

PANAMA RED CROSS



Emergency Operations Centre

Case Study

Summary

National Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Panamanian Red Cross
EOC Level(s)	<p>National Emergency Operations Center in Albrook.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regional EOC<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Barú○ Columbus○ Aguadulce○ La Chorrera• Monitoring Centers<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ The Tables○ David○ Panama North
Year Established	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• August 19, 2020 by note CRPA/PN.254.2020
Administrative Coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10 provinces• 24 points nationwide
EOC Type	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We maintain 1 physical operations center and 4 alternate ones, which connects nationwide with digital tools.
EOC Modality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is maintained permanently.
Supporting NSs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reference Center in Institutional Preparedness for Disasters (CREPD). Spanish Red Cross, AECID.
EOC Specific Staff / Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 coordinator of the COE, 1 focal point of telecommunications, 1 focal point of information management in the 24 points at the national level.

Governance Line

- The COE reports to the head of risk management and the comprehensive decision-making team made up of: The director and deputy director General, the president and the national vice president and the directors of voluntary organizations.

Connection with Authorities

- Inter-agency meetings are held through the team called the Joint Task Force.
- Panama's Joint Task Force (JTF) is an inter-agency team that is responsible for security and civil protection in the country. This force is made up of various institutions, including the National Police, the National Aeronaval Service (SENAN), the National Border Service (SENAFRONT), the Institutional Protection Service (SPI), the Meritorious Fire Department of the Republic of Panama (BCBRP), the Red Cross of Panama, the National Civil Protection System (SINAPROC), the Panama Maritime Authority (AMP), the Panama Maritime Authority (AMP), the Panama Maritime Authority (AMP), the Panama T the National Environmental Authority (ANAM), the Tourism Authority of Panama (ATP), the Ministry of Health (MINSAs), and the Unified Emergency System (SUME-911). The FTC was formed by the National Government of Panama through the Ministry of Government through Executive Decree No. 2 of January 7, 2015.

1. Context and Characteristics

The Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), a key component of the National Society's Preparedness for Effective Response, manages a wide range of hazards, including floods, civil unrest, environmental pollution, epidemics, pandemics, and routine peacetime incidents. The EOC is also leading a digitization initiative to systematically collect and analyze national-level data on response actions, enhancing transparency, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making.



Panamanian Red Cross adapted and maintained water and sanitation services for the community in the Darién. © IFRC, 2021

2. Core Functional Areas

a. Strategic

Strategic decisions are determined by the Decision-Making Team, which includes the Director-General, Deputy Director-General, President, National Vice-President, Directors of Voluntary Agencies, and the Head of Risk Management. This team sets the strategic direction for response efforts, authorizes key actions, and ensures alignment with the National Response Plan and institutional policies.

Meetings of the Decision-Making Team are convened ad hoc, depending on the nature and complexity of the emergency. While there is no fixed schedule, continuous communication is maintained via an institutional WhatsApp group, enabling real-time updates, operational exchange, and prompt decision-making.

The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) of the Panamanian Red Cross serves as the central hub for coordinating and overseeing response activities during humanitarian emergencies, disasters, or crises. It is responsible for collecting, analyzing, prioritizing, monitoring, and disseminating critical information on situational developments, operational needs, risks, and capacities.

Within this framework, the EOC provides essential analytical support to inform strategic decision-making. The EOC Coordinator regularly delivers situation analyses, operational reports, and risk assessments to decision-makers, ensuring that all institutional actions are guided by accurate, up-to-date, and field-verified information.

b. Operations

The Panamanian Red Cross National Presidency oversees EOC operations, supported by Risk Management, ensuring that all response actions are well-planned, coordinated, and aligned across teams. The National Plan defines clear roles and responsibilities for each operational team, enabling organized, technical, and efficient operations.

EOC Activation

The President of the National Society activates the EOC based on the severity of an event and established activation criteria. In the absence of a national alert, internal mechanisms may be triggered depending on the assessed impact. Activation is communicated through email, radio, or phone, ensuring all relevant teams are informed promptly.

Once activated, the response coordination team, operational teams, and institutional representatives engage in internal and external coordination efforts to manage the emergency effectively.

EOC Deactivation

The National President instructs deactivation when the emergency subsides, impacts stabilize, and ongoing coordination is no longer required. All involved teams are informed and resume regular duties.

Connection with Local Committees and Field Teams

The EOC maintains effective communication with local committees and field teams through digital channels, providing real-time instructions and updates. Central teams coordinate the overall strategy, while local teams implement actions on the ground and report needs and situational information. Institutional liaisons facilitate cooperation between internal committees and external organizations, ensuring a cohesive, unified response.

c. Information Management

The EOC employs a range of digital and communication tools to support data collection, analysis, monitoring, and decision-making:

- Kobo Toolbox: Collects field data and geospatial metadata with built-in quality control measures.
- Excel: Supports data consolidation, debugging, and technical checks to ensure accuracy.
- WhatsApp: Enables rapid transmission of alerts, updates, and reports across the country.

- Email: Used for formal communication, particularly with local committee chairs and institutional partners.
- Power BI: Headquarters uses interactive dashboards for real-time analysis, situational monitoring, and operational oversight.

3. Infrastructure and Equipment

The Panamanian Red Cross EOC has well-equipped physical infrastructure comprising the following areas:

- Decision-Making Room: Serves for strategic and operational planning, equipped with 2 screens, video conferencing equipment, and 1 dedicated computer.
- Monitoring Room: Supports situational monitoring, with 2 screens, 2 laptops, a multifunction printer, and a coffee station.
- Telecommunications Area: Includes a computer, telecommunications base radio, laptops, shortwave equipment, ODK, and tablets for data collection and communication.

All areas are supported by internet connectivity and data server backup. If the primary EOC is unavailable, operations can continue at 4 alternate centers nationwide or using a portable computer as needed.

4. Integration with Government and Partners

The Joint Task Force (JTF) serves as the country's primary coordination body, directly managing responses to emergencies, disasters, and crises.

The Panamanian Red Cross engages with other institutions through the Field Technical Committee (FTC), facilitating information sharing, joint planning, and complementary humanitarian actions at both national and local levels, while supporting public authorities. This approach enables the National Society to integrate with national structures, participate in decision-making, and enhance the efficiency of humanitarian response by reducing duplication and optimizing the use of resources.

Coordination with the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, including the IFRC and partner National Societies, is conducted through established Movement mechanisms, ensuring alignment and collaboration across national and international levels.

5. Lessons Learned and Adaptation

Achievements

- The Panamanian Red Cross has formalized its National Emergency, Disaster and Crisis Plan (PNEDC) to guide coordinated response actions, in accordance with national and international standards.
- The COE is now established as a technical body managing emergencies, resource mobilization, communications, and decision-making using timely information.
- Collaboration has improved among public authorities, partners, and national systems, strengthening coordination during emergencies.
- The COE has responded to various incidents by providing monitoring, support, and humanitarian services.
- Regular drills and exercises have aided in assessing capacities and enhancing organizational learning.

Good Practices

- Procedures and information flows are standardized under the National Plan for organized activation and response.
- Communication protocols ensure effective data sharing for decision-making.
- Actions are integrated with SINAPROC, enhancing interoperability and minimizing duplication.
- Ongoing training and feedback contribute to continuous improvements in operational response.

Challenges

- Ensuring enough trained staff across regions remains a difficulty.
- Maintaining process continuity, training, and plan updates requires ongoing institutional support.
- Further strengthening of the auxiliary role in inter-institutional coordination is required.