EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRES

Implementation and Readiness Assessment Tool

2026

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Executive summary

Emergency Operations Centres (EOCs) are coordination hubs established by NSs to collect, analyse, and use information for better coordination, resource allocation, and decision-making during disasters, crises, and emergencies. Across the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (RCRC), many EOC initiatives have evolved from ad hoc coordination rooms into strategic platforms that strengthen preparedness and operational efficiency. In an environment of growing humanitarian needs and limited resources, the Movement must advance scalable and context-appropriate systems that enhance crisis understanding and institutional learning.

This document serves a dual purpose: it supports NSs in establishing and developing their EOCs, offering design considerations, minimum functional standards, and adaptable models; and it provides a framework to assess existing or emerging EOCs, using practical, operational criteria to guide institutional growth

The guideline integrates seven interdependent dimensions that define EOC readiness and can be examined through the EOC Readiness Self-Assessment Tool. Each dimension is assessed along a progressive scale from Foundational to Emerging, Functional, and Institutionalised; covering Institutional Set-up, Policy and Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Integration, People and Capacity, Operational Procedures, Information and Communication Systems, Subnational Integration, and Operational Scope.

The proposed framework promotes progressive functionality and sustainable growth, prioritising institutional anchoring, skilled personnel, and clear procedures before expanding scope or infrastructure. Grounded in non-linear, modular, and context-driven implementation, the guideline does not impose checklists or fixed benchmarks. Instead, it highlights fit-for-purpose configurations shaped by each NS's operational realities, resource base, and strategic ambition, supported through the self-assessment and planning toolkit.

Acknowledgments

This document benefited from the quality assurance, technical review, and contributions of the IFRC Reference Centre for Institutional Disaster Preparedness, the IFRC Preparedness and Information Management teams, the Netherlands Red Cross and 510 teams, the German Red Cross Information Management and Anticipatory Action teams, the IFRC Africa Region, and the Danish Red Cross global operational teams.

Their inputs helped strengthen its technical accuracy, operational relevance, and applicability for National Societies developing Emergency Operations Centres.

1. Background and purpose

This document provides operational guidance and practical tools for the establishment, strengthening, and assessment of EOCs within Red Cross and Red Crescent (RCRC) NSs across all regions and risk contexts. It is conceived as a complementary and implementation-focused framework to the **International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)'s Emergency Operations Centres – Guide (2026)**, translating its global principles into practical methodologies that can be adapted to different institutional realities and levels of maturity.

While drawing on extensive operational experience gained through regional initiatives (particularly the multi-year EOC development process supported in the African Region between 2022 and 2025) its structure, principles, and tools are globally applicable. They are designed to guide NSs in establishing fit-for-purpose coordination systems that strengthen preparedness, response, and recovery capacities within their specific operational and institutional environments.

These guidelines are grounded in the principle that EOC development must be nationally led and context-driven. External partners may provide technical assistance, financial support, or surge capacity during specific phases, but ownership, sustainability, and institutionalisation must remain with the NS itself.

2. Definition and evolution

This document, *Emergency Operations Centres: Implementation and Readiness Assessment Tool (2026)*, builds on and operationalises the IFRC's global reference, **Emergency Operations Centres – Guide (2026).** The guidance sets out the overarching vision, principles, and institutional role of EOC within the Movement, defining them as coordination mechanisms that strengthen preparedness and enable more coherent and efficient response across all stages of the DRM continuum.

The present guideline takes that conceptual framework a step further by providing practical direction and applied tools that help NSs translate the global principles into operational reality. It offers a pathway to design, strengthen, and assess EOCs according to each NS' mandate, capacities, and context, ensuring that coordination structures become both functional and sustainable. Rather than redefining what an EOC is or retracing its historical evolution, this document focuses on how NSs can establish or consolidate EOCs that are fit for purpose, context-appropriate, and institutionally embedded.

In this sense, the guideline and its accompanying tools serve as a bridge between policy and practice. They support NSs in adapting the EOC concept to their organisational structure, linking strategic intent with day-to-day operational systems and decision-making processes. The objective is to enable each NS to strengthen its capacity to coordinate

emergencies effectively and to align these systems with both Movement standards and national disaster management frameworks.

The methodology presented here emphasises progressive development, self-assessment, and contextual adaptation rather than prescriptive templates. It recognises that every EOC evolves differently, reflecting the diversity of risk environments, institutional maturity, and resource availability across NSs. The guidance therefore promotes a modular, scalable approach, encouraging incremental growth informed by lessons learned, partnerships, and practical experience.

This operational orientation complements the global IFRC framework by offering concrete steps and instruments for implementation, enabling NSs to diagnose their current level of EOC readiness, identify priority areas for improvement, and plan strategic investments that strengthen coordination capacity and institutional resilience.

From a practical perspective, more recently, EOCs have been reimagined not just as physical coordination rooms but as platforms delivering a range of services. From a practical perspective, these may include dashboards, alert systems, early warning mechanisms, daily monitoring, volunteer dispatch, ambulance tracking, asset management, training coordination, program documentation, and financial oversight. Many of these functions can be used for day-to-day operations, not only during specific onset crises, allowing the EOC to contribute to ongoing organisational efficiency and preparedness.

However, EOC setup must be shaped by the specific context and operational realities of each NS. It should evolve through the PDCA cycle (Plan–Do–Check–Act) in response to actual crises, lessons learned, partnership dynamics, or leadership shifts, rather than being imposed through a standard checklist or universal set of minimum criteria. There is a significant risk in formalizing structures on paper that do not translate into operational effectiveness. However, while the ideal setup should be fit for purpose, it must also be recognisable and interoperable with other RCRC EOCs to ensure smooth collaboration and integration when large-scale emergencies require surge capacity from across the Movement.

Operating DRM in a NS is highly context-dependent, and it may involve functioning in highly volatile conflict zones where minimal but effective coordination is sufficient, or in low-frequency disaster environments that call for temporary and flexible structures rather than permanent centres. Both models are valid if they reflect real risks, needs, and sustainable capacity.

For this reason, the introduction of EOC structures and functions must be preceded by a careful reflection and diagnosis of the NS's operational context. This should focus on functional requirements rather than structural blueprints. It should ask whether a centralized or decentralized model is more appropriate, whether tools are truly being used

in the field, and whether the existing staff can sustain the system. The following guidelines therefore do not propose a linear or hierarchical setup from level one to level five. Instead, they offer a modular and fit-for-purpose approach designed to support real-time decision-making and context-sensitive prioritization.

3. Dimensions

The following section explores the EOC dimensions, understood as critical functional areas that define how an EOC is set up, operated, governed, and sustained. It intends to break down the sometimes complex and multi-faceted setup into manageable components that can be assessed, planned, and improved over time, and provide realistic guidance on maturity. The dimensions are presented and described in a way that answers key questions about EOC readiness and performance:

- Who's responsible?
- How is it integrated to the NS?
- What systems are in place?
- Where does it operate?
- How does it evolve over time?

What follows is a model that defines the core set of non-prescriptive functions based on key EOC dimensions and assesses how well these functions are being performed.

EOC dimensions

GUIDING QUESTION	WHAT TO ASSESS
A. Institutional Set-up	
Is the EOC formally positioned within the NS structure, with clearly defined ownership, leadership, and coordination roles?	• EOC appears in organogram, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), Early Action Protocols (EAPs), Anticipatory Action Plans (AAPs) or structure charts • Assigned focal point or coordination lead • Assigned power of attorney to activate the EOC • Resourcing (space, staff, equipment) is allocated • Auxiliary role is defined
B. Policy & DRM Integration	
Is the EOC embedded in the NS's DRM policies and external coordination frameworks?	• Referenced in contingency plans, DRM SOPs, EAPs, AAPs or emergency frameworks • Activation triggers and reporting lines defined • Participation in coordination structures (e.g. task forces, clusters, Movement, civil defence)

GUIDING QUESTION	WHAT TO ASSESS
C. People & Capacity	
Are roles defined, and is there sufficient trained capacity (beyond designated focal points) to operate and support the EOC during both routine and surge situations?	• Focal points named at HQ/branch, with clear role descriptions EOC roles defined and appointed to people • EOC roles defined and assigned to multiple trained individuals per function to ensure redundancy • Staff and/or volunteers trained on EOC tools and processes • Surge staffing plans in place for large-scale or unexpected events • Cross-departmental awareness of EOC roles
D. Operational Procedures	
Are EOC operational processes clearly documented, applied during emergencies, and regularly improved based on feedback and learning?	• SOPs for activation/deactivation processes, notification protocols, shift rotations, EOC cells, meetings, decision-making, and reporting. • Sitrep or coordination templates in use for logistics, IT, support, staff rotations, facility management, and staff welfare (nutrition, rest, safety). • Meetings or coordination calls held regularly during emergencies, with strong engagement with relevant government systems; arrangements formalised via MoUs and aligned to national legislation and policies defining the NS's auxiliary role. • Performance metrics – response time, situation awareness quality, resource utilisation, coordination effectiveness, and stakeholder satisfaction. • After-action and continuous improvements – post-incident evaluations, lessons learned, feedback loops, and improvement plans.
E. Information & Commuications Systems	
Are hardware, software, and communication systems functional and used consistently to support the EOC?	• Hardware & Infrastructure: Reliable laptops or workstations, shared visualization tools (e.g. large monitor or projector for a common operating picture), and documentation capacity (e.g. functioning printer/scanner for hard-copy logs and maps). • Software & Data Tools: Digital platforms (e.g., Kobo, Excel, DHIS2, shared folders) and dashboards used for data collection and analysis. • Communication Systems: Primary and backup tools (radios, phones, WhatsApp) with resilient power/connectivity options. • Consistent Use: Evidence of these systems being used during actual responses or simulations rather than remaining unused.

GUIDING QUESTION	WHAT TO ASSESS
F. Subnational Integration	
Are regional or branch offices connected to the EOC and involved in coordination?	• Branch/regional focal points identified • Subnational staff or volunteers trained or briefed • Reporting or coordination mechanisms include branches • Branches participate in EOC tools or meetings • Auxiliary role on regional or branch level defined.
G. Operational Scope	
Is operational authority and execution responsibility adequately delegated to the EOC to enable timely decision-making and effective response?	• Whether the EOC is purely coordination and information-focused • Or if it is authorised to make and implement operational decisions • Whether the EOC plays a command, coordination, facilitation, or monitoring role • How it relates to existing Operational and Programmatic units (e.g. WASH, HEALT, DRR, AA, etc), other departments, PMER units, finance, logistics, planning, volunteer management teams • How the added values is described or perceived.

Each dimensions can be self-assessed using a basic traffic-light indicators[1]:

EOC readiness dimension states

Readiness State	Color	Meaning
Foundational [2]		The EOC dimension is in an early design or conceptual phase. There may be initial awareness, discussions, or drafting of its purpose or role, but no structure is yet in place. It reflects intent or vision without operational traction.
Emerging		The EOC dimension is not yet functional. It may be informal, improvised, or undefined, with no consistent use or recognition in the organisation.

[1] Both the categorisation of dimensions and readiness states is a suggested framework based on the different and experiences gathered while supporting the Ethiopian Red Cross between 2022 and 2025.
[2] Since some NSs may still be in early stages of defining, designing or conceptualising an EOC (prior its development) this stage can help assess and reflect on progress, readiness and planning situation before operationalisation begins. The foundational phase is added, but does not count towards the functional rating of the self-assessment tool.

Readiness State	Color	Meaning
Functional		The EOC dimension is partially functional. Some elements are in place and used, but implementation is inconsistent, fragile, or lacks formalisation.
Institutionalised		The EOC dimension is fully functional when it is documented, consistently used, resourced, and embedded in the NS's systems, structures, and practice, with regular training and exercises to keep knowledge and skills up to date

In parallel, each readiness status is accompanied by a series of indicative characteristics that without being specific requirements or checklists are intended as a guiding narrative for aligning the current status, and identifying gaps or tensions with the readiness status.

All in all, the different dimensions, readiness levels, and characteristics are designed to contribute to an effective EOC setup. This includes enabling evidence-based response through fast and coordinated decision-making based on shared analysis and real-time needs data; supporting multisectoral coordination among teams; and ensuring consistency and alignment with other humanitarian actors, while avoiding duplication of efforts.

Therefore, we are looking through operational lenses of an EOC that allow the NS to better tailor decisions based on context and ambition. These dimensions should be seen as horizontal and interlinked layers that feed into one another.

A. Institutional set-up

The effective functioning of an EOC depends on how well it is embedded within the NS's internal operational structure. Typically, this involves formal placement under the Disaster Management or Operations Department, with clearly defined leadership oversight, mainly by a senior operations coordinator, the Head of DRM, or even the Deputy Secretary General.

The EOC should be integrated into the NS's organisational chart, with a defined chain of command and clear linkages to relevant departments. This institutional anchoring determines how the EOC is resourced, staffed, and supervised, and shapes its capacity to coordinate emergency responses consistently and accountably. Strategic oversight and cross-departmental engagement are key to ensuring the EOC is recognised as a shared institutional asset rather than merely a technical tool. It is worth noting that within this integration, Information Management expertise can play a critical role in connecting the different functions and processes, to ensure data is transformed into actionable inputs within the EOC.

The role and authority of DRM in NSs varies drastically in every context due to the auxiliary status played differently in each country. This DRM set-up can be varied and different in nature and objectives (e.g. NS being leads vs supporting vs shadowing government response; DRM work is determined by internal triggers vs external governmental calls; EMS, WASH, Shelter are inherent to DRM functions vs functions structurally disconnected, etc.) All these specifications need to be very clear in the definition of an EOC to avoid risks of distortion and determine what an EOC can realistically in that context. The below section is rooted through a prominent DRM operational role of the NS, though specific emphasis it will be made in weaker or project-based DRM functions within a NS.

> This assessment tool only focuses around the EOC NS continuum and does not cover the intersection and coordination components with the National Disaster Preparedness and Response structures that may exist in a country, including National EOC under the Civil Protection or National DRM structures, or thematic coordination hubs like Primary Health EOCs (PHEOC) driven by Health Authorities. The IFRC EOC Guide covers the cooperation dimensions of this interoperability.

A critical structural consideration is whether the EOC is designed as a permanent coordination function or as an ad-hoc mechanism activated only just before or during emergencies. Permanent models require sustained investment in dedicated personnel, infrastructure, and continuous processes. Ad-hoc models rely on pre-identified staff, defined surge protocols, and reactivation procedures. As long as strong protocols exist, episodic or forecasted activation of the EOC remains a valid approach. However, the choice must be deliberate, documented, and consistently reflected across all dimensions (particularly in SOPs, staffing models, budget lines, and digital systems). Where the EOC's operational modality anticipates or could require surge capacity from the Movement, this should be reflected in the institutional set-up through agreements with Movement partners and clear delegation of authority. The lack of aligning the EOC's operational modality with its institutional design often leads to fragmented ownership, underutilisation, or collapse under pressure.

Institutional set-up readiness table

Readiness State	Characteristics
Foundational (Design phase)	The NS is discussing or drafting the establishment of an EOC, with preliminary roles, placement, and coordination structure proposed or under consultation. This may include early SOP drafts, guidelines, leadership buy-in, or initial focal points being identified, but the EOC is not yet part of the organogram or regularly used.
Emerging (Informal recognition)	The EOC exists in practice but lacks formal structural integration. It is often activated ad hoc through personal initiative or emergency need. It may be tied to a project or crisis-specific initiative, without an official place in the organogram. Lines of accountability are unclear. The EOC depends heavily on individuals and lacks institutional memory or continuity.
Functional (Structural anchoring)	The EOC is formally recognised in the NS structure, typically under the DM or Operations department. It has defined reporting lines and oversight by senior management. A chain of command for activation and coordination is in place and respected. Cross-departmental participation is active during crises, but structural anchoring may still rely on a few key people and varies outside emergency periods.
Institutionalised (Governance maturity)	The EOC is a permanent function or unit within the NS with clear integration in the organogram. It has budget lines, job descriptions, dedicated staff, and a training and exercise programme embedded in a continuous improvement cycle (Plan–Do–Check–Act). Leadership structures (e.g., executive teams or crisis committees) interface with the EOC as a matter of routine. In this matured level, it is expected that all phases across the DRM continuum and its different phases (document & protocols, coordination and decision-making frameworks) are institutionally integrated. Whether permanent or episodic, its modality is defined, resourced, and sustained with consistent governance and accountability mechanisms.

B. Policy and DRM integration

The foundation of any EOC should rest within the NS's existing DRM and emergency response systems. These systems may include contingency plans, NS emergency SOPs, response frameworks, and the national disaster management laws or policies that define the broader governmental structure; within which the NS's auxiliary role is positioned. The EOC should complement and integrate with this holistic disaster management framework, serving as one of its operational pillars rather than a stand-alone add-on. The Preparedness for Effective Response (PER) framework can be a valuable reference to validate the formal response and readiness capacity of the NS, and to identify which core PER functions align with the NS's real operational role. There is a risk in designing an EOC that attempts to

compensate for gaps in core NS capacities or undefined functional roles, which can ultimately undermine its purpose.

From a policy perspective, it is important to note that minimum but viable SOPs or guidelines (even anticipatory action frameworks like AAP or EAPs) can be sufficient to activate an EOC, rather than requiring fully formal and approved policies. The degree to which the EOC is referenced or formally recognised in these documents can strengthen its legitimacy, interoperability, and potential coordination authority. Specially, those frameworks should clearly define how he EOC integrates all the different phases of the DRM continuum, including how anticipatory action processes, roles, and responsibilities are linked to the EOC set-up. However, in practice, the EOC's real coordination power is often determined less by the existence of documents and more by the relationships, trust, and credibility of the people leading and participating in it. This applies to its connection with internal policies as well as with national and subnational coordination structures. Usually, NSs set up regular emergency operations meetings at several levels to take decisions and coordinate the response. It is in these spaces where EOC-generated outputs should be integrated into decision-making discussions during a crisis.

When referring to the external alignment of the EOC to the national disaster management system and the humanitarian coordination levels, the government is the primary duty-bearer, supported by the NS in its auxiliary role. Depending on the specific mandate and existing coordination mechanisms, the EOC may have a more formal or informal integration into those structures. There may also be existing data and information-sharing protocols, mainly related to the activation of early warning alerts or general tracking of the response and thus utilised for briefs, updates, trends, and real operationalisation.

In some contexts, where the NS role has not direct DRM response functions, the institutionalization of the EOC should focus on the coordination capacity, rather than the control and operational command post of emergencies. In these contexts, the capacity of link, synthesize and escalate between community and branch information will be equally instrumental in the cooperation with other more active DRM actors and the government systems.

Frequently, the DRM role of the NS is associated with the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) functions and systems. Whilst this is a prominent and critical service of support on real-time emergencies, it does not imply a direct role in multi-sectoral operations and instead limited to the health scope (ambulance, triage and referral). EMS systems usually incorporate 24/7 dispatch centers to coordinate emergency calls and coordinate the ambulance movement and health-related response, which unless it integrated with the NS's broader DRM coordination mechanisms, across multi-sectoral triggers, planning protocols and information flows will not be considered an EOC. However, there are means of positioning an EMS towards an EOC framework with an effective transition and transformation of the additional components of emergency and operations.

Policy and DRM integration readiness table

Readiness State	Criteria
Foundational (Design phase)	The NS has initiated internal discussions on the future role of the EOC within its DRM and emergency response framework. There may be early drafts or reviews of contingency plans, AAP or EAPs, PER outputs, or SOPs referencing the EOC's potential role, but the EOC is not yet formally linked to internal policy or recognised in national systems. Government coordination may be informal or under consultation. The EOC concept is seen as complementary to existing DRM structures, but its mandate and interoperability remain undefined.
Emerging (Foundational awareness)	The NS has formal DRM/emergency response documents (e.g. strategy, SOPs, contingency plans, AAP or EAPs), and DRM roles are described but not yet linked to EOC operations. The EOC may be referenced informally in planning or preparedness materials, but it lacks official connection to government or Movement coordination mechanisms.
Functional (Basic set-up)	The EOC is referenced in DRM policies or emergency frameworks (e.g. AAPs or EAPs). Its structure and role are outlined in internal SOPs or guidelines. Ad hoc or situational coordination exists between the EOC and Movement/government actors. The NS participates in national DRM coordination platforms, and some EOC protocols reference external collaboration.
Institutionalised (Integrated governance)	The EOC is formally established in internal policy or endorsed by senior management. SOPs, ToRs, AAPs or EAPs define its roles, activation process, and reporting responsibilities. There is a documented connection between the EOC and DRM systems (e.g. reporting flow, activation triggers or integration of anticipatory action frameworks). The EOC is recognised within national or subnational DRM structures (e.g. national task forces, real-time data exchange, joint assessments).

C. People & Capacity

Depending on the organisational structure and level of maturity, EOCs may have dedicated personnel fully assigned to coordination and information management tasks. In more consolidated set-ups, responsibilities can be divided into core role types, which may be combined in smaller teams:

- **Coordination roles**: Focused on operational leadership, planning, and cross-sector coordination. These profiles bring a strong background in DRM and experience in managing emergency workflows and protocols.
- **Analytical roles**: Focused on assessing needs, monitoring forecasts and risks, managing consequences, and providing technical expertise for specific responses (e.g. Health, Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA), Shelter, WASH).
- **Resource management roles**: Cover human resources, finance, procurement, and logistics functions to ensure timely and accountable resource mobilisation.
- **Information management roles**: Focused on data collection, processing, analysis, visualisation, and producing actionable information products to support decision-making.
- **Liaison roles**: Dedicated to maintaining effective relationships with external partners, including government bodies, Movement partners, UN agencies, and other humanitarian actors; require strong diplomacy and negotiation skills.

Regardless of the profile, EOC personnel must be formally embedded in the NS's DRM coordination mechanism, with clearly defined roles and mandates, reporting lines, and participation in operational decision-making. This ensures alignment, ownership, and rapid mobilisation during emergency response. However, we often identify that analytical and technical capacities for hazard, risk and forecast monitoring often already exist within AA or other DRM teams. EOC structures should build on those rather than duplicating them, ensuring alignment and avoiding fragmentation. In lean structures, it is realistically expected that one single role may combine multiple functions like a coordinator also handling information management and liaison duties, provided there is adequate training and clear prioritisation during high-demand periods. In more mature (functional to institutionalised) EOC set-ups, selected AA-related functions (e.g. forecast monitoring, trigger analysis, coordination of early actions) may be integrated within the EOC structure. These functions should be aligned with and guided by EAP implementation SOPs, process flows and communication protocols.

In decentralised structures (presented in below sections), regional or branch-level EOC coordinators may be appointed to ensure localisation and timely coordination. These individuals act as the local extension of the national EOC and must be trained in both the tools and the protocols of the system. Their role is especially critical in early warning dissemination, rapid assessments, and local response coordination with the central EOC.

The engagement of DRM volunteers is also vital. Volunteers trained in the core EOC functions such as field enumeration, secondary and primary data collection, reporting, communication, use of mobile tools, coordination, and participation in decision making processes form the operational backbone of many EOCs. The EOC's people component should therefore reflect and integrate the broader DRM network. Branch DRM officers, field focal points, volunteers, and sectoral staff should all be aware of the EOC's function and how their roles contribute to it, particularly in decentralised settings where volunteers may take on expanded responsibilities.

On this regard, the sustainability of the EOC relies on a well-defined capacity-building strategy and recurrent learning pathway. This includes:

- Dissemination of the EOC's purpose, structure, protocols and guidelines across the organisation.
- Alignment with existing job descriptions or TORs.
- Inclusion of EOC awareness and basic technical orientation in DRM volunteer induction packages and staff onboarding.
- Development of a training pathway that progressively grows and maintains teamwork, leadership, information management, analytical, and coordination skills. This should include recurrent simulations and drill to ensure skills remain current, for example progressing from Kobo use to operational dashboard management and ultimately to decision making models.

Ultimately, the EOC should be seen not as a separate technical function, but as a central coordination node in the NS's emergency response system powered by people, supported by tools, and connected to decision-makers at all levels.

People & Capacity readiness table

Readiness State	Criteria
Foundational (Design Phase)	The NS has identified the need for EOC related personnel and is defining roles conceptually. There may be draft job descriptions or EOC role profiles, early organograms, or plans to align the EOC within the DRM structure. However, no staff or volunteers have been officially assigned or oriented, and no training has been implemented yet.
Emerging (Basic awareness and ad-hoc resourcing)	No formal EOC roles exist; coordination and analysis tasks are handled ad hoc during emergencies. The EOC's structure and function are not widely understood within the NS, and staff or DRM volunteers have not received specific training or orientation related to EOC operations.
Functional (Defined roles and partial integration)	Coordination and analytical focal points have been appointed (e.g. within DRM or IM units), and basic orientation has been provided to staff or volunteers on EOC tools, workflows, and protocols. The EOC function is acknowledged by other departments and shared with key branch personnel.
Institutionalised (Formal roles and strategic capacity development)	EOC roles are formally included in job descriptions or TORs, including regional or branch focal points. A structured training pathway is in place, growing and maintaining staff and volunteer capacity across key functions. The EOC is embedded in the NS's broader human resource and DRM structure, nationally and sub-nationally.

D. Operational Procedures

The EOC coordinates and oversees all aspects of operational management to ensure an organised, timely, and effective response during emergency situations of varying complexity and magnitude. To support this, the approach promoted by the IFRC and other international organizations adopts a "three-area model" that differentiates between **Strategic Decisions**, **Operations Management**, and **Information Management**, each of which must function in close coordination:

The EOC operates through three interlinked areas to ensure an effective and coordinated emergency response: Strategic Decisions, Operations Management, and Information Management.

A. Strategic Decisions: provide high-level direction by applying organizational policies, managing risks, ensuring compliance with the NS's auxiliary role, maintaining sustainability, and coordinating with authorities and partners to validate strategies, budgets, and communications.

B. Operations Management translates these decisions into action by implementing response plans, coordinating technical and institutional efforts, managing operations, monitoring field activities, prioritizing interventions based on emerging needs, and ensuring staff safety and operational continuity.

C. Information Management: Provides IM support, products, and services to both areas by collecting, processing, analysing, and disseminating reliable data, producing situation reports, identifying trends and risks, and delivering accurate, contextualized information to guide decision-making and communications across all audiences.

This internal structure must also extend externally. With this in mind, the EOC should establish links to other coordination mechanisms, including government-led EOCs, the cluster system, and Movement coordination platforms. These external interfaces must be defined through documented coordination pathways that guide information exchange, participation in joint meetings, and operational decision-making. On this regard, the EOC's coordination and resource management functions should be in a position to assess the NS operational capacity and to raise the need for additional support e.g. including the deployment of Emergency Response Units (ERUs), Rapid Response Personnel (RDRTs), or the triggering of Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) operations. Without a structured escalation mechanism, such requests may come too late or without proper justification.

Finally, an EOC must be structured to operate across the full emergency management cycle, not just during active crises. This includes both preparedness, which focuses on longer-term readiness through planning, systems, and capacity-building, and anticipatory action, which is triggered by a specific more short term forecast or emerging threat and enables early action before an event fully unfolds. A permanent EOC supports both functions by continuously scanning the horizon for hazards, maintaining situational awareness through regular situation reports and other monitoring tools, and translating early warning into timely action when a particular risk begins to materialize..

Functional operational components

The following sub-sections outline five core functional components that should be embedded in EOC procedures: Preparedness, Needs Assessment and Analysis, Planning and Response Design, Implementation and Monitoring, and Evaluation and Learning. These components represent the technical and procedural backbone of the EOC and define how the system supports real-time decision making, course correction, and accountability.

Across all five components, anticipatory action should be understood as an integral part of the response logic. Anticipatory action plans, including Early Action Protocols where applicable, operationalise forecast-based decision-making through predefined triggers, actions, and procedures. The EOC should ensure that this logic is embedded within routine workflows, enabling a coherent operational flow from early warning to early action and response.

Preparedness

The EOC should embed preparedness as a continuous function within its setup, including contingency planning, risk analysis, and development of anticipatory action plans. This involves defining SOPs, trigger mechanisms, and coordination workflows that link forecast monitoring to decision-making. Rather than treating anticipatory action as an add-on, preparedness systems should ensure that early

The **IFRC Analytical Framework** can be a good reference and structuring tool that can guide this thinking. It must be applied critically to unpack the underlying dynamics of the crisis, including power, exclusion, and access. This requires methodologies beyond surveys, such as key informant interviews, observation, and triangulated analysis. The purpose is to surface gaps, not just report them. A strong needs assessment function enables the EOC to shape response priorities and avoid template programming. In that way, it will also supports transparency in resource mobilisation and justifies targeting decisions. Just like in a regular operation, continuous reassessment is not optional, since needs evolve rapidly and unless the EOC maintains a real-time understanding or situational awareness, the response will become outdated within days.

warning information can directly activate predefined actions and coordination processes.

Needs Assessment and Analysis

The EOC is responsible for building and continuously refining the operational picture. This includes integrating forecast and risk information with contextual data to anticipate potential impacts before they materialise. Analysis should combine expected impact scenarios, geographic exposure, and existing response capacities, allowing the EOC to prioritise areas and populations at risk. This shifts assessment from reactive data collection to forward-looking analysis that informs both anticipatory and response actions.

Planning and Response Design

Evidence alone does not lead to better planning unless the decision-making environment is structured to use it. The EOC must ensure that planning is grounded in both observed and projected needs. Anticipatory action plans should inform operational priorities, resource allocation, and sequencing of interventions, particularly when triggers are met or likely to be met. The EOC enforces discipline in decision-making by validating that plans align with verified data, forecast scenarios, and operational capacities, ensuring coherence between early action and subsequent response.

Implementation and monitoring

The EOC acts as a live coordination hub, tracking both early actions and response activities. This includes monitoring trigger thresholds, validating activation decisions, coordinating pre-positioning or early actions, and adjusting operations as the situation evolves. Monitoring should integrate real-time field data with forecast updates, enabling continuous recalibration of actions. Without this feedback loop, both anticipatory and response actions risk becoming disconnected from operational realities.

Evaluation and learning

Post-crisis evaluations are often treated as compliance exercises rather than opportunities to adapt. The EOC must ensure that learning captures the full operational cycle, including anticipatory phases. This involves analysing not only response outcomes but also the effectiveness of early warning interpretation, trigger validation, and timing of early actions. Lessons learned should directly inform revisions of SOPs, anticipatory action plans, and coordination workflows, strengthening the overall system rather than treating anticipatory action and response as separate domains..

To ensure these procedures are not theoretical or dormant, a complementary approach is to routinely engage in simulation drills that replicate real-world emergencies and challenge the different procedures and readiness. These exercises serve not only to validate the entire humanitarian cycle, activation protocols, workflows, and analytical products, but also to test coordination with internal departments, government platforms, and Movement actors.

Information products and analytical outputs

The IM Area transforms field-level data into analytical products that inform coordination and decision making. Most EOC produces a series of outputs that change in type, format and regularity that in most instances get shaped by the available data, target user and decision level (internal or external), the NSs analytical capacities or the available means and channels of communications.

Examples of EOC standard products:

Product Type	Typical Format	Data/Process Prerequisite	Use Case
SitRep	PDF/Word + visual annexes	Needs assessment, field reports	Internal/external situational awareness
Rapid Assessment Summary / Reports	Table + narrative brief (2–3 pages) + Full report	Kobo / Qualitative questionnaire	Validation of crisis impact & planning input Internal/external situational awareness
Dashboard	Power BI / Excel / web-based	Structured field data + regular updates	Operational monitoring + internal ops tracking
Risk and Forecast Dashboard	Power BI / GIS / web-based	Forecast data, risk analysis, EAP datasets, hotspot mapping	Anticipatory decision-making, early warning monitoring, and prioritisation of high-risk areas
Operational and Analytical Maps	GIS outputs, static or interactive maps	Combined datasets: assessments, forecasts, population data, capacities	Situational overview, impact analysis, operational planning, and prioritisation
Sectoral Briefs	PDFs	Thematic inputs from health, shelter, WASH teams	Sectoral planning + resource mobilisation
Flash Updates	WhatsApp/Email text + one-pager PDF	Emergency Alerts	Real-time coordination or external sharing
Decision Log / Logbook	Excel or web-based tracker	Recorded decisions with context, responsible parties, and dates	Accountability, institutional memory, and tracking implementation of decisions

After all, each of these phases requires evidence to inform decision-making and operational action. This includes not only assessment-based insights but also forecast and risk analysis. The EOC should support the consolidation of information for prioritisation of sectors, geographies, and intervention areas, including those identified through anticipatory action planning. This may involve aligning early action and response modalities, supporting forecast-based pre-positioning and logistics planning where relevant, and integrating community feedback, priorities, and preferences.

In more mature EOC setups with a continuous coordination function, analytical outputs should go beyond traditional situation reports to also include products that support anticipatory decision-making. These may include trigger monitoring, impact-based forecasting, and tracking of early actions. Depending on the institutional setup, these functions may complement established Early Action Protocols or support broader anticipatory approaches, ensuring a coherent flow from risk analysis to operational decision-making.

Operational procedures readiness table

Readiness State	Criteria
Foundational (Design Phase)	The NS has begun defining the function and coordination role of the EOC. Drafts or concept notes may outline how the EOC could support assessment, planning, or SitRep production. No documented workflows exist, and internal roles and protocols are not yet connected to the EOC concept.
Emerging (Ad-hoc workflows)	The EOC is activated on a reactive basis without documented procedures. Coordination workflows (e.g. needs assessment, SitRep generation) are inconsistent or undefined. Information is processed irregularly and analytical products are generated on an ad hoc basis, with limited decision value.
Functional (Basic integration of key processes)	Key workflows like activation protocols, SitRep production, needs assessments, basic forecast monitoring, early warning inputs and response planning are documented and followed. Information products (e.g. summary reports, dashboards) are used during operations. Field inputs are regularly reviewed and inform decision-making through the EOC.
Institutionalised (Full cycle coordination and feedback)	SOPs define the EOC's role across all stages of the DRM continuum including preparedness, assessment, planning, monitoring, and learning. The EOC produces a consistent suite of analytical products aligned with decision timelines. The EOC is seen not just as a coordination hub but integral platforms that support day to day operations. Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (PMER) and sectoral teams contribute to ongoing review, feedback, and adaptation.

E. Information and Communication systems

Most of the time, EOCs are associated with advanced and complex Information and Communication Technology (ICT) ecosystems before becoming fully functional. However, from a Red Cross Red Crescent perspective, technology should be viewed as a means to an end, thus an enabler that supports standard protocols, information workflows, effective and timely communication, and operational decision-making grounded in data. This is why the effectiveness of an EOC does not depend on high-end, sophisticated systems but rather on how fit-for-purpose and sustainable the technology is, in alignment with the NS's actual needs and digital maturity.

With this in mind, there are several phases that digitalisation can support the EOC with, from basic set-ups to more sophisticated platforms. These can be:

- **Data collection** to capture data in real-time from field teams and volunteers. This include the use of mobile tools like KoboToolbox, Open Data Kit (ODK), RedRose, 121, CommCare, or imple paper-to-digital workflows).
- **Data management and analysis** to organise and transform the data into actionable insights though spreadsheets, share folders or central databases.
- **Forecast monitoring and anticipatory action support**, ranging from simple arrangements such as receiving and reviewing official meteorological bulletins, to more advanced systems such as GIS workflows, risk monitoring dashboards, trigger trackers, and impact forecasting tools.
- **Information and analysis products** to create sit-reps, dashboards, Geographic Information System (GIS), and reports to support decision and disseminate the results.
- **Coordination and communication** both internal and external through the use of WhatsApp, Teams, Zoom, SMS, etc.

However, the success of EOC technology will depend heavily on tight coordination between the ICT department and the DRM/operational departments that manage the ecosystem. Both teams must co-own the systems, agree on shared expectations, and establish solid frameworks to ensure appropriate tool selection, define roles and responsibilities, structure data flows and protocols, manage system administration and maintenance, and safeguard data protection and backup mechanisms. If there's a lack of integration we see risks in underutilisation or misalignment in ownership and purpose of the ecosystem.

Ultimately, tools and technologies must align with actual operational workflows, staff capacities, and both technological and financial sustainability. Key decisions include choosing open source or low cost tools versus overly complex platforms, developing a clear roadmap for the EOC digitalisation process, and embedding the EOC ecosystem into the NS's broader Digital Transformation agenda and PER priorities. These tools should be used regularly and integrated into day-to-day activities, ensuring they are familiar and trusted by staff and volunteers. Relying on systems developed only for major emergencies often

results in people defaulting to their usual day to day tools during a crisis, reducing the value and uptake of the emergency specific systems.

Below, a few subsections around software, products and hardware introduce some guidelines and references for action.

Information and communication systems readiness table

Readiness State	Criteria
Foundational (Design Phase)	The NS has acknowledged the need for digital tools and is exploring options. Some field data collection tools may exist independently (e.g. Kobo or Excel), but are not linked to EOC functions. No integration, roadmap, or digital governance structure exists. Coordination remains paper-based.
Emerging (Basic set-up)	The EOC uses isolated or non-integrated tools (e.g. Excel, email, WhatsApp). Field data collection is disconnected from decision-making. ICT/PMER/IM and Ops/DRM teams operate separately. No SOPs or digital governance protocols are in place. Coordination depends on ad hoc tech use by individuals.
Functional (Structured digitalisation)	The EOC uses a consistent toolset across core tasks (e.g. Kobo, shared folder, dashboards). Field data feeds into sitreps or summaries. ICT/IM and DRM collaborate on tool design and testing. Workflows are documented and tools are chosen based on cost, sustainability, and user capacity.
Institutionalised (Integrated and sustainable systems)	The EOC runs regularly on an integrated digital ecosystem that aligns with NS systems (e.g. automated dashboards, SOP-governed tools, centralized data repositories). A co-owned digital roadmap is in place. Tools are interoperable and scaled to fit hardware, workflows, and user capabilities at HQ and branches. Decision making entities within the NS use information and EOC analytical outputs to take decisions.

Software considerations

A minimum level of software types will be required for any EOC configuration at multiple tiers of complexity. Below we proposed a modular design based on the NS' needs and capacities with several ranges of tech stack and expertise. These needs can be structured by operational needs for coordination, analysis and decision-making process.

Though the structure is through those functional core needs, it's important that each NS has an even stage of each component depending on the concrete needs. However, the further scalability of solutions will require the NS offer a central hub or portal of

information that will emerge when several functions (coordination, Facthseets, dashboards, etc) are in need of a central access point (more about hub & portals in the next subsection).

The selection of software should always be based on digital literacy, staff capacity, cost of maintenance, and interoperability with the existing ecosystem of the NS, ensuring it is not an isolated element of the system. The different software solutions must be able to exchange information, reflecting the natural interdependencies between functions within the entire ecosystem. In addition, redundancy must be planned for from the start. In sudden changes caused by conflict or natural disaster, there is a high likelihood that communication systems will be disrupted. The chosen software should be able to operate offline where possible, storing information locally until connectivity is restored, and critical workflows should have backup processes for situations where even satellite connections are unavailable. To ensure sustainability – both financial and technical – it is worth considering open-source systems and technologies that can prevent licensing and dependency costs. Lat but not least, ensuring compliance of data protection principles (and GDPR) is essential when potentially dealing with personal and sensitive data.

Software type and stages

Software Type and purpose	Minimum Viable Tools (Recommended)	Scalable Options (Optional)	Advanced Systems (Not Essential)
1. Data Collection: To capture structure field data from assessment, updates, alerts, field information	KoboToolbox / ODK (offline/online), Google Forms	ODK Central, CommCare, RedRose, Kobo + XLSForm governance	Full integration with CRM/ERP systems, Python or R for automated analysis workflows, custom-built apps
2. Data Management & Storage: To organise, clean and store data in a consistent structure	Google Drive / OneDrive folders, Excel/Word/CSV files	SharePoint structure, CRM systems, simple SQL databases	Central data warehouse, automatic ingestion pipelines
3. Information Product Creation: Transform input into SiReps, Factsheets, Reports, Dashboards, Maps, Visuals	Excel, inDesign, Word, PowerPoint, PDF templates	Power BI dashboards, QGIS for mapping	Real-time dashboards with API data pull, embedded GIS platforms
4. Coordination & Communication: To share updates, alerts and coordinate actions across actors	WhatsApp, SMS, Email	Signal, Telegram bots, Teams/Zoom integration, Power Apps	Alert escalation systems, integrated comms platform with CRM trigger links

Software Type and purpose	Minimum Viable Tools (Recommended)	Scalable Options (Optional)	Advanced Systems (Not Essential)
5. Document & SOP Repository: To centralise SOPs, guidelines, templates, policies, contact lists and relevant references	Google Drive / Dropbox with folder structure	SharePoint library online, Hubs with access control	Document management system (DMS) with tagging, search, and access workflows
6. Hub Interface: To provide a front-ed to publish critical information and coordination data	Simple Google Site or shared folder index with links	Web dashboard, hub site hosted on IFRC GO, WordPress, Frappe CMS	Integrated portal with authentication, live maps, and system-wide dashboards

Hardware considerations

While the focused might be put on the software and platforms, hardware will be equally required as a backbone. The NS should adapt the hardware acquisition and readiness to the available environment and capacities, both at HQs and branch level, including a minimum viable EOC set-up. In most instances the NS will already have for other programmatic and DRM operational needs most of the elements.

Minimum hardware set-up might include:

- Laptops or desktops for central coordination and reporting
- Smartphones or tablets for field data collection and communication
- Internet access (either through SIM mobile card & modems or Wifi set-up)

Not indispensable at initial stages, might be required in consolidated and institutionalised set-ups:

- VHF/UHF radios or repeaters when unreliable telecoms or communications between branches and HQs
- Projector or display screens for the coordination meetings
- Power sources for blackout contexts

Hardware investment should reflect the EOC's actual governance structure (centralised, decentralised, or hybrid) and align with the broader infrastructure and departmental linkages of the NS.

A risk of overequipping can lead to underutilisation and wasted resources. Instead, each tool should match the number of users, the digital literacy level, and the workflow demands of the setup. A scaling approach starting with core components and growing based on tested need and capacity it is preferrable rather than donor-driven hardware deployment. ICT/IT volunteers or focal points can play a critical role in maintaining system integrity, and

flagging when upgrades are needed. Still, it must be acknowledged that in many operating contexts, digital maturity will not progress in a linear path.

External shocks, funding volatility, and rapid turnover may all disrupt the EOC's technical evolution reason by we need for thoughtful, scalable hardware planning grounded in actual use rather than future sophistication.

Hardware type and requirements (suggested)

Hardware Item	HQ EOC *(Fixed/central)*	Branch/Regional EOC *(Decentralised)*	Mobile/Virtual EOC *(Remote or field-deployable)*	*Note*
Laptops/desktops	Core team + display station	1–2 devices for coordination/reporting (can rotate	At least 1 device per mobile team	*Ensure basic ICT support exists. Pooled assets or refurbished*
Smartphones/tablets	Optional for HQ staff	Needed for mobile data collection and field teams	Essential for mobile Kobo or communication	*Choose low-cost Android devices;*
Internet (Wi-Fi, modem, SIM)	Dedicated, stable Wi-Fi + backup	Mobile modem/SIM connectivity / data bundles	3G/4G SIM or satellite if remote	*Prioritise mobile-based SIMS in low infra areas, data costs must be considered*
Large screen/projector	For sitrep display and coordination meetings / TV-Screen HDMI sufficient	Low priority unless regional hub	Not needed	*Avoid expensive digital boards, small HDMI monitor suffice*
VHF/UHF radios or repeaters	Only in low connectivity contexts	Recommended if rural/remote	If telecoms fail	*Requires licensing and training. Link with DRM logistics capacity. If both VHF and UHF fail, establish a physical messenger*
Power backup (UPS/generator)	Especially in load-shedding areas for laptops / modems	Based on electricity reliability: low-cost inverter or UPS	Solar/portable power if deployed	*Prioritise solar kits where generated aren't viable*

Recommended	Optional	Not essential

Complementary to the hardware set-up, a core enabler of the EOC is its ability to centralize, organize and disseminate information in real time. This goes beyond having solid analytical products or having digital tools, instead it requires a consolidated digital environment that can function as a front-end of the EOC's operational set-up. This can prevent having fragmented workflows, delayed decision-making, or undermined interoperability with several layers.

Additionally, it is worth considering the existence of effective data quality assurance and standardisation processes that enhance the overall reliability, consistency, and trustworthiness of data and information provided. Having both processes, techniques and mechanisms in place (e.g. triangulation, validation processes, approval structures, etc) ensure that decisions can be confidently based on qualitative evidence.

Finally, as described in the EOC IFRC Guide (2026), as part of the EOC we can find Situation Rooms and Command Posts as tools that can help enhance the overall coordination. These might be physical or virtual portal (mostly web-based) or digital hub that can address this fragmentation by bringing together cross-cutting information and operational outputs in one accessible space. Information is usually presented in charts, graph, maps, tables, as well as sitreps, alerts, reports, staff deployment statuses, resource dispatch, SOPs, focal points, etc so operational coherence is at place. These portals do not require complex tech, but rather simple and effective application that can clarify the purpose of an EOC, easy access of critical information, allow interoperability with core used tools, and internal vs external use for its different purposes.

The lack of this centre can reflect a failure in thinking the set-up of solutions and tools as isolated elements, instead of a system. Thus, it should be a core, single, living operational front-end of the EOC moving parts of the emergency DRM systems. Beyond the assumption of the need of a web-portal, in lower tech environments, we equally identify functional EOCs that systematically structure operational information in real-time and make it accessible to key players.

Situation Rooms and Command Post component and stages

Component	Recommended (Minimum Viable)	Optional (Scalable Additions)	Not Essential (High-end / Advanced)
Landing Page	Simple home page with EOC mission, activation status	Internal-only page for staff with access restrictions	Public real-time updates dashboard
Emergency Info Products	SitReps and alerts in PDF or Word, downloadable	Visual dashboards (Power BI, Tableau, etc.)	Real-time auto-generated dynamic dashboards
Data Collection Integration	KoboToolbox / Google Forms link embedded	Automatic feeds from Kobo/ODK with manual review	Full API-based sync with field tools

Component	Recommended (Minimum Viable)	Optional (Scalable Additions)	Not Essential (High-end / Advanced)
Document Repository	Shared folders for SOPs, plans, and templates	Versioned document control (e.g., GitBook, SharePoint workflows)	Integrated DMS with tagging and cross-search
Volunteer/Branch Access	Basic link-sharing via email/WhatsApp groups	Branch-specific portals / login credentials	Decentralized multisite EOC pages
Coordination & Alerts	WhatsApp/SMS integration via manual alerts & mobile bulleting board	Triggered messages via simple broadcast tools (Telerivet, Twilio)	Automated alerts with escalation logic
Map / GIS Display	Static maps uploaded as images	Embedded webmap (QGIS Cloud, ArcGIS Online Viewer)	Live GIS layers from real-time assessments
Admin Back-End	Manual updates via web admin panel	Admin dashboard for uploading content with minimal training	Fully integrated content & data pipeline manager
Authentication & Permissions	No login or protected only by Google Drive links	Password-protected internal pages	Role-based access system (OAuth2, Active Directory etc.)
Implementation tiers considering hardware and software options	Prioritised for NSs with little to no ICT infrastructure, but with an ambition to centralise and systematize EOC functions: Printed SitRep and incident log templates (words, excel); shared folder structure via USB/Drive; SMS/WhatsApp/Telegram Alerts; central coordination led by focal point with local backup systems.	For NSs with moderate IM/ICT skills that can gradually digitize operations Shared cloud folder (Drive/OneDrive) with folder architecture; Excel-based Master Incident Tracker; Kobo/ODK links embedded; Simple dashboards (Excel, Power BI); Weekly updates shared as PDFs	For NSs with strong digital transformation leadership, surge support, and governance maturity Full web hub hosted on GO/Frappe/WordPress/ EspoCRM; Automated data feeds, user access controls, CRM-style integration; PMER, HR, volunteer systems all linked; Dashboarding, SOP repo, live mapping

In NSs with low digital literacy or no ICT teams focus should be put on using accessible tools like Kobo Toolbox links, Google Drive, OneDrive or basic website platforms. Its scalation to other features should be considered if there's sufficient capacity and clear demand and sustainability assurance of its set-up.

A scalable integration, could be the potential use of Go Platform embeds or utilisation of existing Go Platform tools like the Field Reports that can allow a sustainable, Movement driven starting point of having a central hub of critical information with updated information around emergency situations, active operations, NS overview.

F. Subnational integration

EOCs are traditionally structured under a centralised HQ mandate and operate in some sort of decentralisation set-up that allows an effective functional workflow. This can be the case where a critical prone-region heavily affected by hazards (e.g. Malawi southern regions heavily impacted by floods recurrently) has a subnational structure that delivers better and tailored results without the need to operate nationally. Nonetheless, in DRM operations, branches are the core of the NSs field work, and its connection to the communities, this is why the emergency operating set-up will condition how an EOC can work well. Depending on the institutional nature, we might see Regional EOCs at branch level covering a specific geography with both a human-resources dedicated set-up, as well as a minimum systems ecosystem. Ultimately, this level of decentralisation will require an effective workflow of communication and coordination with the HQs EOC, with defined thresholds of responsibilities, and even take over, when crisis exceed the regional capacity.

When this two-fold structure of HQs-Branch EOC structure is formal, we might see division of responsibilities, where the HQs EOC set-up ensures the standardisation of protocols, connects the different regional layers, consolidates the findings, QAs the regional set-up, and serve as the direct link with higher instances within Management, Movement Partners, IFRC / Go Platform alignment.

This decentralisation, also comes with the different levels of people's structure and related capacity. Most of the teams will have permanent DRM Officer, and volunteers at sub-branch level that will need to be equally trained and updated on the EOC set-up and its connection to their work. Ensuring that new DRM people received the necessary trainings and capacity, is vital for the sustainability of the EOC in the subnational level.

Beyond this structure, there's a need to define the coordination mechanisms through the geographies and layers of the NS, which include where (HQ, Regional or mobile), how (digitally, physically or both), and the capacity structure that exist in each level in terms of authority, tech, staff, volunteers, etc. Depending on the general formal set-up (existence of SOPs, formal label of subnational authority or effective functional hybrid or physical subnational integration) we can see different types of working connections and resources that will determine whether we have physical, virtual or hybrid coordination nodes that are functional with the formal structures.

Subnational integration readiness table

Readiness State	Criteria
Foundational (Design Phase)	Coordination during emergencies happens at branch level only and is limited to local actors. There is no structured link between branches and HQ, and no formal role for branches in national-level coordination. However, initial discussions or plans exist to connect branch operations into a wider coordination mechanism.
Emerging (No structured presence outside HQ)	Some coordination occurs between a small number of branches or between branch(es) and HQ, but it is informal and inconsistent. Data sharing may happen ad hoc (e.g., via phone calls or WhatsApp), but there are no agreed SOPs, assigned coordination roles, or structured workflows to connect subnational coordination into a national EOC system.
Functional (Partial integration at regional/branch level)	Specific branches or regions have designated focal points who actively coordinate with HQ and with other branches. EOC tools (e.g., Kobo forms, SitRep templates) are in use by some branches. Coordination happens periodically through planned calls, data validation meetings, or joint planning sessions, though not yet systematic across all regions.
Institutionalised (EOC functions embedded at subnational level)	Subnational coordination roles (e.g., regional EOC coordinators) are formally documented in SOPs. All branches follow standard EOC workflows (assessment, reporting, monitoring), and national-level coordination systematically integrates subnational inputs with established feedback loops. HQ–branch collaboration is routine, accountable, and includes joint decision-making where relevant.

4. Operational scope

A growing trend among NSs is the progressive expansion of EOCs from emergency-focused units into broader operational coordination platforms. Initially conceived to manage disaster response, EOCs in some contexts have evolved into hubs that centralise a wide range of operational data and information across the organisation. This shift reflects both the influence of digital transformation ambitions and a natural institutional evolution. The EOC, in these cases, serves as a coordination and information-sharing mechanism not only during crises but also during routine operations. It may aggregate inputs from logistics systems, ambulance dispatch, volunteer coordination, programmatic tracking, and other core services that extend beyond the traditional emergency cycle. It may also oversee the monitoring of forecasts for AA and the implementation of readiness activities outlined in an Early Action Protocol. In doing so, the EOC moves closer to the role of an operations centre, supporting real-time situational awareness, cross-departmental planning, and

decision-making on a continuous basis. This expanded scope requires careful governance, interoperability with existing systems, and alignment with the NS's broader strategic functions. If not, there are risks that without having a functional EOC-DRM driven set-up, we already move to the extended coordination domain and constraint the prioritisation of resources and core functions of an effective operative EOC.

Operational scope readiness table

Readiness State	Criteria
Foundational (Design Phase)	The EOC is under development or only activated in concept. Its purpose is unclear or not yet defined in official documentation. Coordination occurs ad hoc and inconsistently across emergencies. No structured process links EOC operations to NS planning, and routine use is not envisioned.
Emerging (Event-driven and ad hoc)	The EOC activates reactively during large-scale emergencies but lacks defined scope or continuity. Coordination dissolves after response ends. Documentation and protocols exist in fragments or vary between operations. Decision-making roles are unclear or improvised.
Functional (Emergency-focused and structured)	The EOC plays a recurring role during emergencies, including preparedness, assessment, response, monitoring, pre-positioning, and early warning follow-up. Activation and deactivation follow consistent workflows. Roles, information flows, and coordination responsibilities are documented and recognised by leadership. When not activated, response functions may request activation when coordination needs exceed routine arrangements.
Institutionalised (Expanded to routine operations)	The EOC functions continuously, integrating emergency and non-emergency operations, including logistics, EMS, volunteer tracking, programme oversight, forecast monitoring, trigger tracking, early action readiness, and monitoring of anticipatory actions. Its mandate is codified beyond crisis management, aligned with the NS's digital transformation agenda and core operational governance.

5. From self-assessment status to execution

This section introduced a self-assessment tool designed for NSs that have an EOC established to some degree either active, previously activated, or in partial use. It is not designed for initial planning or feasibility phases, but to assess the operational maturity of an existing EOC across seven core dimensions.[3] The tool is intended for maturity assessment, but not for capacity mapping or advocacy. It helps NSs to understand where it stands, what matters most and where to go during the next phases.

As far as the diagnostic process is honest and user-led, it will be triggering core questions, across department and team, to enhance the set-up and next steps around structure, people, process and systems of an EOC.

As a guideline of utilising the tool in an effective way, there're two elements to consider in its usage and interpretation:

Minimum function configuration

In order to be considered functional, an EOC must demonstrate clear added value and reliable use in real operational contexts. This readiness cannot be determined by simply averaging scores across all dimensions, but by the strength of three foundational components: Institutional Set-up, People and Capacity, and Operational Procedures. These ensure that the EOC is structurally anchored in the NS, has defined coordination and analytical roles with trained staff and volunteers, and core workflows documented and applied in different contexts. Coordination is only accepted and valued by operational actors when it delivers tangible benefits such as raising effectiveness, lowering costs, gathering more skills, avoiding duplications or gaps, reducing response time, providing access to better information, enabling service delivery, and preventing actors from working against each other. If an EOC does not consistently deliver these benefits, it will be bypassed by operations.

With these considerations, we can define a theoretical minimum standard of "Functional" readiness for each dimension. This level should represent the point at which the EOC is reliably used for emergency coordination, with core systems and processes in place, even if it is not yet fully institutionalised or integrated across the organisation. Its characteristics include a structured (not ad-hoc) set-up, repeatable workflows and tools, clearly defined governance, leadership and teams, and proven functionality across real emergency responses. While such a configuration may still be limited in scope, it becomes a dependable and actionable coordination platform. That said, achieving this ideal scenario in practice is often challenging and, in many contexts, remains a goal / aspiration to reach.

[3] If the NS does not have an EOC, and no organisational mandate for one has been defined, the sel-fassessment tool may not yet be applicable. Instead, you can use the above presented dimesnions and it's foundational sections (in grey) to structure a design-phase readiness process or feasbility discussion in introducing an EOC.

Dimension	Minimum Standard (functional readiness status)
1. Institutional set-up	The EOC is formally recognised within the NS structure (organogram or SOPs), with at least one designated coordinator or focal point and basic resourcing (space, leadership oversight).
2. Policy & DRM Integration	The EOC is referenced in at least one core DRM document (e.g. SOPs, contingency plan, PER action plan), with defined activation triggers, scope of use, and reporting channels.
3. People & Capacity	One or more individuals are formally tasked with EOC functions (coordination or analysis), trained in core workflows, and actively involved in real or simulated activations.
4. Operational Procedures	Documented workflows exist for activation, SitRep production, coordination meetings, and decision support. These have been tested in at least one real or simulated operation.
5. Information & Communications Systems	A consistent toolset (e.g. Kobo, Excel, WhatsApp/Drive) is in place and used for collecting, consolidating, and disseminating field-level data to inform operational decisions.
6. Subnational Integration	A functional link is established with at least one regional/branch focal point. Shared reporting formats and participation in coordination mechanisms are in place, even if informal.
7. Operatioal Scope	EOC is used consistently for emergency coordination across multiple phases: preparedness, response, and monitoring. Outputs (SitReps, updates) are shared with decision-makers.

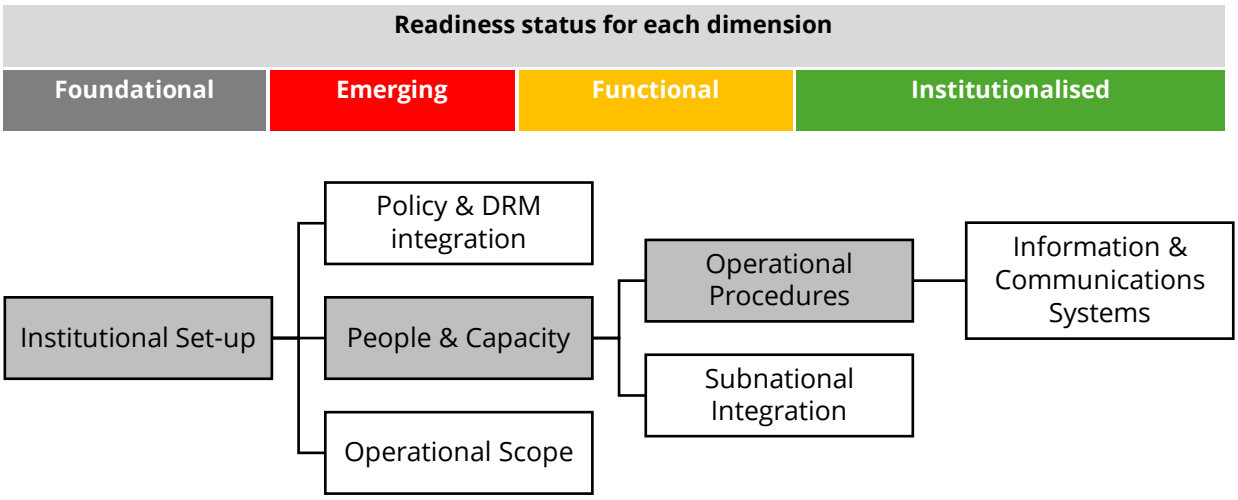
Dependencies and relations

While the tool and minimum functional set-up presents seven dimensions separately, they are not meant to be developed in isolation. As defined before, EOC effectiveness requires basic coordination among the different dimensions both operationally and structurally. This means that some dimensions cannot be considered functional unless others are.

To reflect this, the tool uses a tree-logic dependency model, where certain dimensions are structurally rooted in others. This helps ensuring that a functional label is grounded in operational logic. For this reason, there are some core dependencies across the different dimensions, meaning that there are some minimum pre-requisites in order for certain dimension be considered functional. E.g. Tools and technology cannot be functional if workflows and processes are undefined; Local branch EOCs cannot function independently if the central HQ EOC is dormant; Government coordination is ineffective if internal

coordination is fragmented; data outputs are irrelevant unless they shape real decisions, etc.

These dependencies can be identified in the following tree structure:



Practically, not all progress is equal. For instance, if the *Institutional Set-up* is still at the *Emerging* stage, no other dimension should be rated as *Institutionalised*. Similarly, if *People & Capacity* remains *Emerging*, then more technical or decentralised components like *Information Systems*, *Operational Procedures*, or *Subnational Integration* should not be rated beyond the *Functional* level. If a NS considers its *Subnational Integration* to be *Institutionalised*, it must also demonstrate that both *People & Capacity and Procedures* have reached at least a *Functional* status to support that decentralisation. Likewise, claims of advanced government integration must rest on an operationally active *Institutional Set-up* and coordination structure. These dependency rules are not constraints, but rather indications designed to prevent inflated assessments or fragmented development pathways, ensuring that functional coordination is truly supported by the necessary institutional architecture.

Find the EOC Readiness Self-Assessment Tool in the Annex of this guidelines, which you can replicate in the necessary format and structure for a better fit to NS.

6. Final Note: From Function to Practice

This document is a guide for building what works. The EOC should be understood not as a fixed infrastructure or toolset, but as a system of coordinated people, processes, and decisions. This is why its value lies in its use, not in its existence on paper and NS' policies.

Across contexts, an EOC will look different, and will operate as a temporary coordination room activated during a surge, or as a permanent nerve centre embedded in the day-to-day work of the NS. What matters is not the modality but how well it drives collective decision-making process towards action based on ground operational choices in evidence. The EOC should add value to the operations.

The self-assessment dimensions and readiness states proposed here are designed to bring an honest discussion and strategic prioritisation for a future planning. They should not be used to certify or rate capacity but to question it for effective functionality. Also, the development of EOCs will not be linear from basic to integrated set-up, instead we will see an evolution in which the NSs regress due to crisis, funding cuts or leadership changes and priorities.

Ultimately, an EOC must serve its environment. That means it should grow with the NS, integrate with real-world constraints, and evolve alongside its operations. All in all, building and sustaining such structure is not a one-time event but rather a continuous organisational learning and institutionalisation.

Annex1: EOC Readiness Self-Assessment Tool

Completed by the NS to reflect current operational status across key EOC dimensions. The assessment should be based on actual, observable practice or temporary donor-driven capacity. The overall EOC readiness status is based on a rule-based approach rather than an average score.

National Society:

Date of Assessment:

Readiness status for each dimension			
Foundational	Emerging	Functional	Instituionalised

EOC Global Readiness Status: Emerging ☐ Functional ☐ Institutionalised ☐

Dimension	Readiness Stage	Comments / Evidence
[CORE] 1. Institutional Set-up		
2. Policy & DRM Integration		
[CORE] 3. People & Capacity		
[CORE] 4. Operational Procedures		
5. Info & Comms Systems		
6. Subnational Integration		
7. Operational Scope		

Facilitated Assessment and Follow-Up: *While the tool is designed for self-assessment and internal reflection, experience has shown that it is often beneficial for the first application of the EOC Readiness Self-Assessment to be facilitated by an external evaluator or peer reviewer. An independent facilitator can help ensure objectivity, validate interpretations, and guide the process through discussion and consensus among departments. Once this initial baseline has been established, the NS can subsequently use the tool independently for regular follow-up assessments, progress tracking, and internal learning.*

EOC Readiness Status final rate:

Emerging

If any of the three critical dimensions (Institutional Set-up, People & Capacity, or Operational Procedures) are rated as Foundational, they will be treated as Emerging for the purpose of determining overall readiness but flagged for urgent capacity development. Similarly, if any of these three critical dimensions are rated as Emerging, the overall status is Emerging regardless of the other scores. The EOC will also be rated as Emerging if more than two dimensions in total are rated as Emerging or Foundational. This ensures that critical gaps in key functions are not masked by strengths in other areas and reflects the operational reality that weak foundations limit the whole system's effectiveness.

Functional

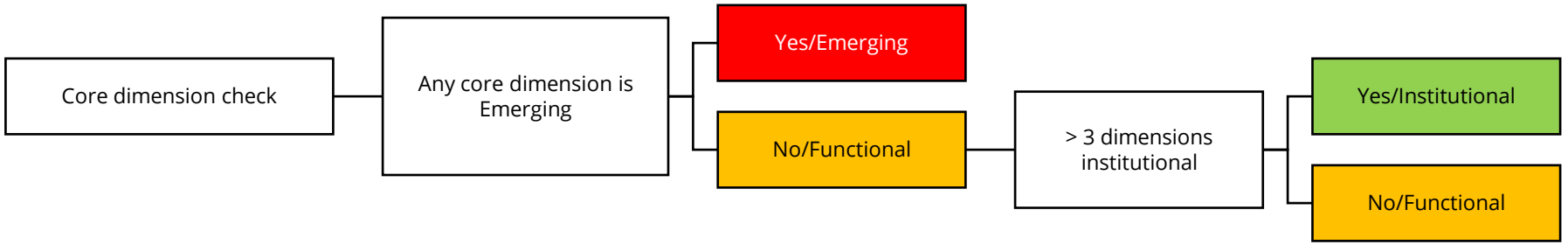
An EOC is considered Functionally operational if all three core dimensions are rated at least Functional, with no more than two dimensions in total rated as Emerging or Foundational. This rating reflects that the EOC has its critical foundations in place and is being used effectively to coordinate operations across the system, even though certain areas may still require further development, formalisation, or improvement.

Institutionalised

The EOC is considered Institutionalised if all dimensions are rated at least Functional, with several (at least 3) at the Institutionalised level, and it is used consistently in real emergencies with organisation-wide integration. This level reflects a system that not only

performs reliably in operations but also has strong governance, continuous improvement mechanisms, and full organisational buy-in.

Note: Foundational ratings are retained in the assessment results to highlight priority areas for capacity development, even though they roll up into Emerging for the final overall rating. This approach ensures that the readiness classification reflects operational reliability, while still providing a clear diagnostic picture of where the system is only at the conceptual or pre-operational stage.



Rule-based logic for dimensions rating:

Certain dimensions are considered critical foundations, highlighted in the assessment tool. If Institutional Set-up, People and Capacity, or Operational Procedures are rated as Emerging or Foundational, the overall status cannot be considered Functional or Institutionalised. If these core dimensions are all at least Functional, with no more than two dimensions rated as Emerging or Foundational, the EOC is considered Functional. If any of the core dimensions are rated as Emerging or Foundational, or if more than two dimensions are not yet in place, the EOC remains at the Emerging stage. This rule-based approach prevents overstatement of progress and ensures the rating reflects actual, dependable operational performance.

Acronyms

AA	Anticipatory Action
AAP	Anticipatory Action Plan
API	Application Programming Interface
CMS	Content Management System
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
CSV	Comma Separated Values
CVA	Cash and Voucher Assistance
DHIS2	District Health Information Software 2
DM	Disaster Management
DMS	Document Management System
DREF	Disaster Response Emergency Fund
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EAP	Early Action Protocol
EMS	Emergency Medical Services
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning
ERU	Emergency Response Unit
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GIS	Geographic Information System
HDMI	High Definition Multimedia Interface
HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IM	Information Management
IT	Information Technology
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NS	National Society
ODK	Open Data Kit
PDCA	Plan Do Check Act
PER	Preparedness for Effective Response
PDF	Portable Document Format
PHEOC	Public Health Emergency Operations Centre
PMER	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting
PNS	Partner National Society
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
QA	Quality Assurance
QGIS	QGIS mapping software
RCRC	Red Cross Red Crescent
RDRT	Regional Disaster Response Team
SitRep	Situation Report
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
ToR	Terms of Reference
UHF	Ultra High Frequency
UN	United Nations
UPS	Uninterruptible Power Supply
VHF	Very High Frequency
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Version 1.0: Completed 28.07.2025

Version 1.1: Completed 13.08.2025

Version 1.2: Completed 05.11.2025

Version 1.3: Completed 07.04.2026

Version 1.4: Completed 30.04.2026