they were new positions for the delegation. This included risk management and security management posts. Ultimately however, having personnel in place to support these elements of a significantly scaled up response was beneficial.

With a reliance on SARC for obtaining visas for deployed personnel (with the exception of some RO staff who already had visas), ensuring SARC's consent for incoming surge staff was vital. Internally, as noted above, the IFRC made some errors here by not consistently simultaneously obtaining both strategic and operational management level approval from SARC for surge profiles. This resulted in some delays in rapidly getting visas processed. It should be noted that in the first two weeks post-earthquake, visa approval was extremely rapid (24 hour turnaround). But after this, long delays were reported, and due to the sensitivities around numbers and profiles of surge staff required, this window of opportunity for ensuring rapid surge deployments was perceived by some to have been missed in a number of cases. GoS capacity was also critical

with regard to the Movement's response, as lack sufficient staff to speed up key issue such as visa (and import) approvals created bottlenecks and increased the pressure on SARC as the gatekeeper not only for the Movement but for external partners in relation to visa approval and processing.

In addition, the IFRC wanted to maintain positive relationships with PNS who were keen to provide surge support. In order to avoid PNS deploying staff without a clear role, but aiming to ensure that PNS had the opportunity to support the response with relevant surge personnel, the CO took the lead in identifying positions which were crucial to ensuring an effective response. This was successfully managed, albeit under pressure, by the delegation. The delegation's knowledge of the level and size of a response structure that would be able to function in Syria and that could also be managed politically was critical in this regard.

Key Finding 22 Of the 16 surge deployments, the first to arrive within three days of the earthquake was the HEOps, highlighting the possibility for rapid deployments.

Excluding ERU personnel (which is covered further below), a total of 16 surge deployments³⁵ were made to support the earthquake response as outlined in Table 3:³⁶

Table 3 Overview of Syria Earthquake Surge Deployments

	Start	Title	Month
1.	9 Feb 2023	Head of Emergency Operations	February 2023
2.	12 Feb 2023	Health Coordinator	
3.	17 Feb 2023	Medical Logistics Officer	
4.	17 Feb 2023	Communications Coordinator	
5.	17 Feb 2023	PMER Coordinator	
6.	19 Feb 2023	Supply Chain Coordinator	
7.	20 Feb 2023	Shelter Coordinator	
8.	20 Feb 2023	Security Officer	
9.	27 Feb 2023	Security Coordinator	
10.	27 Feb 2023	Operations Manager	
11.	10 Mar 2023	PMER Officer	March 2023
12.	17 Mar 2023	HEOps, 2nd rotation	
13.	26 April 2023	Partnership and Resource Development Officer	April 2023
14.	19 May 2023	PMER Coordinator, 2nd rotation	May 2023
15.	1 June 2023	Shelter Coordinator, 2nd rotation	June 2023
16.	25 June 2023	Security Officer, 2nd rotation	

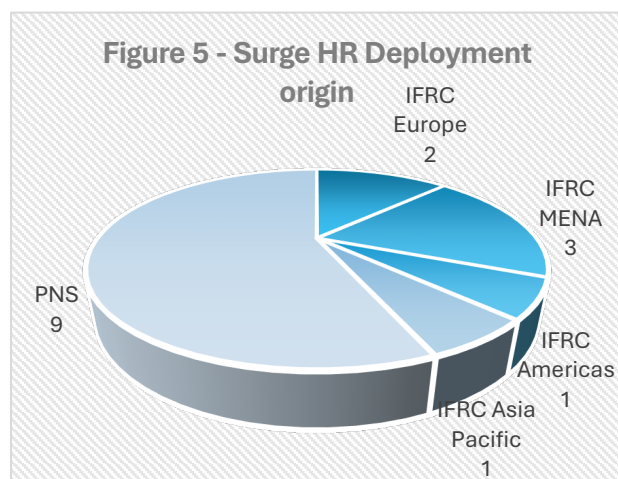
It is potentially worth noting that double the number of deployments were made to support the earthquake response in Turkey (38 in total). In the same region, and taking into account the different Host National Society (HNS) capacities and contextual differences, a total of 28 surge

³⁵ IFRC Emergency Operations - 2023 Key Figures

³⁶ Please see Annex 4 for an overview of positions deployed; dates of deployment; and deploying component.

deployments were made in support of the response to Storm Daniel in Libya on 5 September 2023 and 53 to support the 8 September 2023 earthquake response in Morocco.

The majority of surge deployments were made within three weeks of the earthquake and the later deployments were primarily second rotation deployments. Positively, the deployment of the HEOps was the first to take place, three days post-earthquake. In spite of this, a number of those spoken to for this evaluation stressed that HR processes were slow, at times as a result of delays in visa approvals but also due to internal IFRC processes which saw delays in the opening of longer-term positions due to the need for the positions to be graded (see below) as well as delays in shortlisting and interviewing candidates.



As can be seen in Figure 5, the majority of deployments were supported by PNS (two such deployments came from within the region, from the Lebanese Red Cross), with the remainder covered by IFRC's own personnel, including the deployment of three staff from the MENA RO.

SARC interviewees were clear that the most useful IFRC surge staff were those who knew Syria, and this was primarily staff from the MENA RO. There was acknowledgement that surge staff did have experience, but what

SARC needed in addition was those with a pre-existing understanding of the complexity of the context. SARC was left with the impression that a number of international staff arrived with no clear role and SARC did not have the time to teach or mentor them. In addition, some international staff were only in-country for short periods (not the minimum one-month expected of surge staff. This was primarily linked to having to wait for visas for both Lebanon and Syria) leading to a high turnover of staff which was additionally overwhelming for SARC.

ERU deployment

Immediately post-earthquake, SARC requested an Emergency Medical Team (EMT) Type 2 Hospital. Prior to deploying this an Advance Health Assessment Team (see Table 3, Section 3.1.1 above), carried out a health needs assessment between 13 February and 3 March 2023 and instead recommended the deployment of a Type 1 EMT i.e. a Red Cross Emergency Clinic (RCEC).

Key Finding 23 A number of challenges were faced deploying health ERUs into Syria – the first such deployment into the country. There were significant delays in the arrival of the emergency medical ERUs which arrived in earthquake affected areas four months after the earthquake. This was due to a combination of factors including: lack of readiness on the part of deploying ERU NS (none of which are based in the region); lack of clarity with regard to which type of ERU should be deployed; unavailability of the specific type of ERU identified through the health assessment; complex import requirements in relation to medical items and vehicles. In spite of this, the ERUs were found to be of added value in terms of provision of treatment (outside the emergency phase) and capacity strengthening of SARC.

Key Finding 24 There was pressure to activate the ERU mechanism before having a full understanding of what the ERU would be used for and what its added value would be. The deployment of an advance assessment team was helpful in contributing to this understanding.

Normally ERUs would arrive within 48 hours of the advance team's arrival. However, in this case the assessment took some 15 – 20 days to complete, and according to interviewees this was followed by ongoing discussion as to the form that the RCECs would take. In spite of the advance assessment not being completed until early March, a Finnish RC evaluation of the ERU deployment stated that Finnish RC began preparations for the ERU deployment on 20 February 2023, relatively soon after the earthquake and a day before the official deployment order was given by the IFRC on 21 February 2023³⁷. There are therefore contradictory accounts with regard to the role and need for the advance assessment team as the ERU deployment order and preparations were initiated before the assessment was complete.

Although the assessment team's proposal for a Type 1 EMT was broadly accepted by SARC, SARC sought mobile health clinics with particular specifications (such as ambulances with in-patient capacity) which were not in line with the assets held by ERU NS nor with the existing ERU standard equipment.

As a result, PNS worked together in order to deploy three custom-made ambulances for the earthquake response.³⁸ This joint modality was chosen as none of the deploying health ERU NS had the requested non-standard units ready in their warehouses. Two of the vehicles were procured and imported by the German RC³⁹ and the third vehicle was provided by the Portuguese RC.

The requirement to provide non-standard RCECs (in the form of ambulances) resulted in delays in the deployment of the vehicles. In addition, due to the strict importation regulations of the GoS regarding medicines and medical consumable expiry dates, there were additional delays in the arrival of ERU medical kits as no ERU NS had kits available which complied with customs regulations. This lack of readiness, combined with import requirements, resulted in the vehicles arriving in Latakia and Jableh only at the beginning of June 2023.

Key Finding 25 The ERU asset and the ERU team's arrival in Syria were not synchronised. This hampered the ability of the ERU team to operate. While this did allow the ERU team to recruit and train national staff, it was not optimal in terms of fulfilling ERU objectives and risked the ERU team being seen as more of a burden than a support to the NS. The consequences of receiving ERU personnel without assets were not fully assessed at CO and RO level.

The first international ERU delegates to arrive in Syria were the team leader and the IFRC security delegate in mid-March 2023 – over one month after the earthquake. At this stage, there was already an awareness of the possible delay in the arrival of the ERU hardware and discussions were held between the PNS and IFRC with regard to potentially halting sending the remainder of the ERU team into Syria. The decision was taken to go ahead and nine ERU delegates arrived in

³⁷ *Evaluation of the Red Cross Emergency Clinic ERU Deployment to Syria 2023* (30 December 2023)

³⁸ Led by the Finnish Red Cross, supported by the Canadian, Japanese, French, German and Portuguese RC.

³⁹ The vehicles arrived at SARC's Tartus warehouse on 10 April 2023 but only arrived in Latakia on 3 June 2023 due to the need to apply stickers, install VHF radio, and plate registration.

Latakia at the end of March, with work starting on 14 April. The Interagency Emergency Health Kits (IEHK) arrived in Latakia by 15 May 2023. Although the early stage of the response was over, the focus shifted to recovery as opposed to response.⁴⁰ This was the first RCEC deployment to Syria.

A separate evaluation of the ERU deployment was undertaken by the Finnish Red Cross at the end of 2023.⁴¹ In an effort to avoid duplication, this evaluation has drawn from the findings of that evaluation which found *inter alia*:

- SARC was not familiar with the ERU modality and the IFRC Regional and Country Offices also had a limited understanding of the health ERU tool and their own roles and responsibilities in supporting its work.
- The RCEC worked independently from other Movement activities in Syria.
- The ERU modality was not the most efficient IFRC tool to be used in the response due to the substantial delay in the importation of the vehicles.
- There was a pressure from the IFRC's operational management for the ERU team to become operational and receive patients even though the vehicles, equipment and medicines were not in-country. This caused unnecessary strain, particularly for national team members.

Although the deployment of the RCEC fell well outside expected timelines, evaluation discussions and a review of key documents show that there was still an added value for the deployment in terms of supporting primary healthcare activities in the Latakia/Jableh area and building the capacity of SARC. Between June and August 2023, over 3,000 patients were treated by the mobile clinics.⁴² The units were handed over to SARC mid-August 2023 with support from the Danish RC and Canadian RC continuing to support SARC in the development of national ERU activities.

However, essentially the ERU was not part of the emergency response phase and instead played an important role in the recovery phase, leading to questioning with regard to whether the ERU was the most appropriate modality to be deployed in such a fast-paced and complex operating environment.

Interviewees also highlighted the lack of continuity between rotations of ERU staff, leading in some cases to a loss of momentum with key initiatives (primarily linked to the three-week delay between the departure of the advance assessment team and the incoming ERU team). In addition, the need for PNS to combine efforts in order to deploy an ERU was not ideal and was reported to be one of the contributing factors relating to the ERU's delayed arrival.

Although there was an awareness of the difficulties surrounding the importation of vehicles and medical items into Syria, interviewees have highlighted that an opportunity was missed when the government exempted import conditions for medicines and medical equipment (which would have included the ERU vehicles) in the weeks immediately after the earthquake. In spite of this, the decision to deploy the RCEC went ahead.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

⁴¹ *Ibid*

⁴² *Evaluation of the Red Cross Emergency Clinic ERU deployment to Syria 2023 – Finnish Red Cross* (December 2023)

Recruitment for longer-term positions

Key Finding 26 In spite of the Appeal being extended until 2025 and the awareness of the need for long-term positions in the CO, it has taken time to fill a number of posts which has caused frustration at CO level due to waiting for positions to be filled and relying on short-term surge deployments to cover the gaps.

Beyond the surge deployments, another challenging area was recruitment for long-term positions which was reported as slow. For example, the delegation's procurement delegate only arrived in Syria in August 2023. This delay in recruitment resulted in the Operations Manager being tasked with procurement which potentially contributed to some of the delays in this area. It is reported that since the arrival of the procurement delegate (who has subsequently resigned) procurement has gone much more swiftly.

Given the scale of the earthquake and the early indications of how successful the Appeal (which was extended to February 2025) was, a more optimal approach for recruitment of longer-term positions could have been initiated from the outset in order to avoid having HR gaps or over-reliance on short-term surge deployments.

3.2.3 Flexibility of IFRC finance policies and procedures

Three of the key issues relating to the IFRC's finance policies and procedures which caused challenges during the earthquake response were:

- The use of working advance procedures for large sums of money.
- The initial absence of sufficient IFRC finance HR in-country.
- Strict application of financial approval levels during an emergency response.

Key Finding 27 For the first 12 months post-earthquake the IFRC's working advance system was applied in Syria. There has been some flexibility in the system in terms of providing bulk transfers and although the reconciliation procedure has been lengthy and required significant HR, it has worked.

Before the earthquake, IFRC standard working advance procedures for financial transfers to SARC were slightly different than in other countries. Due to the economic restrictions causing a devaluation in currency, the IFRC undertook bulk transfers to SARC of 80% of total funds received which had to be accounted for before the next working advance could be provided i.e. SARC was obliged to provide transactional level receipts and report on each transfer before any further transfers could be made. With the working advance system, money was only counted as disbursed by SARC when a satisfactory retrospective reconciliation of transactions had been undertaken by the IFRC. This was a lengthy process, requiring significant SARC and IFRC HR, with reporting by SARC tending to be completed within six months as opposed to the standard three months.⁴³

Key Finding 28 Although the IFRC finance delegate arrived more than one month after the earthquake, having dedicated IFRC finance HR in-country has been vital in ensuring appropriate support to SARC to support the NS in meeting finance-related requirements.

⁴³ Starting in 2024, the second year of the earthquake appeal, the IFRC has moved to the Working With Project Partners (WWPP) approach which is closer to a cash advance system whereby SARC will not have to provide receipts for every expenditure but will undergo review and audit.

The earthquake saw a rapid and dramatic increase of funds coming into SARC via the IFRC (the first transfer from the DREF was for CHF 1.7m; the second transfer was for CHF 10).⁴⁴ At the time of the earthquake the IFRC had no finance delegate in country, the previous delegate having left six months before the earthquake. The new finance delegate arrived in Syria on 15 March 2023, more than one month after the earthquake (filling a long-term position which was planned before the earthquake took place). By June 2023 (four months post-earthquake) a finance officer had been hired. These two staff were not employed specifically for the earthquake but their arrival was timely.⁴⁵ The presence of these staff has been vital and SARC has confirmed that, although there have been difficulties in the working advance system as it has been challenging to get timely invoices from branches, there have been no delays in fund transfers from the IFRC. Pre-earthquake finance training at branch and HQ level has been extremely important here.

Key Finding 29 **IFRC financial risk tolerance levels are appropriately low. However, in emergency contexts where difficulties in purchasing essential items such as fuel are further compromised by the existence of economic and political restrictions, the lack of flexibility in terms of senior positions having to seek written approval from the highest level in Geneva is time-consuming and could put the security of IFRC staff at risk.**

Another finance related issue faced during the earthquake response was a reported lack of flexibility with regard to financial approval processes and limits at delegation level. This is perhaps more linked with procurement and also connected to the IFRC's approach to working in a country facing political and economic restrictions. An example of where the lack of flexibility here caused difficulties for the CO was the need to purchase fuel for in-country vehicles. With fuel only easily accessible on the black market, the inability of the HoD to make this purchase without higher level approval resulted in the need to seek exceptional approval from the Under Secretary General based on a "Note to File" which was limited to 5,000 litres per month and valid for only three months, after which the "Note to File" had to be reviewed. The "Notes to File" first needed approval from the RO, and the Regional Director. Not having fuel for vehicles posed a potential security risk for IFRC staff but there was an absence of balancing this risk against the strict application of financial sign-off procedures.

As noted in Section 3.1.1 above, the government's requirement for each agency to have a unique earthquake bank account caused challenges for SARC in terms of being able to track funds and expenditure per donor. However, support from the IFRC in terms of developing SOPs to manage this was essential.

3.2.4 Logistics, procurement and supply chain management processes

Interview discussions highlighted significant frustration and varying perspectives in relation to IFRC procurement and supply chain management processes. Key issues included:

- Lack of clarity with regard to local versus international procurement procedures.

⁴⁴ The second transfer was split into tranches of CHF5m; CHF2.5m; and CHF 2.5m in order to hedge against exchange rate risk and losses due to the sharp weakening of the Syrian Pound against the Swiss Franc and due to the fact that funds were directly exchanged into local currency upon transfer.

⁴⁵ The finance delegate and officer were also responsible for all finance issues relating to the nine projects covered in the annual and the four emergency projects in Syria (of which the earthquake appeal is one).

- The regional logistics team being dependent upon receiving the Operational Plan and mobilisation table before being able to proceed with accurate procurement support.
- Lack of capacity at RO level – an issue which had already been emphasised through a recent Supply Chain Review (compounded by limited availability of surge support with appropriate language skills combined with the approach of not overwhelming the CO and SARC with excessive surge staff).
- Perceptions relief stocks were not available from the Dubai warehouses because the decision had been taken for items to be sent to Turkey first.
- External barriers such as strict and timely customs and import requirements.

Local versus international procurement

Key Finding 30 Procurement and supply chain procedures were unclear, particularly in relation to the most effective and cost-efficient approach relating to local versus international procurement. There was a tension between the application of IFRC standards and procedures (international procurement) and speed but at the potential cost of quality (local procurement). This caused significant delays in the procurement of key relief items for the earthquake response.

Key Finding 31 A customer service mindset is not well embedded in the IFRC's logistics, procurement and supply chain modus operandi. Lack of communication on procurement progress between the RO and the CO led to frustration between the two offices.

In the years preceding the earthquake SARC had undertaken its own procurement at a local level. Following the earthquake, the IFRC agreed to provide SARC with in-kind support for a number of items. However, IFRC procurement procedures set out requirements in relation to levels of approval and approaches to local versus international procurement. For example:

- For procurements over a specific amount or of a certain quantity different processes are triggered in relation to sign-off levels and the need for sealed bids – measures which are important for a number of reasons including risk mitigation and accountability.
- For procurements over CHF 50k, the IFRC Regional Logistics Unit needs to provide technical approval within 72 hours. Procurements worth more than CHF 200k need to undergo a technical evaluation by Geneva or Budapest where the Committee of Contracts (CoC) has a further 72h to come back with any questions, adding another layer between the CO and the CoC.

According to interviews, by Day 3 of the operation, although the RO had not received a mobilisation table from Syria, separate tenders were run for a variety of items in order to be ready to procure. This tender process took two weeks. Discussions between the CO and the RO on whether to proceed with local or international procurement then went on for a further two weeks, with SARC and the CO preferring the local option and the RO preferring the international option. There was significant strength of feeling from both sides on the best option taking into account speed, price, accountability and political sensitivities.

Upon the arrival of the HEOps in Syria, the first procurement and supply chain task force meetings were held between the CO and the RO to analyse and define the strategy for support from the RO (this was around 11/12 February 2023).

Key Finding 32 The lack of IFRC’s full legal status in Syria resulted in SARC relying on the Lebanese Red Cross for customs clearance, transport and warehousing support.

The Lebanese RC (LRC) played a key role in supporting supply chain management through receiving items on behalf of SARC in Lebanon and transporting goods to Syria through their own pipeline. The IFRC did support coordination here but due to the fact that (at the time) the IFRC did not have full legal status in Syria, the IFRC could not receive goods in its own name⁴⁶. LRC was able to provide warehousing, customs clearance and transportation support in order to store and ship incoming items into Damascus as well as to SARC warehouses in Tartous and Lattakia.

Key Finding 33 The RO was dependent on receiving the earthquake operational plan and mobilisation table before being able to undertake procurements and have an understanding of what was needed, where and when. These documents took some weeks to produce, contributing to delays in the procurement process.

The earthquake response mobilisation table took 40 days to produce and had to be adjusted as it initially reflected a number of items which would never be covered by donors. Although the process was slow, this was the first time that SARC had produced a mobilisation table, so was an important exercise. While the mobilisation table was being finalised, SARC was already receiving goods on behalf of donors and partners.⁴⁷ Unknown to the IFRC, SARC had also created a verbal agreement with the Lebanese RC which was shipping relief items into Syria on SARC’s behalf.

Key Finding 34 One of the main challenges was in relation to the procurement of food parcels. A number of issues contributed to delays in food procurement including risk tolerance in relation to SARC doing local procurement versus the RO doing international procurement; with different technical quality thresholds between SARC and the IFRC lying at the heart of the issue. Ultimately, with the need to seek exceptional approvals to deviate from standard procurement processes, it took nearly three months for SARC to receive food parcels from the IFRC. This slow process risked damaging SARC and the Movement’s reputation in Syria.

⁴⁶ The IFRC’s lack of full legal status also impacted on the importation of vehicles. (Legal status has recently been obtained and the CO is testing the importation and registration of vehicles which is so far proving to be a lengthy process.)

⁴⁷ In the year following the earthquake, SARC was responsible for customs clearance, shipments, transportation to warehouses of 322 cargo planes; seven ships; nine small sea shipments; and 459 trucks.

One of the key items which was subject to confusion between the CO and RO was food parcels. According to the RO, when the Logistics Request (LR) for food parcels was received a tender was launched immediately. As SARC was the final user, the tenders and samples were sent to SARC



to review. However SARC did not find the samples satisfactory.⁴⁸ There was significant to-ing and fro-ing between SARC, the CO and the RO on whether local suppliers or international suppliers were most appropriate (see footnote 39 for further detail). When the CO decided that local procurement would be done this was in conflict with IFRC's normal procedures and quality assurance standards. In addition, it is reported that the international procurement process was significantly cheaper than the local procurement

process but that the local procurement option was much faster than international procurement. The tension between speed and quality and between flexibility and rigidity of procedures was a source of significant tension which remained unresolved at the time of this evaluation.

At the same time, the IFRC CO did not have its own framework agreements in Syria due to lack of legal status. The IFRC did support SARC to establish framework agreements for local procurement of food parcels, food testing, hygiene kits and dignity kits. The framework agreements' pricing were indexed to the Syrian Central Bank earthquake exchange rate in order not to subject suppliers to the undue burden of foreign exchange risks.

Key Finding 35 There is an ongoing lack of clarity with regard to the levels of risk that the IFRC is prepared to take in a red scale emergency response with diverging opinions across the organisation. In Syria, this was characterised with procurement staff sticking to established procedures with CO staff (and sometimes RO staff) pushing for more flexibility. The rulebook was followed, but it was not a rulebook that was sufficiently adapted to emergency response.

Key Finding 36 Although the Federation-wide country plan for 2023 foresaw the prepositioning of food and relief items for 10,000 households, these stocks were not yet in place at the time of the earthquake due to lack of funding. This resulted in a key gap in the IFRC's preparedness.

Key Finding 37 The absence of a regional preparedness relief or fleet stock contributed to delays in both in-kind and fleet supply for the earthquake response.

The difficulties faced within the IFRC in terms of reaching agreement with regard to the benefits of rapid, more expensive local procurement with less accountability, versus following standard procurement procedures which were slower but with higher levels of quality assurance were the subject of ongoing tension. A number of those spoken to for this evaluation emphasised that the IFRC's own processes in relation not only to procurement but also on how to decide on levels of risk tolerance were not fit for purpose in this environment. There remains a lack of clarity with regard to the levels of risk that the IFRC is prepared to take in a red scale emergency response with diverging opinions across the organisation. This was characterised with procurement staff

⁴⁸ There are different approaches to technical testing with SARC conducting food taste testing and IFRC conducting lab testing which focuses more on ingredients and technical quality.

sticking to established procedures with CO staff (and sometimes RO) staff pushing for more flexibility. This led to the CO having to draft decision papers and support a response through seeking exceptions - an ineffective approach to supporting an emergency response, particularly of this scale.

Key items which were the subject of local versus international procurement discussions were⁴⁹:

Table 4 Food and hygiene parcel tender processes

Item	Tender processes	Date of CoC approval for local purchase ⁵⁰
Food ⁵¹	Two local tender processes were launched: one to cover immediate needs and the second through framework agreements.	27 June 2023
Hygiene and dignity kits	Local tender processes launched as international procurement of these items was not advised due to cultural sensitivities.	5 May and 8 May respectively

Dubai relief stock

Delays in the Syria CO submitting LRs to Dubai for certain items meant that by the time LRs were submitted, there was no stock remaining as it had already been sent to Turkey (or elsewhere). Table 5 below compares the dates of the LRs for a number of the key items required by both responses. LRs were submitted by the Turkey response between 9 – 13 February, whereas the first LRs from Syria were not submitted until mid-March.

Table 5 Comparison of Turkey and Syria LRs and delivery dates⁵²

Item Name	Syria Response		Turkey Response	
	Date of LR	Date of arrival	Date of LR	Date of arrival
Jerrycan, Foldable	14/03/23	25/06/23	09/02/2023	21/02/23

⁴⁹ This report does not aim to cover all procurement and supply chain issues faced during the Syria response as there was insufficient time or capacity for this. However, a number of additional items, such as IT equipment were also subject to delays, often due to external factors, for example, the need for US Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) approval prior to shipping US IT items.

⁵⁰ Based on local sourcing tenders conducted by SARC.

⁵¹ The RO received an LR for the first food parcels on 1 March 2023 and launched a tender for the food parcels the following day. According to the RO, it took the RO one day to prepare the Request for Quotations and suppliers were given six days to respond. Analysis and completion of the tenders took 48h and the CO/SARC were informed of the outcome on 9 March. At this stage discussions regarding the local purchase option were ongoing with SARC proposing the local procurement of 2,000 food parcels as an emergency procurement. A technical evaluation meeting was held on 13 March for a technical evaluation. On the same day, a local CoC was conducted. Upon SARC's request, the IFRC sent food parcel samples to Syria for technical evaluation on 14 March 2023. By 25 March the RO received feedback from SARC that the samples were not acceptable. The IFRC HoD requested the RO to cancel the international tender. Local tender processes were then initiated by SARC.

⁵² Information on additional items for both responses can be found at Annex 5

Tarpaulins	20/03/23	06/05/23	09/02/2023	21/02/23
Kitchen Set, Type A	14/03/23	26/06/23	09/02/2023	20/02/23
Body Bag	20/02/23	20/05/23	09/02/2023	20/02/23

The average time between submission of an LR for Syria and delivery was just over two and a half months. Interviews with the RO highlighted that due to lack of access to some of the affected areas, receiving detailed needs assessment information from the CO took some time. There appears to have been significant frustration in relation to the perception that the Turkey response was prioritised over the Syria response because Turkey was quicker to submit LRs. However, there was perhaps a lack of awareness that supply chain can only react to LRs, and does not take decisions with regard to timings and what goes where. As a result, Dubai responded to LRs from Turkey which was quick to develop its response plan.

Key Finding 38 Two IFRC COs (Syria and Turkey) and two IFRC ROs (MENA and Europe) were supporting the earthquake response. A lack of cross-RO oversight, particularly in relation to availability of pre-positioned stock in Dubai, exacerbated the delays already being faced by the Syria CO in terms of fulfilling its Appeal commitments.

A complicating factor was the fact that the same disaster was being overseen by two different ROs. There appears to have been lack of strategic oversight at cross-regional level in relation to procurement and supply chain requirements which left the Syria CO having to re-work framework agreements with suppliers as there was no stock left in Dubai and this caused delays in receipt of critical relief items such as kitchen sets and tarpaulins.

Fleet

Another item which was raised during this evaluation was in relation to fleet. IFRC's Global Fleet in Dubai has a number of different options for providing fleet support in times of emergency. These include:

Figure 6 *Dubai fleet vehicle sourcing options for emergency operations*



Key Finding 39 There was a delay in getting vehicles into Syria. One contributing factor was the need for petrol-fuelled as opposed to diesel-fuelled vehicles, a specification which the Dubai Global Fleet office was not previously aware of.

For Syria there were no vehicles in-country that could be re-allocated to the operation. Although there were some diesel vehicles available in Lebanon (option 2), the CO could not accept these vehicles as they only wanted petrol-fuelled vehicles (an issue that had reportedly not been clear

from the outset)⁵³. In addition, although some Lebanon-based vehicles were petrol-fuelled, they had diplomatic plates and the CO felt this could pose a security risk. Looking at option 3, Global Fleet tried to access vehicles from partners like Land Rover but this wasn't possible due to the import permit requirements and government restrictions. Vehicles were not available from either Jordan or Lebanon. This left the final option of purchasing vehicles in the UAE, which were then sent by road from Dubai, to Jordan, and on to Syria. A key factor in this was the need for petrol as opposed to diesel vehicles and reportedly, Global Fleet had not been informed of this requirement previously.

Undoubtedly various aspects of the IFRC's own procurement and supply chain processes were slow for a number of reasons including:

- Late submission of LRs from the CO to the RO.
- Lack of capacity at RO level to swiftly respond to and execute LRs.
- Inability of the CO to make essential purchases such as fuel from the black market requiring sign off from the CO, RO, Regional Director and the USG.
- Medical procurement requires sign off from Geneva. With only one person in Geneva authorised to give approval for medical procurement this can cause bottlenecks.

However, there were issues which were to an extent outside IFRC's control which further exacerbated the situation including:

- Lack of pre-planning by the CO and RO (and thus lack of awareness on the part of Global Fleet) in relation to vehicle requirements for Syria (petrol fuelled instead of diesel fuelled vehicles).
- The necessity for SARC to be involved in procurement issues.
- Lack of IFRC full legal status resulting in the ability to receive goods in its own name.

As highlighted in Section 3.2.1 above, the adjustment of roles and responsibilities between the RO and CO did put the RO in an untested position.

3.2.5 Ability of vulnerable populations to access humanitarian goods and services

Years of political and economic restrictions have hampered the ability of aid agencies to easily transfer funds and goods into Syria and made the purchase of critical items such as fuel challenging. Regulatory frameworks both within and outside the country have impacted the delivery of humanitarian aid and dictated what form of humanitarian assistance can be delivered (for example, limits in relation to reconstruction and cash distribution). A feature of the restrictions has been slow processing times in receiving approval from government authorities for visas/permits for humanitarian personnel and for the importation of goods, particularly vehicles, medicines, and IT equipment. The existence of legal and regulatory restrictions has been compounded by the conflict and following the earthquake, accessing those affected in parts of Syria not under the authority of the government was unpredictable and difficult.

⁵³ IFRC's standard is for diesel-fuelled field vehicles. Petrol-fuelled diesel vehicles need to be purchased in the UAE and this process can take a number of months. There is a very low demand for such vehicles. Maintaining a stock of pre-insured petrol-fuelled field vehicles runs the risk of depreciation if the vehicles are not used.

Compliance with the restrictions was a daily element in the work of all Movement components which impacted finance, logistics, and the delivery humanitarian services.

As set out in Table 6 below, a number of exemptions were made following the earthquake in order to facilitate humanitarian response operations. These exemptions were generally for a period of six months, running from February – August 2023.

Table 6 *Overview of earthquake-specific lifting of political and economic restrictions*

Date	Restrictions lifted / Approach amended
9 February 2023 – 8 August 2023	The US Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) issued Syria General Licence (GL) 23 which authorised, for 180 days, that all transactions related to earthquake relief that would be otherwise prohibited by the Syrian Sanctions Regulations (SySR) would be authorised. ⁵⁴
9 February 2023 – 8 August 2023	The Central Bank of Syria stated that external remittances transferred for the purposes of emergency response to the earthquake would be excluded from the provisions of Resolution “145/LE2”, meaning that the exchange rate for the transfers of UN, international and humanitarian organisations would be close to the black-market exchange rate.
15 February 2023 – 14 February 2023	The UK issued two general licences (GL) to facilitate humanitarian relief efforts linked to the earthquake for six months. The first GL authorised activities which would otherwise have been prohibited by the asset freeze for specified groups or organisations, and their service providers. The second GL extended the protection offered by the existing humanitarian exception to petroleum prohibitions for UK-funded persons to all those conducting earthquake relief efforts in Syria and Turkey. ⁵⁵
27 February 2023	The EU established a humanitarian air bridge for Syria which resulted in two emergency aid planes landing in Damascus. The cargo included relief items from the IFRC and the EU. ⁵⁶

Key Finding 40 The IFRC was not institutionally prepared to navigate contexts characterised by political and economic restrictions and restrictions on the movement of goods from neighbouring countries.

Key Finding 41 A window of opportunity for importing goods into Syria without having to adhere to stringent customs regulations was missed in the two weeks post-earthquake. This points to a lack of awareness of changes on the ground combined with a lack of agility and lack of clarity with regard to decision-making which would have potentially allowed the IFRC to capitalise on the realities on the ground.

Key Finding 42 The lack of available guidance to support decision-making during key windows of opportunity when restrictions were eased or waived resulted in over-compliance which impacted on the ability to rapidly import goods and provide surge staff to support the earthquake response.

Some IFRC interviewees stated that even though the above exemptions were put in place, outside the Geneva sanctions team and the CO there was a lack of understanding within IFRC as to what this meant. This resulted in continued over compliance which hampered the IFRC’s

⁵⁴ [Treasury Issues Syria General License 23 To Aid In Earthquake Disaster Relief Efforts | U.S. Department of the Treasury](#)

⁵⁵ [UK takes steps to further facilitate aid flow into Syria - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

⁵⁶ IFRC Syria Earthquake SitRep No. 4 (27 February 2023)

ability to act rapidly in terms of importing goods or fast-tracking personnel into the country. The IFRC Legal Department did produce a factsheet in early March 2023⁵⁷ but on its own, it did not set out in layperson's terms the practical (and positive) implications that the six month exemptions could have for the different IFRC teams which could have taken advantage of the temporary change (for example, different Corporate Services teams).

3.3 Resource mobilization

When considering the IFRC's resource mobilisation for the Syria earthquake, the evaluation centred on efficiency, focusing on the following points:

- ❖ The extent to which the IFRC's resource mobilisation strategy and financial analysis and monitoring influenced the funds received;
- ❖ IFRC and SARC donor coordination;
- ❖ SARC's capacity to absorb and manage resources for the earthquake response;
- ❖ Allocation of resources to ensure the sustainability of SARC's operational capacity.

3.3.1 Efficiency of IFRC's resource mobilisation strategy and financial analysis and monitoring

Resource mobilisation strategy

The initial EA for CHF 100m was amended to CHF 200m to cover a Federation-wide approach. With difficulties in funding for Syria in the build up to the earthquake, expectations in terms of financing the EA were significantly lower than what has ultimately been achieved.

Key Finding 43 The fundraising strategy for the Syria Emergency Appeals was to raise unearmarked funds. This was successful. It is not clear the extent to which this was as a result of continued donor awareness-raising efforts by the IFRC, including at CO level both prior to and after the earthquake.

The fundraising strategy sought to obtain unearmarked funds. Interviews revealed that this strategy was relatively successful with approximately 30% of the funds received being fully unearmarked. Where there was earmarking this tended to be linked to undertaking spending within a specific timeframe – normally six months. Some earmarking was linked to reporting terms.

Key Finding 44 IFRC's humanitarian diplomacy efforts as part of the resource mobilisation strategy with donors highlighted that funds would be targeted at earthquake-affected governorates but that no differentiation between the affected population and those affected by the protracted crisis would be made; and the intervention would be extended to governorates hosting earthquake-displaced populations. The early communication of these strategies to donors was key.

Other critical decisions in relation to the fundraising strategy were taken on early in the response. These were communicated to back donors early on. This included:

⁵⁷ Factsheet – Sanctions relevant to the IFRC response to the earthquake in Syria – Updated Situation (7 March 2023)

- That funds would be targeted toward the three earthquake-affected governorates but that there would be no differentiation between earthquake-affected populations and those affected by the protracted crisis as this would be too politically sensitive.
- The area of intervention was then expanded beyond the three affected governorates to also include governorates to which people had been displaced. Communicating this early on was critical (and no donors objected) in order to avoid donors asking for a return of funds.

These humanitarian diplomacy efforts were led by the CO management who had a strong pre-existing understanding of what would be both politically acceptable and in line with scaling up operations to support those affected.

Key Finding 45 **There was a lack of alignment between the CO and the RO with regard to what was feasible in relation to funding reporting timelines. This resulted in reporting timelines being agreed which it was not feasible for the CO to meet.**

The main challenge in terms of financial analysis and monitoring was being able to submit donor reports on time. Delays in the IFRC CO and RO receiving relevant financial documents from SARC and NS result in systems showing little or zero expenditure which is not necessarily a true reflection of actual expenditure. This delay had an impact on reporting to donors for the Syria response. Not being able to give formal expenditure figures was a key issue. In order to have accurate information for fundraising there is a need for data to come from the field and with SARC's initial weak MEAL team, this was a challenge.

Another challenge in relation to reporting was the lack of clarity with regard to RO and CO roles and responsibilities in relation to reporting timelines. At times, it was not feasible for the CO to meet agreed reporting schedules (e.g. interim reports to be submitted at a certain point) which had been communicated by the RO to Strategic Partnerships and Resource Mobilisation (SPRM) because of delays in getting relevant data from the NS. It is understood that there had been a lack of communication between the RO and CO as to what was actually feasible.

Key Finding 46 **Introducing the ERP at a time when IFRC staff were unfamiliar with the system and not all staff had access resulted in different people having access to different information which was not optimal at a time when the Appeal was raising significant amount of funding. This was combined with insufficient staff being dedicated to pledge registration in the early days of the Appeal, as staff were also having to focus on active fundraising.**

When the Appeal was launched in February, the first phase of the IFRC's new ERP was also launched. This caused challenges for those involved in SPRM and Finance as they were learning how to use the new system at a time when significant amounts of money, which needed to be registered in a timely manner, were coming in. At the time, not everyone necessary had access to the new system which led to different people having access to different information at different times which was chaotic. (At the time of this evaluation this was still the case.)

In the early days of the response, insufficient human resources were dedicated to pledge registration as staff were also focused on active fundraising.

Key Finding 47 **Due to the absence of a list of all IFRC's umbrella agreements which have specific limitations or clauses linked to the political and economic**

restrictions applied to Syria, significant time had to be dedicated to pledge management and donor liaison at the height of the earthquake response.

A number of partners have counter-terror clauses linked to donations for Syria and it took significant time checking which partners this applied for. This took additional time and addition required liaising with donors when responding to an emergency in a country which was the subject of political and economic sanctions.

Key Finding 48 Key messages with regard to transfer of funds to SARC (as a result of the prevailing economic and political restrictions) were only developed post-earthquake. This hampered the ability of resource mobilisation teams to engage with partners and donors early on in the response and provide guidance on the most efficient way of actioning transfers.

In addition, at the start of the response there were no readily-available messages for SPRM to communicate with donors on what was or wasn't possible in terms of transferring funds to SARC. This caused delays in terms of not being in an immediate position to respond to questions such as what wording could be used on payments to avoid banks blocking transfers.

No donor mapping was shared with this evaluation, leading to the understanding that this was not part of the resource mobilisation strategy/approach.

However, even before the earthquake the IFRC had aimed to focus on humanitarian diplomacy efforts, holding discussions with back donors to raise awareness of what the IFRC was doing in terms of supporting SARC. It is not clear the extent to which this facilitated the significant unearmarked funds raised through the earthquake EA.

Significant effort was put into ensuring that the political and economic restrictions in Syria did not affect the delivery of RCRC services. This entailed the CO and IFRC's legal team going through each individual pledge and each individual back donor to identify any relevant clauses and ensure compliance.

The budget was put together not only based on needs but also on the absorption and implementation capacity of SARC.

One key issue was the inability to receive funds for reconstruction efforts. Post-earthquake and with significant damage to buildings and infrastructure, this was a challenge for the recovery phase. This had to be navigated and wording and terminology for donors used to ensure that funds could be received and used appropriately.

At the height of the earthquake response, the IFRC started working on the new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system.⁵⁸ It took some weeks for the CO to understand the earmarking requirements in ERP, causing challenges for the management of resources in terms of alignment with the operational strategy and earmarking processes. Nobody in the CO had been trained on the system and there was a preference for maintaining the old system which had clear approval processes and was a system which the CO was familiar with. The CO did request additional support in order to manage this manually instead of using the ERP but it took some months for this request to be fulfilled.

⁵⁸ The ERP system integrates the financial, project management, risk management, procurement and HR elements of an operation.

3.3.2 Efficiency and effectiveness of IFRC/SARC donor coordination

The IFRC took the lead on donor resource mobilisation for the EA but coordinated with SARC regarding all pledges. This approach was successful and was helped by SARC hiring a grant manager six months after the earthquake.

There were some mixed results in relation to donor negotiations. For example, ECHO immediately wanted to send goods to Syria through the Emergency Humanitarian Response Capacity. The CO was clear what items were required stating that it could not accept goods which were not required. ECHO provided a list of items they would be shipping and at a political level it was agreed that some items, specifically tents, would be stored as shelter items were politically sensitive. ECHO wanted the tents distributed immediately and ultimately, although the IFRC was able to facilitate this, it had to be undertaken outside the earthquake response plan. While this showed flexibility on the part of both the donor and the IFRC it was outside the original plan.

The IFRC supported gap analyses to map out who within the Movement was funding what and set that against SARC's budget.

IFRC went beyond its resource mobilisation coordination role by also supporting SARC with the coordination of bilaterally donated relief goods.

3.3.3 SARC capacity to absorb and managing resources

Key Finding 49 SARC's ability to absorb and manage resources was not questioned. A key challenge though was the burden put on SARC due to the different reporting systems and reporting requirements of SARC's donors.

The ability of SARC to absorb and manage resources was not questioned by interviewees during this evaluation. What was highlighted was the huge burden put on SARC because of the different reporting systems and reporting requirements of SARC's multiple donors (both within the Movement and externally).

3.3.4 Allocation of resources for sustaining SARC's operational capacity

Key Finding 50 The inclusion of funds for NSD in the EA, in part by fast-tracking the pre-earthquake National Society Development workplan and having an NSD delegate in place, was an essential approach to ensuring the sustainability of SARC's operational capacity beyond the emergency phase.

The pre-earthquake NSD workplan was fast tracked by using EA funds. A total of CHF 1.1m was included in the Appeal for this. The ICRC and Danish RC had supported a pre-earthquake Preparedness for Emergency Response exercise and community assessments had already been undertaken. This was important in ensuring that the NSD plan which was included in the Appeal was evidence based.

Having an NSD team involved from day one of the response, ensuring longer-term thinking was integrated was crucial here. Ensuring that SARC's corporate services were included under the NSD budget was also vital in terms of allocation of resources to sustain SARC's operational capacity. In addition, through the Appeal, the IFRC was able to positively respond to SARC's request for risk management support through the provision of a risk management delegate.

Key to sustaining SARC's operational capacity was ensuring that the right systems were in place. The financial capacity strengthening perspective of SARC was an important component of the budget, building capacities of SARC finance staff at both branch and HQ levels. Through the EA, the IFRC has also provided infrastructure support to SARC, through the provision of IT equipment as well as the donation of the ERU clinics.

Key Finding 51 A critical element of focusing resources for sustaining SARC's operational capacity was incorporating collective medium to longer-term programme through resilience strengthening within the Appeal. This built on an approach already set out in SARC's 2023 – 2027 Strategic Plan.

Within three months of the earthquake, efforts were made by the IFRC to lay the foundations for a collective medium to longer-term programming in order to improve the resilience of affected communities. The basis for this approach was already established in SARC's Strategic Plan 2023-2027 which focused on comprehensive, coordinated response, recovery and resilience building, as well as on the IFRC's Earthquake Operational Strategy 2023-2025 which included an early recovery and resilience strengthening approach. In April 2023, a concept note was drafted outlining the key considerations, milestones and terminology for linking immediate humanitarian assistance plans and longer-term programme. The aim was to ensure that all efforts contributed to strengthening early recovery and resilience programming in the earthquake-affected area and beyond and as a guide for the next planning steps between SARC and IFRC network partners.⁵⁹

Making the shift from immediate response to recovery/resilience has however been challenging. This was in part due to external factors such as the country's economic situation and the ongoing gaps in responding to pressing and life-saving needs. In addition, the reducing in the budgets of other organisations will impact SARC's own capacity. For example, WFP plans to completely stop food distributions which will result in hundreds of SARC staff job losses. To try and address this challenge, a resilience workshop was held at the RO with SARC in June 2023 but so far no concrete level programme has come from this.

Key Finding 52 Planning for the IFRC's downsizing when the Emergency Appeal ends in 2025 will be critical for ensuring SARC's sustainable operational capacity.

With the Appeal coming to an end in 2025, a key aspect of planning will be preparation for the IFRC's downsizing while ensuring SARC's sustainable operational capacity. Discussions during this evaluation did not centre on the IFRC's withdrawal strategy although preparing over the coming months is essential.

4. Key lessons

Table 7 below provides an overview of the key lessons identified in the RTE.

Table 7 Key lessons

Topic	Lesson
The Agenda for Renewal	Ensuring that SARC was the convener and led the earthquake response was appropriate and effective. This is a shift from past practices but was pragmatic and practical.

⁵⁹ *Resilience Strengthening Roadmap in the Aftermath of the Syria Earthquake and amidst a protracted conflict – Concept Note V2* (30 April 2023)

	Allocating sector leads to Members who had existing relationships with SARC and in-country expertise was an appropriate approach to help ensure effective planning for the response and facilitate a Federation-wide response.
Decision-making structures	In-country CO staff rapidly put internal coordination mechanisms in place which were suitable to the context. These mechanisms were maintained and incoming surge staff, particularly the HEOPs, worked in line with the approach led by the CO.
	In politically sensitive environments where the CO has strong existing relationships with the National Society, ensuring that the CO maintains strategic responsibility for the response is appropriate.
	Making assumptions that decisions taken at strategic level of a National Society will be filtered down to management and operational levels risks miscommunication and can cause confusion and delays.
	Ensuring clarity of roles and responsibilities, particularly when significant operational management surge is deployed, through regular dissemination of decision-making structures and processes is vital.
Surge tools	Gaining a full understanding of the potential added value of an ERU deployment, combined with an assessment of the feasibility of deploying the ERU team simultaneously with the ERU assets, is essential prior to agreeing on an ERU deployment.
IFRC policies, procedures, and risk tolerance levels	The lack of flexibility and clarity with regard to decision-making at CO level and risk tolerance in times of emergency, particularly in environments affected by political and economic restrictions, resulted in time-consuming approval processes.
Preparedness for red scale emergencies in contexts characterised by economic and political restrictions	Lack of institutional preparedness and guidance on navigating contexts characterised by political and economic restrictions hampered the IFRC's ability to make quick decisions when windows of opportunity were presented.
Resource Mobilisation	Humanitarian diplomacy efforts to ensure that funds raised through the Appeal could be used more widely than just on those directly affected by the earthquake was appropriate due to the high levels of need in Syria and the prevailing political situation.
	Taking the opportunity to include plans for the longer term and NSD in the Appeal ensured the ability to support SARC's operational sustainability beyond the emergency phase.
IFRC systems	Introducing new systems, such as the ERP, at the height of an emergency response added increased pressure on IFRC staff who were not familiar with the system and resulted in different people having access to different information at different times.

5. Conclusions

The earthquake which struck north-western Syria and southern and central Turkey on 6 February 2023 caused significant infrastructural damage and loss of life. In Syria, thousands of people

were injured and displaced, increasing the vulnerabilities of a population already suffering from the multiple consequences of the twelve-year conflict.

At the time of the earthquake, the IFRC delegation was in a process of downsizing and the earthquake saw the need for the IFRC to make swift decisions to adjust its approach in order to provide support to SARC as the Movement leader for the earthquake response.

The IFRC acted rapidly in a number of ways immediately post-earthquake in order to support SARC in scaling its response to deliver humanitarian assistance to earthquake-affected populations. Key areas where the IFRC displayed an added value included the raising of funds at a global level and the provision of technical financial assistance to SARC to manage those funds in a way which was both accountable and in line with newly-introduced Government of Syria requirements.

Although not entirely in line with the IFRC's ERF, the early and pragmatic decision for the CO to set the strategic direction for the response (in support of SARC's lead) was logical and appropriate. This approach took into account the existing robust relationship between the CO and SARC. In addition, when a HEOPs was deployed to support the response, the CO appropriately maintained responsibility for strategic direction, leaving the HEOPs to focus on operational issues.

A key decision which was taken by the CO from the outset was to invest in the practical implementation of the "NWOW" which saw SARC leading the response and the IFRC and in-country PNS taking the lead in sectors where they had existing core competencies. This decision to focus IFRC support on Membership coordination was of added value, clearly promoting a Federation-wide approach to the earthquake response. The approach was built on the already well-established and trusting relationships that the IFRC and PNS had with SARC and this was vital in ensuring the swift cementing of Membership coordination structures to support SARC's earthquake response in a coherent and consistent manner. Although regular operational Membership coordination meetings were helpful for sectoral information-sharing, there was an absence of functional coordination, for example with regard to the development of joint plans. The absence of guidance on the practical implementation of the "NWOW" perhaps contributed to this.

In addition to the deployment of a HEOPs, other operational management surge support was provided in the form of two deputy HEOPs and an Operations Manager – this was in addition to the Head and Deputy Head of Delegation maintaining a role in the response. For some IFRC, SARC and PNS staff the roles and responsibilities of each of these positions were unclear. At the same time, some of the decisions taken between the IFRC and SARC at strategic level were not sufficiently filtered down to SARC's operational management level and this contributed to confusion and delays in key areas such as the agreement of surge personnel profiles and visa processing.

The deployment of surge personnel did cause challenges for the CO which had to tread a careful line between ensuring sufficient HR capacity to be able to effectively support SARC's response but without unnecessarily inflating the IFRC HR structure and overwhelming the National Society.

Given the magnitude of the earthquake, the scale of the humanitarian response, and the size of the existing IFRC structure, there was a clear need for surge support. However, surge rosters within the region (and globally) were unable to meet surge requirements in terms of personnel

with Arabic language skills; technical skills; knowledge of the Syrian context; and ability to rapidly deploy for a minimum one-month timeframe. Although there were some difficulties in terms of rapid visa processing, the arrival of the HEOPs within three days of the earthquake served to highlight that rapid deployments were possible if appropriate profiles were available.

The first ever deployment of a health ERU to Syria formed part of the IFRC's response. However, this deployment was characterised by confusion and delays. There was some pressure on the CO to activate the ERU mechanism before having a full understanding of what was most appropriate for the response. The deployment of an advance assessment team was helpful in defining the most appropriate ERU but the gap between that team's departure and the arrival of the ERU team resulted in a loss of momentum. This was compounded by the fact that the ERU team arrived well before the ERU assets – in part because the ERU PNS did not have the assets readily available (with no health ERU PNS being based in the region) and due to complex import requirements. This resulted in the ERU not being fully functional until four months after the earthquake. In spite of this, the deployment was considered to have an added value in terms of provision of treatment and capacity building of SARC.

The IFRC's finance policies and procedures in relation to transfer of funds to SARC were considered appropriate even though the use of the working advance system did require significant HR. The arrival of a finance delegate one month after the earthquake was critical in ensuring that SARC was able to meet its financial obligations although the absence of a finance delegate in the six months prior to the earthquake meant that neither SARC nor the IFRC CO were fully prepared for the significant financial implications of a large Emergency Appeal.

Although risk tolerance levels were appropriately low, at times the inflexibility shown in a context where purchase of essential items required prior authorisation from the HQ resulted in delegation senior management having to engage in time-consuming discussions to be able to take actions such as purchasing essential fuel to run IFRC vehicles.

This lack of flexibility was also seen in procurement and supply chain processes where different approaches were pursued by the CO and the RO with the latter focusing on adhering to standard procedures and the CO seeking flexibility to, for example, move ahead with local purchasing. Here there was a struggle in switching from normal operating mode to emergency response mode.

The lack of clarity with regard to the extent to which standard procedures should be followed contributed to significant delays in the procurement of key relief items for the earthquake response. Other contributing factors included delays in developing the operational plan and mobilisation table which hindered the RO's ability to understand what was needed, where and when. The absence of any prepositioned stocks (as foreseen in the Federation's country plan for 2023) saw the CO requesting support for some items from the global logistics hubs. However, with the delays in submitting logistics requests, by the time they were put forward a number of key items had already been sent to Turkey to support the response there. This points to a lack of oversight between the two IFRC ROs in terms of understanding the significant needs in both countries and ensuring a balance in availability of stocks.

Standards, clear procedures, quality assurance and accountability are all important in large-scale emergency responses. Maintaining a balance between this and being able to support timely, agile and needs-led responses was challenging for the IFRC. The result was the need to seek numerous exceptional approvals to overcome procedures.

Many cited complex import and visa processing requirements as the cause of delays in the import of in-kind relief items and the deployment of surge personnel. However, windows of opportunity were missed, particularly in the immediate post-earthquake phase when a number of restrictions were lifted, making the arrival of goods and people into Syria less complicated. The lack of available IFRC guidance to support decision-making during these windows highlighted a lack of institutional preparedness to navigate contexts characterised by political and economic restrictions and resulted in over-compliance which contributed to the delays.

In terms of resource mobilisation, the IFRC's strategy to raise unearmarked funds was primarily successful. Efforts had been made to raise donor awareness, including by the CO, of the importance of receiving unearmarked funds and that no distinction would be made between the earthquake-affected population in relevant governorates and those affected by the protracted crisis and that the response would extend to governorates hosting earthquake-displaced populations. These humanitarian diplomacy actions were successful and critical to ensuring the flexible use of funds.

Including NSD in the Emergency Appeal was an essential approach to ensuring the sustainability of SARC's operational capacity beyond the emergency phase and this was facilitated by having an NSD delegate in-country and fast-tracking the existing NSD workplan. In addition, including resilience strengthening in the Appeal was critical for SARC's ongoing operational capacity.

There were some challenges faced in terms of managing funds raised for Syria and the IFRC was insufficiently prepared for this. For example, the absence of list of all the IFRC's umbrella agreements with donors which have limitations or clauses linked to the political and economic restrictions resulted in significant time being dedicated to pledge management and donor liaison at the height of the response. Similarly, no key messages were readily available on how best to transfer funds to SARC, hampering the ability of resource mobilisation teams to engage clearly with partners and donors early on in the response regarding fund transfer procedures.

In spite of some of the challenges faced, SARC's ability to absorb and manage the resources raised, although under significant pressure to manage both solicited and unsolicited support, was not questioned.

Significant effort was focused on implementing and supporting the implementation of an effective response in a highly complex operating environment by SARC, IFRC and PNS, while implementing a relatively new model of Membership working. There remains room to adapt the IFRC's procedures and practices in order that there is improved readiness for response combined with clarification of decision-making responsibilities at global, regional and country levels. The Syria earthquake response has provided the opportunity to showcase important lessons which should be taken into account for future emergency responses, particularly in complex environments. These include ensuring that SARC led the earthquake response; establishing internal country-level coordination mechanisms under the strategic direction of the CO; allocating sector leads to the Membership on the basis of their core competencies; and undertaking humanitarian diplomacy efforts to facilitate the most appropriate use of funds.

6. Recommendations

Using the evaluation's key findings as a foundation, a set of 14 recommendations is proposed in order to support the IFRC's future responses in complex settings.

IFRC Secretariat coordination structure and operational intent

For recommendations 2 and 3 below, it is important to note that there were a number of limitations in objectively renewing the extent to which Syria was able to implement the "NWOW" for a number of reasons. This included the following:

- As noted under section 3.1.3, Syria was not one of the 14 "NWOW" pilot countries, so was not tasked with developing templates or implementation of the initiative.
- The IFRC Syria HoD had not received the "NWOW" onboarding as Syria was not a pilot country, and was therefore not part of the Teams or WhatsApp "NWOW" channel which allowed for exchange of experiences between the pilot countries. In the last quarter of 2022 the Syria HoD was part of the general onboarding on strategic coordination of the "NWOW" which included a session on the mindset change needed for the "NWOW" to be implemented.
- Detailed "NWOW" guidance was prepared and shared through a collaborative effort of 30 technical IFRC, HNS and PNS experts and shared with the pilot countries in five languages.
- In the last quarter of 2022 all IFRC HoDs received a copy of the "NWOW" guidance and all Deputy Regional Directors were onboarded and trained on the initiative. Following this, the IFRC began an intensive discussion with the Membership, at leadership level, on the need to develop guidance for the implementation of the "NWOW" in Operations. This process was further streamlined through the Disaster and Crisis Working Group just prior to the Syria earthquake.
- As part of the pilot, performance metrics were developed which the 14 pilot countries regularly reported on. Learning from this fed directly into the Unified Planning Process development.
- Based on learning from the pilot countries, revised "NWOW" guidance was developed and shared in August 2023.

The above points should be taken into account when considering the recommendations relevant to the "NWOW".

Recommendation 1 Tension between the "NWOW" and the ERF

(Link to key findings: 13, 17)

In order to support the implementation of the "NWOW" the ERF (particularly paragraph 27(b)) needs to be reviewed. A revised ERF should:

- Clarify the role of the Host National Society (HNS), and ensure flexibility which highlights HNS capacity and willingness to lead.
- Reflect the potential for IFRC COs to take responsibility for setting the strategic direction of a response where this is most appropriate. In highly political contexts like Syria, emergency response decision-making should be as close to the nucleus as possible i.e. with the Country Office.
- Reinforce the role of the IFRC as a coordination enabler and not an implementer.

Recommendation 2 Development of guidance for implementation of the “NWOW”

(Link to key findings: 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13)

While acknowledging that Syria was not a pilot country for the “NWOW”, lessons from the application of the approach in Syria should be consolidated and contribute to the learning from the 14 “NWOW” pilot countries in order to help inform the finalisation of practical guidance for the future implementation of the “NWOW”. For example, in Syria documents were developed which set out the structure of the coordination mechanisms put in place and which outlined the information-flow within the mechanisms. The End of Mission report of the Deputy HEOPs responsible for Membership Coordination should be used as a starting point⁶⁰.

Recommendation 3 Development of tools to measure implementation of the “NWOW”

(Link to key finding: 12)

In order to help measure and monitor the implementation of the “NWOW” and the IFRC’s coordination role, there is a need to **develop performance metrics, indicators and timelines for future responses** in which the approach is applied.

Having available data on the IFRC’s coordination role may in turn help to ensure that the IFRC can attract funding to facilitate its ability to fulfil this role.

Recommendation 4 Membership coordination platforms and decision-making processes

(Link to key finding: 9)

In order to ensure that all those with decision-making authority are on board with response-related decisions, Membership coordination platforms need to involve all relevant people. This is likely to differ depending on the HNS in question. In preparedness for an emergency, based on a sound understanding of HNS working modalities and existing decision-making structures, COs and ROs should develop a simple one-page document which sets out which HNS decision-makers need to be involved in which coordination meetings and this should be used to help inform Membership coordination platforms and decision-making processes at the outset of an emergency.

IFRC Secretariat internal readiness to respond in complex environments

Recommendation 5 Surge rosters

(Link to key finding: 21)

There is a need to increase the pool of Arabic speaking surge staff across all talent areas.

The MENA RO, led by HDCC, needs to invest in developing its regional surge roster, working with National Societies in the region to build reliable technical surge pools which include Arabic speakers. This requires each technical sector point in the region to develop technical surge pools which ensure sufficient diversity in terms of skillsets, languages and gender.

In order to help fund this, each Emergency Appeal in the region should include a budget line for surge capacity strengthening to help build a dependable surge system at regional level.

⁶⁰ Sarah Parisio EoM Report (6 June 2023)

Recommendation 6 Operational management surge

(Link to key finding: 18, 19)

In future complex environments where the pragmatic decision has been taken for the CO to maintain strategic direction for the response (see Recommendation 3) **consideration should be given to the HEOps maintaining responsibility only for operational priorities.**

Where the decision is taken to deploy additional operational management surge **clear communication on the IFRC's decision-making structure and roles and responsibilities needs to be developed and documented from the outset.** This needs to be regularly disseminated throughout the response, particularly in light of the fact that new staff arrive in the first weeks of response and staff turnover can often be high.

Recommendation 7 ERU deployments

(Link to key findings: 23, 24, 25)

For future deployments, particularly to complex political environments, it is recommended that:

- In support of the findings of the Finnish RC ERU evaluation, there is a need for **clear and improved information sharing between COs, ROs, and in conflict environments the ICRC**, in order that prior to an ERU deployment there is a solid understanding of the context into which ERUs may potentially be deployed. At a minimum this needs to include information on:
 - The capacity of the HNS.
 - Safety and security.
 - Import conditions.
 - The state of existing health services (for health ERUs).
- **ERU personnel should be deployed at the same time as ERU assets** in order to ensure that ERUs can fulfil their expected roles.
- Where an advance assessment team is deployed, **the arrival of the ERU should be timed to coincide with the advance team's departure** in order to avoid loss of momentum.
- The Syria response has highlighted the need for health ERUs to be more flexible and adaptable. **An assessment needs to be done by each RO to better understand the potential health ERU needs and requirements of NS in preparedness for an emergency. The analysis of this assessment should then be used to identify which PNS are likely to be able to rapidly deploy an ERU if required.**
- Consideration should be given to **identifying PNS with ERUs in each region** and/or developing the capacity of PNS who currently do not have ERUs, in order to speed up ERU deployment in times of emergency. This may require capacity building of PNS.
- In conjunction with the IFRC, PNS need to ensure that **the services which health ERUs can provide are regularly adapted in line with existing trends and contexts.**

Recommendation 8 Preparedness for local procurement in Syria⁶¹

(Link to key findings: 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37)

Production of the earthquake operational plan and mobilisation table for the earthquake response took time. This impacted the timeliness of RO-led procurement processes. **In order to avoid similar future delays, the cause of the delays of the production of these key documents should be investigated.**

At country and regional level, **the IFRC needs to work with SARC to establish a strategy to decide, in case of an emergency, which relief items should be considered for local procurement and which for international procurement.** This strategy should be based on a robust market assessment, and ongoing price monitoring (local and international). The strategy should accommodate the possibility of both local and international procurement taking into account timeliness, price, and quality. A risk mitigation strategy which sets out what level of risk the IFRC is prepared to accept should be included.

Recommendation 9 Fleet preparedness

(Link to key finding: 39)

In order that IFRC Global Fleet have an understanding of potential fleet requirements for emergency response at country level, **a database should be established which includes details of vehicle specifications for each country/context** (e.g. vehicle type, fuel type, plate requirements) combined with import and registration requirements and timeframes.

Recommendation 10 Cross-regional oversight

(Link to key finding: 38)

In future cross-regional emergencies, consideration should be given to setting up **cross-regional procurement and supply chain task forces** which include the global hubs in order to facilitate the anticipation of needs and availability of relief items for each country.

Recommendation 11 Guidance for complex environments

(Link to key findings: 40, 41, 42)

There is a need for a greater understanding of the implications of working in contexts characterised by political and economic restrictions. IFRC's legal team should consider **developing clear and simple guidance for each context where the IFRC has a presence in order to support CO and RO staff in decision-making in such contexts.**

⁶¹ It is understood that there are already a number of processes underway which are likely to address some of the issues highlighted in this evaluation:

- Review and revision of the current procurement manual which currently contains limited adjustments for red scale emergencies. The revised procurement manual will include provision for local procurement and escalated procurement processes for emergencies.
- The ForeSee project which will look, *inter alia*, at simplification of approval processes, including exceptional approvals.

In addition, once the ERP is fully in place it should provide more easily available data on procurement issues, such as approval status, lead times, and delivery data. The recommendations in this evaluation only aim to cover additional issues for consideration emanating from the Syria response.

Resource mobilisation and management

Recommendation 12 SPRM Preparedness

(Linked to key findings: 47, 48)

In order to ensure that SPRM and Finance teams have the necessary information in advance of an emergency it is recommended that:

- For all countries impacted by political and economic restrictions where the IFRC is present, a list of all IFRC umbrella agreements with donors which have specific limitations or clauses linked to restrictions is developed in order that SPRM is able to easily access this information during donor negotiations.
- Key messages for donors which included details on, for example, how to make transfers in contexts affected by political and economic restrictions should be developed in preparedness for an emergency.

IFRC RTE and Evaluations

Recommendation 13 RTE timing

Acknowledging the challenges in implementing RTEs at the height of a response, it is recommended that, when feasible, in future RTEs should take place within the first three months of an emergency in order to provide the opportunity for immediate course correction.

Recommendation 14 Consolidation of RTE findings and recommendations

In order to consolidate findings and recommendations from recent RTEs – both in MENA and other regions - a meta-evaluation should be undertaken. This will support the identification of common findings and recommendations, feeding into IFRC's learning for the future.