

Distance Deployments: Australian Red Cross' Experience with Remote Rapid Response

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Acknowledgments

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Contents

Abbreviations and acronyms	4
Introduction	5
Research objectives	6
Methodology	6
Limitations	7
Definitions and explanations	7
Summary of research findings	9
ARC's remote rapid response: what did it look like?	10
Findings	11
Finding 1: ARC's contribution to the remote deployment mechanism was mostly relevant and effective in achieving operational objectives for the COVID-19 and TC Harold responses	11
Finding 2: Not all profiles and missions are equally suited to remote working	14
Finding 3: Delegates faced specific challenges working remotely with respect to relationships, systems, accountability and strong management.	16
Finding 4: Critical factors can make or break a remote deployment	20
Finding 5: Rapid response delegates and their managers require specific skills and competencies to optimise ways of working remotely.	23
Finding 6: Remote deployments can, but do not always, contribute towards localisation objectives.	26
Conclusion	28
Summary of recommendations	29
Annex 1: Example decision-making framework	30
Annex 2: Adapting to remote monitoring	32

Abbreviations and acronyms

ARC	Australian Red Cross
FGD	Focus group discussion
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
PDM	Post-distribution monitoring
RCRC	Red Cross Red Crescent
SIMS	Surge Information Management Support
TC	Tropical Cyclone
ToR	Terms of Reference
VCRS	Vanuatu Red Cross Society



Photo by Chanan Greenblatt on Unsplash

Introduction

COVID-19 is changing the way the world works. The pandemic is evolving rapidly, and its public health, social, political and economic implications are widespread. Humanitarian actors, including the Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) Movement partners, are mitigating, preparing for and responding to the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable and crisis-affected populations worldwide. They are being forced to change their ways of working to continue to meet growing and compounding humanitarian needs.

COVID-19 continues to force governments to restrict human mobility in a concerted effort to reduce transmission. Many countries have closed their borders to international travellers and imposed restrictions on internal movement. In addition to enforced mobility restrictions, many agencies have restricted staff travel and movement to reduce COVID-19 risk for staff and communities. Reduced mobility of personnel significantly hampers the ability of humanitarian agencies to respond.

In response to the changing operating environment brought about by COVID-19, the Australian Red Cross (ARC) adapted the way it mobilised surge for international responses. Rather than deploying to an operation, delegates provided support to the operations (working with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and National Society partners) from remote locations. The remote response mechanism was coordinated at all levels by IFRC. ARC's contribution of personnel therefore aimed to meet the needs of the IFRC and National Society partners as part of the Movement-wide response.

This document presents the evidence about what makes a successful remote deployment. Through six key findings and a series of aligned recommendations, it informs ongoing support to operations and Movement partners. This report also highlights how ARC and other Movement partners can progress other areas of work, including remote peer support for capacity-building, advancing the localisation agenda, and recruiting and screening for competencies suitable for remote deployments and positions on their Register.

About this research

Research objectives

The overarching objectives of the research were to:

- **Analyse and identify the strengths, weaknesses, barriers and enablers** of the remote deployment mechanism
- **Identify recommendations** for improving remote deployments in the future.

Methodology

The research used a mixed methods approach that captured both qualitative and quantitative data. It began with a review of key resources, including register recruitment competency frameworks, rapid response remote deployment guidelines, deployment requests and terms of reference documents, Emergency Plans of Action, situation reports, performance appraisals and end-of-mission reports. Twenty-one key informant interviews were conducted with people who had deployed remotely, managed delegates or were otherwise closely involved at various stages of the remote deployment process.

Two focus group discussions (FGDs) involving 12 participants provided deeper insight into the experience of stakeholders with the remote deployment mechanism and allowed interrogation of some of the emerging themes from the research. A survey of 18 key stakeholders who had been involved in the remote deployment mechanism, including delegates, IFRC and ARC representatives, and members of National Societies, was used to gain quantitative insights into their experience of and reflections on the remote deployment mechanism. A summary of the methodology is presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Methodology



Limitations

- **Applicability of findings across context:** the individual nature of missions meant the experience of each delegate was unique in terms of circumstance, role, location and other contextual factors. This limits the applicability of findings across all contexts, although where similarities are evident this has been highlighted.
- **Applicability of findings into the future:** the research was conducted in the unique context of COVID-19. We know that COVID-19 is challenging the world in completely new ways. Data collected during this project was based on experiences in deploying remotely during this unique context and as yet, there is no other dataset of remote deployments with which to compare it. As such, some findings and recommendations may need further consideration when applying to a non-COVID-19 situation.
- **Statistical significance of survey results:** the analysis of survey data is intended to provide an indication of themes and ideas we identified among key stakeholders. We did not test for statistical significance, so quantitative comparisons should not be interpreted as implying statistically significant differences.
- **Assessment of needs:** in reviewing the impact of the Australian Red Cross contribution to the mechanism, particularly in terms of relevance of the missions, this was based on perceptions rather than an in-depth analysis of gaps and needs of the National Society.

Definitions and explanations

Remote deployment mechanism: the IFRC led and coordinated the remote deployment mechanism, which was used to deploy support to operations worldwide (COVID-specific missions and other response missions in a COVID-19 context). ARC, as a partner National Society, contributed to this remote deployment mechanism by deploying and funding personnel from its register.

Localisation: the process of recognising, respecting and strengthening the independence of leadership and decision-making by national actors in humanitarian action, in order to better meet the needs of affected populations.¹

Relevance: the extent to which the objectives of the remote deployment mechanism was consistent with the needs of the National Society.

Effectiveness: the extent to which the mission achieved its objectives.

Shadow missions: missions where a delegate (in some cases a first time delegate or less experienced delegate) works alongside a more experienced delegate. Shadow missions aim to facilitate learning for emerging delegates in a safe learning environment.

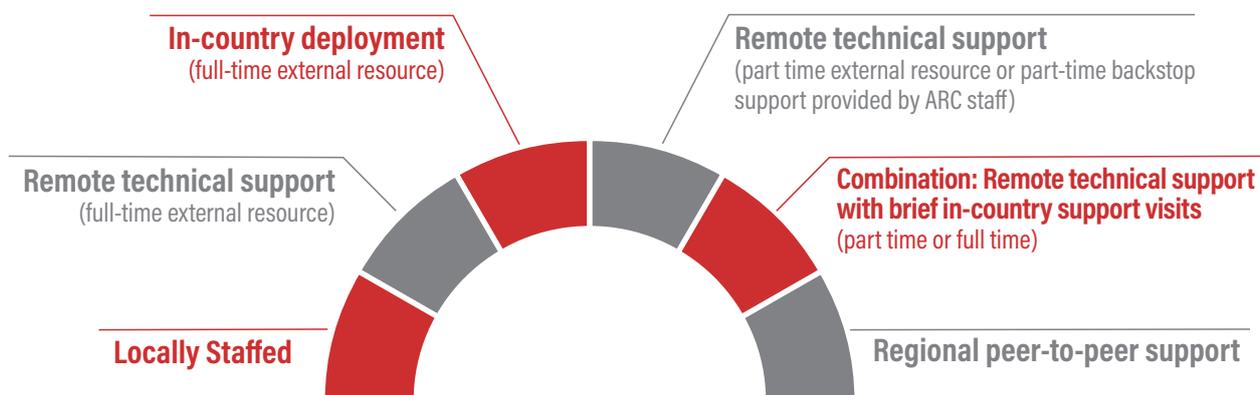
¹ This is the definition agreed by Pacific leaders as part of the research process for Going Local: Achieving a more appropriate and fit-for-purpose humanitarian ecosystem in the Pacific (2017). ARC and HAG. <https://www.redcross.org.au/getmedia/fa37f8eb-51e7-4ecd-ba2f-d1587574d6d5/ARC-Localisation-report-Electronic-301017.pdf.aspx>

Situating rapid response remotely

ARC considers remote rapid response, including what it may look like into the future, as a component of an overall organisational approach to humanitarian action within the RCRC Movement, particularly partnership with National Societies. In addition to the Seven Fundamental Principles,² the RCRC Movement is guided by the Principles and Rules for RCRC Humanitarian Assistance. These principles underline humanitarian response within the Movement, including that “*all international assistance provided by a National Society or the International Federation is with the consent of the National Society of the disaster-affected country*” and that “*international assistance [...] builds upon local capacities and complements local response mechanisms, contributing to preparedness for possible future disasters and strengthening long-term resilience.*”³

Remote rapid response is considered a potential mechanism to support Movement-wide objectives in line with these principles, either alone or in concert with other mechanisms and approaches. The ARC deployment team has begun to articulate this role or contribution of remote rapid response as a series of HR options to support National Societies, as articulated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Human Resourcing for rapid deployments (in no particular order)



² The seven fundamental principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent are humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality.

³ <https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Documents/Secretariat/Accountability/Principles%20Rules%20for%20Red%20Cross%20Red%20Crescent%20Humanitarian%20Assistance.pdf>

Summary of research findings



Finding 1

ARC's contribution to the remote deployment mechanism was mostly relevant and effective in achieving operational objectives for the COVID-19 and TC Harold responses

"(The delegate) was able to adapt and work to support the National Society in the right way. The feedback was that the support being provided to the National Society meant they could focus on the activities they had to prioritise, but still get the right technical support. When it comes down to it, this is the most important thing – that the objectives of a mission support the National Society."



Finding 2

Not all profiles and missions are equally suited to remote working

"Certain profiles just don't work for remote deployments at all, or not as well as others. Some profiles will require significantly more adaptation."



Finding 3

Delegates faced specific challenges working remotely with respect to relationships, systems, accountability and strong management.

"I can't ensure the voice of community and their participation remotely."



Finding 4

Critical factors can make or break a remote deployment

"All delegates said they achieved what they wanted to achieve, it was a successful mission, however they have not been without their challenges. What I've heard is that factors that made a deployment great for one delegate also made it challenging for another."



Finding 5

Rapid response delegates *and* their managers require specific skills and competencies to optimise ways of working remotely.

"First of all, be sure that the local management/leadership team is supportive of remote deployments, and have had the appropriate training themselves on how to support the implementation of remote deployments into a humanitarian response."

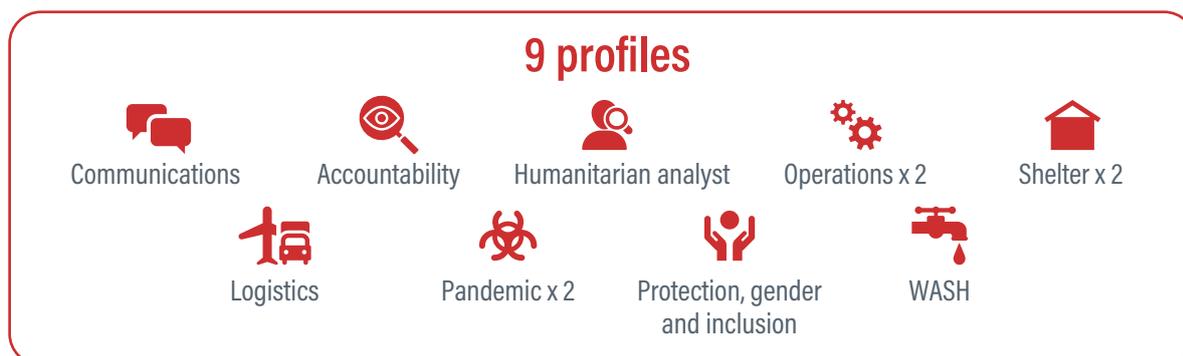
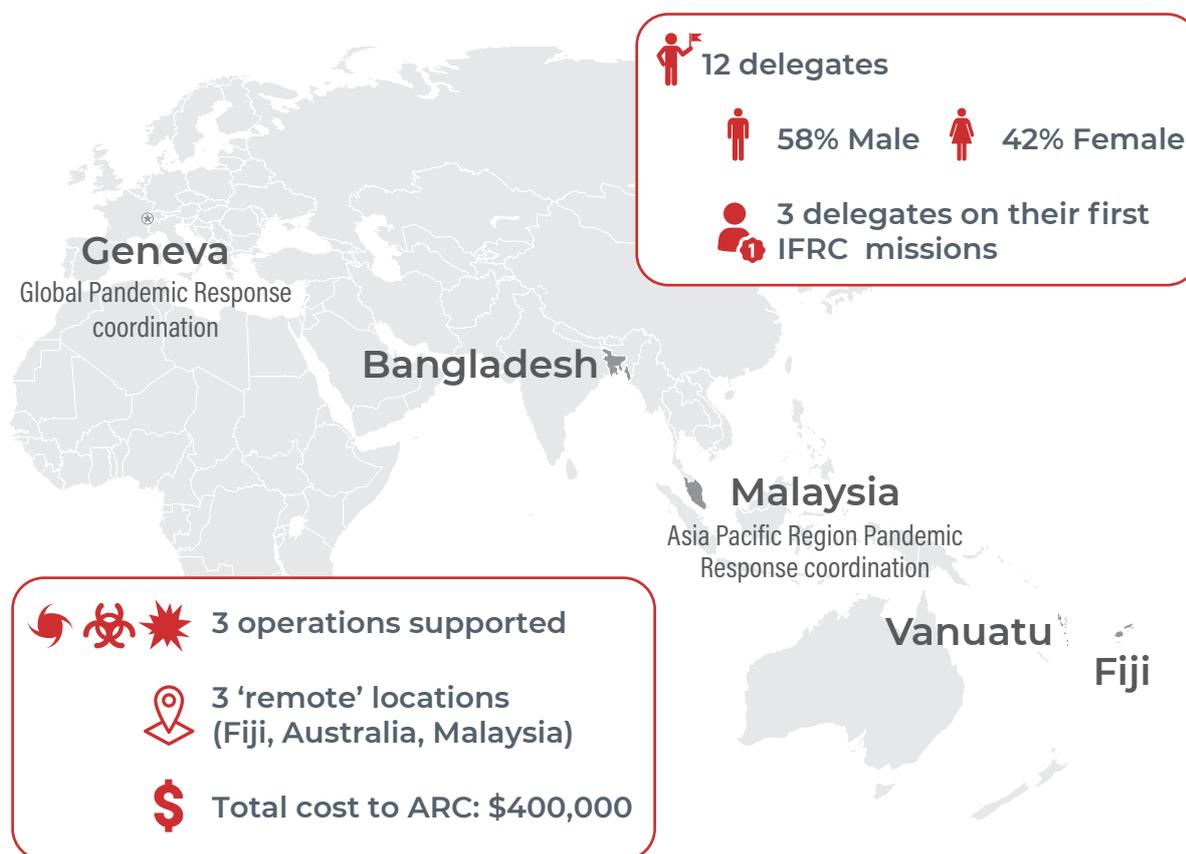


Finding 6

Remote deployments can, but do not always, contribute towards localisation objectives.

"Remote deployment is not a good measure of locally led response. If the power has shifted, it doesn't matter if the support is provided remotely or not."

How did ARC channel its remote rapid response?



Findings



Finding 1:

ARC's contribution to the remote deployment mechanism was mostly relevant and effective in achieving operational objectives for the COVID-19 and TC Harold responses

"(The delegate) was able to adapt and work to support the National Society in the right way. The feedback was that the support being provided to the National Society meant they could focus on the activities they had to prioritise, but still get the right technical support. When it comes down to it, this is the most important thing – that the objectives of a mission support the National Society." (IFRC representative)

Data gathered during this research demonstrated that ARC's contribution to the remote deployment mechanism was effective and relevant in the context of the broader Movement operations. The relevance of ARC's contribution to the remote deployment mechanism was measured by how the IFRC coordinated missions met the needs of Movement partners, in particular National Societies. In this context, ARC's contribution to the remote deployment mechanism was largely seen as relevant.



85% of survey respondents reported the remote deployment mechanism was mostly or extremely relevant.



100% of line managers of delegates deployed to global or regional roles reported their contribution as relevant to what the operations sought to achieve.

* Interviews 8, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20 and 22

Many of the ARC-supported missions were well adapted to the remote working context, which was reflected in the associated Terms of Reference (ToR) documents, and accompanying workplans. Whilst in some cases the scope of work took time to finalise, this investment contributed towards more relevant missions. For example, one delegate and their line manager reviewed the scope of work several times, but both interviewees noted the end result enabled them to effectively complete the most appropriate work.⁵ Whilst this was the case for the ToRs and workplans to which most ARC delegates worked, this was not the case with all mission ToRs and workplans during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶

4 Interview 8

5 Interviews 4 and 17

6 Interview 11

ARC's contribution to the remote deployment mechanism was largely seen as effective. Examples of ARC's influence on effective programming were seen in the quality of IFRC and National Society plans and other documents. For example, in the Tropical Cyclone (TC) Harold response, delegates worked with IFRC colleagues and Vanuatu Red Cross Society (VCRS) counterparts to support VCRS to carry out post-distribution monitoring (PDM) – something which had previously challenged the National Society. Delegates designed the PDM survey, which VCRS then adapted, translated and carried out.⁷ Both delegates and National Societies counterparts highlighted this as helping to achieve the National Societies' objectives.

"The delegates' support with documentation was really helpful, and something that means our work improves."⁸

Examples of effective remote deployments were also evident through the work of ARC-supported Health delegates. Two pandemic preparedness coordinators were instrumental in designing and implementing the IFRC's Emergency Plan of Action for the COVID-19 response – the Federation's largest-ever appeal.

"I was able to do huge amounts of work. I took over the portfolio of developing the training and guidelines for staff and volunteers at the National Society level. At one point WHO were developing so much, one week they had ninety-five documents in the pipeline. I was able to take the information distil it – my take was what did they need to know in universal language and how does it align with other Red Cross tools?"⁹

The desired location of the role was a significant factor in how effective it could be performed remotely. For example, regional or global coordination roles involved a degree of remote working in a pre-COVID-19 context. Some regional roles working in the Asia Pacific Regional Office support 38 National Societies remotely,¹⁰ with infrequent in-country visits.¹¹ Remote roles at the regional level worked well because their proximity to the National Societies remained fairly consistent. However, personnel in roles designed for the field, who commenced in-country before they were repatriated, reported difficulty in achieving full effectiveness.¹²

7 Interviews 7 and 8; End of Mission report 2

8 Interview 5

9 Interview 4

10 <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/where-we-work/asia-pacific/>

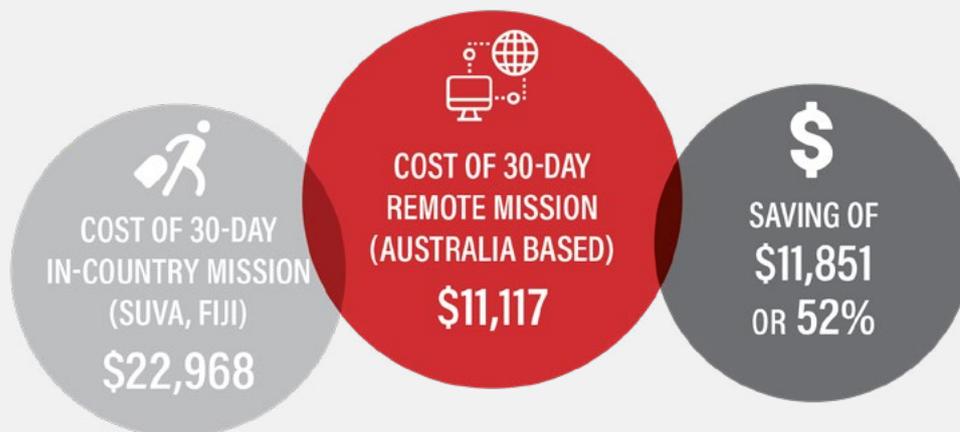
11 Interview 13

12 Interviews 3, 9, 12 and 15

Value for Money

In addition to being relevant and effective, the mechanism also presents cost saving opportunities for ARC and possibilities to increase value for money. Figure 4 below shows a cost comparison of an in-country 30-day mission based in Suva, Fiji as compared with a 30-day remote mission. The main areas for cost saving are in medical clearance, flights, accommodation, insurance and per diems which lead to a saving of \$11,851 over the 30-day period.¹³

Figure 3: 30-day mission cost comparison



Stakeholder perspectives on utilising remote deployments in future are further evidence for the relevance and effectiveness of ARC's contribution. There is a clear desire from stakeholders to continue to engage with the remote deployment mechanism. Many reported that future remote deployments would depend on the context of the mission and role, whilst 51% reported other remote deployments could proceed in the future with few or no changes.

Recommendations

- ✓ Advocate and work to remove barriers for agreed workplans for future deployments to appropriately reflect the context and are adapted to realistically reflect what can be achieved via remote working.
- ✓ Engage proactively with other Movement partners around ways to consolidate and strengthen remote working approaches, and advocate for the use of remote support where relevant.
- ✓ Continue to gather data via delegate debriefs on remote working experiences. Use this data to monitor efficacy and relevance as the global context continues to change.

¹³ Australian Red Cross provided financial data for cost comparison. Note this does not consider any costs incurred by IFRC in facilitating logistics around accommodation, arrival etc.



Finding 2:

Not all profiles and missions are equally suited to remote working

“Certain profiles just don’t work for remote deployments at all, or not as well as others. Some profiles will require a significantly more adaptation.”¹⁴

Whilst overall the contribution to the remote rapid response mechanism was relevant and effective, there were nuances linked to the scope and profiles of each role. Roles found to be better suited to remote working were primarily not directly ‘field-facing’. Examples of such roles included logistics, information management and communications,¹⁵ which are often heavily reliant on defined processes and deliverables and traditionally requiring little time close to operations.¹⁶ For example, one delegate noted that as their role was process orientated, it was easier to build the capacity of their counterpart and support staff because the process and output was defined clearly to begin with.¹⁷

Learning from SIMS

Remote deployments are not entirely new to some parts of the RCRC Movement. The IFRC Geneva Surge desk leveraged lessons from the Surge Information Management Support (SIMS) network when designing the remote deployment mechanism. The SIMS network is a pre-existing network of information managers that can be mobilised via the Geneva Surge desk to provide information management support to an operation. Whilst some missions take place in country, many are done remotely. All in-country missions are also remotely supported by a coordinator.

The SIMS approach is an example of how specific support functions can be systematically set up effectively to work remotely.

Roles that traditionally require more time in the field, including technical roles (such as Shelter delegates or Protection, Gender and Inclusion delegates) as well as coordination roles (such as operations managers) require more adaptation to the remote set up.¹⁸ For example, technical roles are often held accountable to adherence of standards (such as Sphere standards) and are required to validate that programs meet these standards. Being remote made it difficult to verify technical quality of programmes, which in other scenarios is done through direct field monitoring. Further, remote-working technical delegates struggled to acquire a sufficiently detailed understanding of community needs to inform appropriate interventions.¹⁹ Protection technical support requires an additional level of consideration given the importance of confidentiality in how information is accessed, shared and acted upon.²⁰

¹⁴ Interview 20

¹⁵ ARC did not deploy Information Management delegates; this was cited as example of a role that would work well remotely in future. Interviews 11 and 14

¹⁶ Interviews 2, 10 and 12; FGD 1

¹⁷ Interview 2

¹⁸ Interviews 7, 8, 12, 13, 20 and 21; FGD 1

¹⁹ Interviews 7, 9 and 15

²⁰ FGD 1

Within the spectrum of health profiles, only some can be tailored to remote working. Patient facing clinical health roles that are required to directly deliver clinical services, such as ward nurses, anaesthetists and clinical psychologists cannot be done at a distance. These roles make up a significant component of the ARC register and in the 2019 calendar year were the largest cohort deployed. Other health roles, such as those developing training and guidance, SOPs and developing health response strategy however are appropriate for remote working.

Making remote technical support fit for purpose

Technical roles can be better adapted to remote working in future. Technical specialists²¹ raised examples including:

- Mapping existing National Societies' technical capabilities and gaps to better understand their needs
- Excluding the following aspects from remote roles
 - ◆ Management of staff
 - ◆ Budget oversight
- Ensuring ToRs clearly articulate role expectations, including defining how the role will be different to working in the field
- Developing a clear framework of support for delegates, including the role of line managers, the supporting National Society and the IFRC.

These adaptations may require more time, planning, investment and coordination with other Movement partners to ensure that rapid response profile role design, and skillsets of those deployed into the role, are contextually appropriate.

Recommendations

- ✓ Establish a set of decision-making criteria to inform decisions about whether a role is better suited to remote working or in-country support and how it supports localisation objectives. Refer to Annex 1 for an example decision making framework.
- ✓ Explore opportunities with IFRC and other Movement partners to determine feasibility of SIMS-like networks for other functions that are well suited to remote working, such as logistics or communications.

21 FGD 1



Finding 3:

Delegates faced specific challenges working remotely with respect to relationships, systems, accountability and strong management.

| *"I can't ensure the voice of community and their participation remotely."²²*

Adapting to remote working presented a series of challenges for delegates at various points during their missions. Whilst some of the main problems were specific to the remote rapid response context, others were about generally adapting to remote working and COVID-19.

Building relationships

Seventy-eight per cent of survey respondents noted that building new relationships and networks was one of the top three challenges of remote rapid response.

High-quality interpersonal relationships in the work environment improve psychological wellbeing, as well as coordination with other team members and error detection.²³ Without unscheduled engagement time (i.e. that which isn't on a structured call or meeting) with Red Cross or other humanitarian colleagues to build interpersonal connections, it was difficult to foster relationships that transcended the task/s at hand.²⁴

| *"It's those informal conversations you strike up where you share information, develop partnerships – that was a huge challenge."²⁵*

Further, those managing remote delegates noted they had to be intentional in creating the informal aspects of the relationship, which was challenging when interaction time was short.²⁶

Learning and adapting to new systems

There is a heavy reliance on systems and technology when working remotely, which IFRC identified as a critical screening point in the guidelines for remote deployment.²⁷ Delegates or their colleagues whose access to or use of technology and systems was suboptimal reported this significantly reduced their ability to work effectively remotely. For example, colleagues at National Societies and the Federation working from home with low-bandwidth and slow internet connections could only be contacted for calls on certain days, resulting in frustration.²⁸

22 Interview 21

23 https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/61533/932_ftp.pdf?sequence=1

24 Interviews 7, 8, 9 and 11

25 Interview 7

26 Interviews 8 and 19

27 IFRC Guidelines for remote rapid response

28 Interviews 9 and 18

Ensuring accountability

“How do you assess the quality of care in a hospital when you aren't there? How do we know the nursing and medical care is of standard? How is the community protected if no one is watching? It is all based on paper now. If you were in the field you would do a lot of observation. That is the toughest [problem].”²⁹

Lack of physical access to operations and an inability to verify adherence to standards led to uncertainty about the quality and accountability of interventions, both in terms of program quality and financial compliance. Sixty-six per cent of delegates reported lack of physical access as a top-three challenge. One delegate mentioned difficulty in ensuring financial accountability in some operations where auditing and monitoring could not be done in person.³⁰

Strong management

This review found that whilst overall the management of delegates was overwhelmingly positive, where it was not strong it had a significant negative impact on missions. Identified challenges predominately related to a lack of competencies in effectively managing remote delegates. Examples included poor remote communication (leading to poor information flow); lack of trust in delegates in being accountable for their work when not physically present, and frustration in roles not being suited to remote working.³¹ Figure 4 below highlights the range of delegate perspectives on how management impacted their missions. This highlights the important roles that line managers play in enabling remote delegates to function and integrate to be effective in their role.

Figure 4: Delegate perspectives on management as an enabler for remote working

The support from my manager was an enabler to me working effectively



“The management team have not adapted their communication means to account for remote staff, therefore all meetings still occur in-person, with no ability to ‘dial in’. Email communication is very poor and staff meetings (outside of the ones I initiate with my team) are non-existent.”³²

²⁹ Interview 21

³⁰ Interview 16

³¹ Interviews 2, 9, 15 and 18; survey responses

³² Survey respondent

Working from home during a global pandemic: from general to rapid response specifics

Whilst delegates faced some specific hurdles in undertaking rapid response functions remotely, some additional challenges were specific to working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as general problems that are a feature of remote working. For example, only 6% of survey respondents reported that physical proximity to the team with which they were working was a challenge, because teams in most scenarios (even when most members were in the same country) were not meeting physically.

If anything, it was better we were all working remotely. We had to find ways to work towards the goal. If you had some in the office, there may have been an imbalance.³³

Working remotely during COVID-19 has meant some personnel are sharing home 'offices' with other individuals within their households, or juggling home schooling and their rapid response duties. Some delegates also reported being unable to set boundaries for their work hours, resulting in them working at an unsustainable volume.³⁴ This is a common issue with working from a home environment, as acknowledged in the IFRC Remote Working Best Practices guidance. The guidance links to articles that offer strategies on addressing remote working challenges, including how to establish balance between professional and personal life whilst working at home.

Table 1 below highlights some strategies and specific adaptations for rapid response delegates working remotely.³⁵

Strategy	Descriptor	Rapid response specifics
 <p>1. Work parallel schedules</p>	<p>The worker should align their working schedule with those in their life (e.g. spouse, dependents), to allow dedicated time for work and for family.</p>	<p>If working in different time zones, identify the 'non-negotiable' meetings you have to attend that are outside your schedule. Work with your manager to reduce these as much as possible.</p> <p>Time zones may mean workers align their days with other countries' working hours; ensure there is overlap of 'non-work time' if necessary.</p>
 <p>2. Set a firm stopping point</p>	<p>Create consistency and boundaries to avoid working extensive overtime. Setting a firm stopping point every day – and sticking to it – can help you keep your work in check.</p>	<p>In the emergency response phase, there may be an expectation that you are available 24/7 – as you would be in the field.</p> <p>Establish expectations and boundaries with your manager and broader team and ensure these are communicated.</p>

³³ Interview 13

³⁴ Interviews 4, 7 and 13

³⁵ Adapted from <https://www.themuse.com/advice/work-from-home-work-life-balance>



3. Have a trigger to end the work day (and start personal time)

Creating new habits through triggers establishes a new routine. Triggers, such as going for a walk or cleaning up the office, send a signal to the worker's body and brain that work is officially over.

This may include spending 30 minutes at the end of the day (maybe as a formal handover) to ensure the country/context being supported can continue their work when you are offline.



4. Shut the office door

Create physical, visual and/or psychological space between the workspace and other areas of the home. This allows the worker to relax without being pulled back into work.

If you are used to working weekends in the field in the response phase, additional steps could be taken, including not using computers for personal reasons on the weekend (it's easy to get drawn in).



5. Schedule screen-free time

Scheduling no-screen time (laptops, phones, tablets, TV etc.) allows the worker to disconnect from their work and digital life and immerse themselves with their personal life.

Establish points within the day for time away from the screen. Even during the response phase, which may require additional work hours, time without a screen can be spent productively.

Recommendations

- ✓ Consider introducing specific sessions into compulsory pre-deployment training, such as IMPACT, that deal with remote ways of working. Topics to consider include systems and technology, remote ways of working, optimising remote communications, and remote teaching and learning tools and techniques.
- ✓ Ensure that delegates likely to work remotely are well equipped with and able to use technology and systems architecture. Consider options for basic systems and processes training for delegates likely to deploy remotely.
- ✓ Look for ways to increase the capacity of specific personnel (primarily those responsible for adherence to standards and quality assurance) in remote monitoring. See Annex 2 for an overview of remote monitoring guidance and supporting resources.



Finding 4:

Critical factors can make or break a remote deployment

"All delegates said they achieved what they wanted to achieve, it was a successful mission. However they have not been without their challenges. What I've heard is factors that made a deployment great for one delegate also made it challenging for another."³⁶

Many of the factors described as challenges or barriers for remote working were also enabling factors. This highlights the importance of getting these factors right, because they are critical to success or failure.

Pre-existing relationships

"Relationships drive deployments."³⁷

Stakeholders reported pre-existing relationships as one of the main enablers for remote missions. Fifty-six per cent of survey respondents cited relationships, both within the RCRC Movement and more broadly in the humanitarian sector, as a critical success factor. Delegates were able to leverage relationships in several ways with positive effects. For example, one delegate was able to leverage their relationships across the Pacific and Australia to gain traction on activities. They were also able to commence working effectively immediately due to the existing trust in the relationship, as opposed to having to spend significant amounts of time establishing trust.³⁸

A versatile approach to communications systems

"I think what worked well [in my approach] was that I didn't just settle. If I sent an email and didn't get a reply, I would think of other ways to reach out to communicate."³⁹

Whilst access to and proficiency in new systems were barriers for some delegates, systems that enabled communication, coupled with strong, versatile communication skills were critical enablers of success in remote deployments. All interviewees reported that proficiency with systems and modes of communication were vital in engaging with stakeholders. Several delegates cited the need to find alternative communication pathways to engage with colleagues from VRCS. In the Pacific, some modes of professional communication, such as email, are not used as frequently as in other settings. Delegates overcame this by proactively communicating with colleagues via Facebook Messenger – a much more commonly used communication tool.⁴⁰ Another delegate struggled to connect with National Society counterparts via email or other web-based communication platforms, so resorted to using the landline for most communications.⁴¹

³⁶ Interview 12

³⁷ FGD 2

³⁸ Interviews 2, 12

³⁹ Interview 2

⁴⁰ Interviews 3, 3, 4, 7, 9, 12, 13, 18, 19, 20, 21

⁴¹ Interview 14

Experience

“Background and experience enable success for sure [it gives you] familiarity with people, the region, and Red Cross generally.”⁴²

Eighty-one per cent of interviewees reported that previous experience, both within the RCRC Movement and in the country or region of the operation, was a critical enabler – for multiple reasons. Delegates with deep contextual knowledge understood the complex realities on the ground, as well as how to gain traction with their work. Experience within the RCRC Movement enabled delegates to begin their missions quickly due to an understanding of how Movement responses work, including working with National Societies and familiarity with critical IFRC processes and procedures.⁴³

“Because [the delegate] know the processes, they know how to get traction, they hit the ground running.”⁴⁴

A note on first-time delegates

“The outcomes of a first-time delegate and a seasoned deployee might be the same, but the journey to get there will be very different – I think first time delegates would find it harder.”⁴⁵

Whilst prior experience was cited as being a critical enabler of successful remote working, it does not necessarily preclude first-time delegates from remote working in future. Several interviewees spoke to the opportunity remote deployments can offer first-time delegates if they are prepared in the right ways and have some key competencies. Examples of ways to strengthen their understanding of the Movement included participation in trainings (both so they understand Movement response processes and procedures, and to build relationships with key stakeholders), undertaking other pieces of work with Movement partners (such as short-term consultancies), and shadow missions.⁴⁶ Key competencies to look for included mentoring expertise and work with national counterparts in previous roles.⁴⁷

Strong management is a critical enabler to support first-time delegates working remotely. It is important managers acknowledge the challenges any first-time delegate may experience, particularly in the remote setting. New delegates may need increased support in accessing information, a point of contact for questions and clarification, and establishing and adhering to ways of working. These factors can lead to clear expectations being set, and appropriate support mechanisms established, which first time delegates often require. Finding 5 below outlines further detail about competencies required for managers overseeing remote rapid response roles.

⁴² Interview 16

⁴³ Interviews 2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 17, 19, 20 and 21

⁴⁴ Interview 22

⁴⁵ Interview 21

⁴⁶ Interviews 2, 11, 13, 19 and 21

⁴⁷ FGD 2

Remote rapid response presents an opportunity for greater diversity and inclusion within the ARC register. Remote working facilitates access to opportunities for delegates that otherwise may not be able undertake, for example due to family or personal circumstances. Remote rapid response also presents an opportunity to ARC to increase the number and type of delegates they are able to recruit and deploy.

"It opens up a spectrum of inclusion – whether that's carers, persons with disabilities or others who can't deploy for other reasons."⁴⁸

Recommendations

- ✓ In decision-making on which delegates are the most suited for future remote missions, continue to prioritise those that have prior knowledge, experience and relationships in the country or region, as well as positive approaches to engagement with national counterparts. Such experience should be weighted against other critical experience and skills.
- ✓ Look for ways to enhance exposure of new delegates to strengthen their understanding of Movement processes procedures and colleagues in order to better position them for remote roles.
- ✓ Seek opportunities to expand the delegate pool to be more diverse and inclusive, noting that some recruits may exclusively be available for remote work.

48 FGD 2



Finding 5:

Rapid response delegates *and* their managers require specific skills and competencies to optimise ways of working remotely.

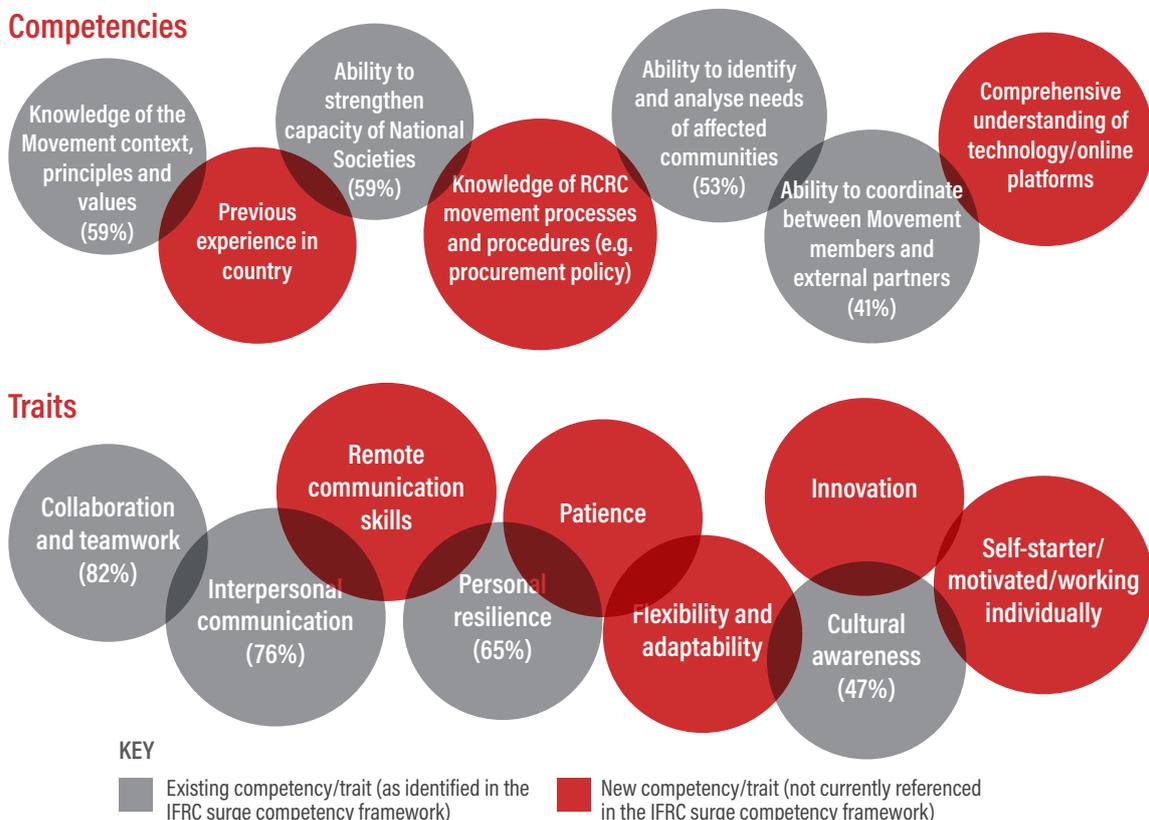
"First of all, be sure that the local management/leadership team is supportive of remote deployments, and have had the appropriate training themselves on how to support the implementation of remote deployments into a humanitarian response."⁴⁹

Competencies for remote rapid response

Whilst many of the competencies and traits that rapid response personnel need are similar to those required in traditional deployments, there are unique competencies that enable more success when working remotely. The *IFRC Rapid Response Remote Deployment Guidelines* note specific competencies that should be assessed when screening for remote deployment suitability include skills and experience in providing remote support, strong mentoring skills, experience with remote collaboration tools, problem solving, and communication.⁵⁰

Evidence collected through this review highlighted existing competencies in the IFRC Surge Competency Framework that should be prioritised, as well as new competencies that could be considered in future screening. Similarly, the review found existing personal traits that were preferred for remote delegates, and new traits for human resources personnel to consider. These competencies and traits are outlined in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Competencies and traits for remote working



49 Survey respondent

50 IFRC Rapid Response Remote Deployment Guidelines

Competencies and skills required for remote working: Lessons from outside the sector

Both the private and tertiary education sectors have collated evidence around enhancing remote working and learning, including the competencies that remote workers need. Research conducted in 2018⁵¹ analysed co-working spaces and remote working to determine the necessary competencies for success in a virtual, technology-rich environment. Eight key skills were identified as essential to successful remote working, which may also be useful for future competency assessment for remote working in rapid response roles.



1. Communication: can you accurately and succinctly convey and interpret thoughts and ideas through digital messages?



2. Self-motivation: Can you take initiative without being prompted or rewarded?



3. Trustworthiness: self-check: are you going to fulfill expectations without supervision?



4. Discipline: are you in control of your own time, tasks and energy?



5. Curiosity and critical thinking: can you independently analyse, evaluate and strategise an issue?



6. Adaptability: can you adapt to and accurately prioritise the impact of changes?



7. Accountability: how do you and your team know that you've been productive throughout the work day?



8. Empathy: are you aware and considerate of other people's feelings?

Competencies and traits for managing remote delegates

“Strong leadership is an enabler – we need to educate managers on how to manage remote work.”⁵²

Specific skills and approaches to managing remote delegates were also found to be critical to the success of missions. Seventy-seven per cent of delegates mentioned the importance of competent line management and its influence (in most cases positive) on their mission. The importance of competency in remote management is referenced in the *IFRC Rapid Response Remote Deployment Guidelines*, which set out specific management duties to ensure the delegate is appropriately on-boarded and familiar with the systems and tasks required for the role.

51 <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b045109c258b4052b14cd0d/t/5c8d6f0ee4966b4eaedbf0df/1552772880182/Academic+Paper.docx.pdf>

52 FGD 2

Management competencies described as vital included understanding of technology and systems, and strong remote communication skills.⁵³ Effective remote communication is vital when working across different time-zones, cultural norms and communication styles. It requires competency in a variety of communication tools and awareness of when the best time is to draw on each tool. One delegate spoke about their manager’s extremely positive approach of setting up multiple team communication channels to ensure that even remotely, all members felt connected in a way that was not burdensome.⁵⁴ Key traits that are important for managers included trustworthiness, interpersonal communication and ability to motivate others.

Figure 6 below highlights the challenges found in managing remote rapid response as identified by both delegates and their managers. It also provides examples of good practice strategies managers could employ to mitigate the challenges in future.

Figure 6: Management of remote rapid response: challenges and good practice



Recommendations

- ✓ In recruiting and screening new register members, consider those with specific experience in remote working environment (e.g. in consulting roles or in universities that facilitate remote learning). Such experience should be weighted against other critical experience and skills.
- ✓ Look for opportunities for delegates to share tips, tricks and traps on working remotely with each other to build a community of practice around what works, and increase confidence and familiarity in remote tools within the delegate pool.
- ✓ Work with Movement partners to refine competencies for managers who will be overseeing remote delegates.

⁵³ Interview 4
⁵⁴ Interview 16



Finding 6:

Remote deployments can, but do not always, contribute towards localisation objectives.

“Remote deployment is not a good measure of locally led response. If the power has shifted, it doesn’t matter if the support is provided remotely or not.”⁵⁵

Remote rapid response can advance localisation objectives if the missions meet the identified needs of the National Society and can be linked to a shift in power towards locally led humanitarian action. A positive example was found in the remote support provided via IFRC to the VRCS-led response to TC Harold. The remote mechanism meant that support in key areas as requested by the National Society could still be provided, but the National Society was not as overwhelmed with personnel as in previous responses and could lead the response.⁵⁶

“During TC Pam, this office was flooded with delegates and it was hard to think and make decisions. With this remote support, it is calm, I can step back, make a decision, lead and move forward.”⁵⁷



ARC delegates deployed to TC Pam in 2014



ARC delegates remotely supporting TC Harold in 2020

There is a risk that remote rapid response is considered a modality that can meet localisation objectives, but analysis of data gathered during this review reveals reasons for caution. The relationship between remote rapid response and localisation objectives, such as strengthening National Society capacity, varies significantly between context and role. Some roles, including those that may not be prioritised within a National Society, or specific technical areas in which a National Society may be weak, may not be as effective without face-to-face support.⁵⁸ Several delegates in roles that required nuanced conversations with National Society counterparts found it difficult to strengthen capacity remotely.⁵⁹

Remote rapid response may require additional support be provided to the National Society to ensure they are equipped to work effectively with remote counterparts. For example, some National Societies found engaging with their remote peers difficult due to the amount of online communication required.⁶⁰ Several National Society staff members had to pay for Skype credit from their own wages in order to sustain communication with remote delegates and offices.⁶¹

“We have to think about how we work, such as capacity building, when National Societies don’t have access to online platforms. Our work has to think about remote approaches around teaching and education.”⁶²

55 FGD 2

56 Interviews 5 and 13

57 Interview 5

58 Interviews 3, 15 and 16

59 Interviews 6 and 9

60 Interviews 12, 13 and 21; FGD 2

61 Interview 4

62 Interview 13

The remote rapid response modality more broadly may undermine some localisation objectives. For example, to work successfully remotely, staff require access to and knowledge of systems, network access, communication tools and a stable, quiet work space. This digital divide precludes some RCRC staff from being able to work successfully remotely, particularly those from host National Societies.⁶³

Within the spectrum of options for ARC to consider moving forward there is an opportunity to provide greater support for peer-to-peer deployments. Peer-to-peer deployments occur when members from one national society (for example, VRCS) deploy to a peer national society (for example, Fiji Red Cross Society) to support during a response. Whilst ARC is not responsible for brokering this support there may be opportunities to provide support to the development of the mechanism, or to provide funding to support the missions.

Recommendations

- ✓ Advocate and work to remove barriers so that ToRs can explicitly articulate localisation objectives and encourage delegates to develop realistic localisation goals with the National Society at the start of the deployment.
- ✓ Where remote deployments are being pursued with a large element of support direct to National Societies (rather than just IFRC), consider possible resourcing implications, such as ensuring National Society counterparts have sufficient access to technology and communications resources.
- ✓ Consider peer-to-peer support (either remote or in person) as an option from the HR resourcing options (refer to figure 2), that can support localisation objectives.

63 Interviews 12, 21, 16 and 18

Conclusion

Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the world in unprecedented ways, it has also forced individuals and agencies to adapt to a new normal. Within the RCRC Movement, the contextual changes presented an opportunity to formalise the remote rapid response mechanism and review its appropriateness moving forward.

This review presents a series of learnings and opportunities for ARC to consider in forward planning for international HR mobilisation. In analysing the recommendations presented in this report it is important to reaffirm the role of ARC as partner national society within the broader RCRC Movement architecture. Progress on remote rapid response should be considered through this lens, meaning that Movement partners need to work together to make remote rapid response a relevant, effective and sustainable option in the long-term.



Summary of recommendations

- ✓ Advocate and work to remove barriers for agreed workplans for future deployments to appropriately reflect the context and are adapted to realistically reflect what can be achieved via remote working.
- ✓ Engage proactively with other Movement partners around ways to consolidate and strengthen remote working approaches, and advocate for the use of remote support where relevant.
- ✓ Continue to gather data via delegate debriefs on remote working experiences. Use this data to monitor efficacy and relevance as the global context continues to change
- ✓ Establish a set of decision-making criteria to inform decisions about whether a role is better suited to remote working or in-country support and how it supports localisation objectives. Refer to Annex 1 for an example decision making framework.
- ✓ Explore opportunities with IFRC and other Movement partners to determine feasibility of SIMS-like networks for other functions that are well suited to remote working, such as logistics or communications.
- ✓ Consider introducing specific sessions into compulsory pre-deployment training, such as IMPACT, that deal with remote ways of working. Topics to consider include systems and technology, remote ways of working, optimising remote communications, and remote teaching and learning tools and techniques.
- ✓ Ensure that delegates likely to work remotely are well equipped with and able to use technology and systems architecture. Consider options for basic systems and processes training for delegates likely to deploy remotely.
- ✓ Look for ways to increase the capacity of specific personnel (primarily those responsible for adherence to standards and quality assurance) in remote monitoring. See Annex 2 for an overview of remote monitoring guidance and supporting resources.
- ✓ In recruiting and screening new register members, consider those with specific experience in remote working environment (e.g. in consulting roles or in universities that facilitate remote learning). Such experience should be weighted against other critical experience and skills.
- ✓ Look for opportunities for delegates to share tips, tricks and traps on working remotely with each other to build a community of practice around what works, and increase confidence and familiarity in remote tools within the delegate pool.
- ✓ In decision-making on which delegates are the most suited for future remote missions, continue to prioritise those that have prior knowledge, experience and relationships in the country or region, as well as positive approaches to engagement with national counterparts. Such experience should be weighted against other critical experience and skills.
- ✓ Look for ways to enhance exposure of new delegates to strengthen their understanding of Movement processes procedures and colleagues in order to better position them for remote roles.
- ✓ Seek opportunities to expand the delegate pool to be more diverse and inclusive, noting that some recruits may exclusively be available for remote work
- ✓ Work with Movement partners to refine competencies for managers who will be overseeing remote delegates.
- ✓ Advocate and work to remove barriers so that ToRs can explicitly articulate localisation objectives and encourage delegates to develop realistic localisation goals with the National Society at the start of the deployment
- ✓ Where remote deployments are being pursued with a large element of support direct to National Societies (rather than just IFRC), consider possible resourcing implications, such as ensuring National Society counterparts have sufficient access to technology and communications resources.
- ✓ Consider peer-to-peer support (either remote or in person) as an option from the HR resourcing options (refer to figure 2), that can support localisation objectives.

Annex 1: Example decision-making framework

The decision matrix below may be useful in assisting decision-makers to respond appropriately to future requests for rapid response roles. The framework is designed to prompt thinking and discussion around which deployment modality is the most appropriate for a given role. It is suggested that decision-makers document responses to the questions and corresponding decisions to assist later reflection and learning.

This framework is can be used by Movement partners when thinking about the type of support they are seeking. The framework intends to provide answers to the following questions:

- What are the operational needs and gaps?
- Which deployment mechanism is the most appropriate to meet these needs?

Area	Questions	Implication for deployment decisions
Scope and role	? Does the ToR reflect a preference for in-country or remote working? Is there scope to change?	➔ <i>Decisions should first and foremost preference the needs and request of the National Society</i>
	? Is the role technical, or does it include a specific focus on capacity-strengthening?	➔ <i>Technical and capacity-building roles are more difficult to carry out remotely</i>
	? Is the role supporting multiple countries or just one?	➔ <i>Regional or multi-country roles naturally have an in-built element of remote working. This may mean the role can be done entirely remotely</i>
	? What are the line management arrangements? Is the proposed manager experienced in remote management, or have they received guidance on how to support a remote delegate?	➔ <i>If line managers have never managed staff remotely, discuss the best approach to ensure both delegate and manager are comfortable</i>
	? Is there a requirement for a specific type of expertise or experience?	➔ <i>Specific expertise may direct decisions. For example, if there is a need to lead on assessments of community needs or quality of interventions, complete or partial in-country support may be required</i>
	? Is the role responsible for adherence to quality standards or accountability of programs/ operations?	➔ <i>Specific accountabilities may also direct decisions. For example, if there is a need to ensure adherence to technical standards and limited capability to monitor remotely, complete or partial in-country support may be required</i>
Context	? How many roles are being requested to support the office or operation? If multiple, where will these other roles be based?	➔ <i>If multiple roles are being requested and some are remote, this may enable the delegate's role to be performed remotely. However, if multiple roles are being deployed, remote working may be isolating for the delegate</i>
	? What other solutions could meet the needs (e.g. could the request be fulfilled locally/regionally/ from another National Society partner)?	➔ <i>There may be other options for meeting the specific needs outlined in the ToR, including through brokering peer-to-peer support or supporting local recruitment</i>
	? Should any specific risk factors be considered?	➔ <i>Risk appetite may direct the final decisions, if in-country support is going to subject the delegate to an intolerable level of risk</i>
	? Are there specific nuances to the country context that may make remote working challenging?	➔ <i>In some contexts, relationships and credibility may be difficult to build face to face. This may make remote working less applicable.</i>

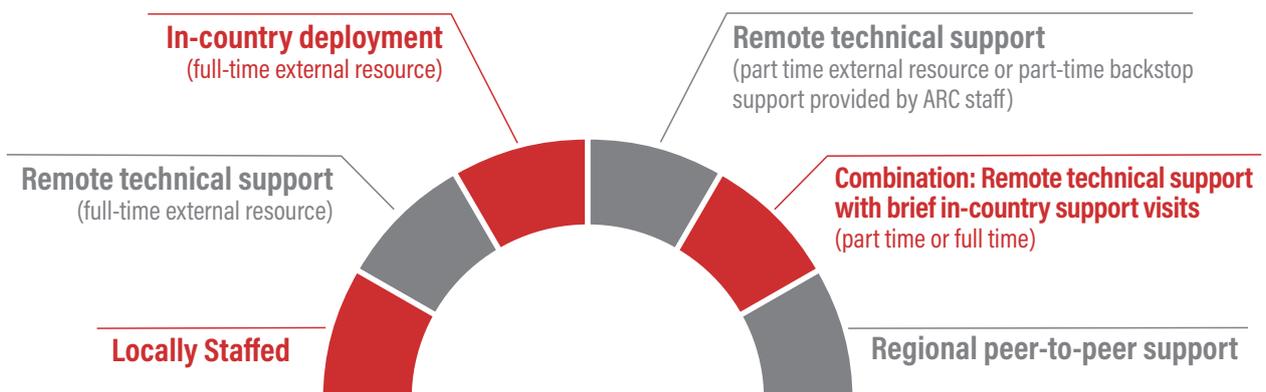
Logistics

- ? What would be the time difference if it was a remote deployment? → *Time differences may enable or prohibit remote working if they are significant and likely to be a logistical problem for the delegate and operation*
- ? Are there any specific systems or processes that are required for the role? Are these easy to access remotely? → *If specific systems and processes are required, a remote delegate needs to be equipped to use them effectively*

Needs and capability of the National Society

- ? What modality of support does the National Society leadership/management want to receive? → *Should the National Society leadership have a strong preference, this should be critical to informing the final approach in line with National Society priorities*
- ? Is the role designed to support a specific National Society counterpart? → *If there is a specific counterpart, their ability to work effectively with a remote rapid response should also be considered*
- ? What systems/processes are set up in relation to: → *If on either side (the delegate or partners) communications and systems will be a barrier to remote working, this should be mitigated or in-country support considered as a preferred modality*
- Communications – internet connection, Skype credit
 - Information technology/file sharing
- ? What sort of support has been provided to the National Society before? What were the enablers and barriers of the previous support? → *If the National Society is experienced in managing remote support, a remote approach may be suitable. If not, consider carefully*
- ? Is the role in an area where the National Society is well developed/experienced, or is it a new area? → *If the area of support is new for a National Society, or it has low capacity in it, some face-to-face time will be needed (either through visits or for the entirety of the mission)*

Figure 2: Human Resourcing for rapid deployments



Annex 2: Adapting to remote monitoring

Strong monitoring systems are important for effective program delivery in humanitarian contexts. During a global pandemic, or in times when field access is restricted or impossible, monitoring programs need to be adapted in order to continue gathering evidence and data to inform programming and to ensure quality and accountability.

Key guidance published in light of COVID-19 restrictions highlights ways existing monitoring programs can be adapted and remain effective. Key actions include:

- Working with partners and local third-party monitoring organisations; develop remote monitoring approaches with partners to ensure safety and feasibility
- Remote monitoring methods and tools; ensure remote monitoring tools and methods are appropriate for context, and that the data collected can be used to inform decision-making
- Collaborate with others; share information with in-country stakeholders if feasible and appropriate to inform monitoring activities
- Maximise inclusion, accountability and protection; ensure remote monitoring addresses inclusion, accountability and protection issues, particularly those that are exacerbated in the context of COVID-19
- Safety and wellbeing: Ensure remote monitoring approaches minimise risks (COVID-19 and others) to staff, partners, third-party organisations and communities.

Key resources for additional information:

- CartONG, https://blog.cartong.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/IM-covid19-impact-on-monitoring-and-accountability_CartONG.pdf
- Coffey International, MERL in a time of COVID-19: A resource tool, 2020.
- Donini, A., and Maxwell, D., From face-to-face to face-to-screen: remote management, effectiveness and accountability of humanitarian action in insecure environments, International Review of the Red Cross, 2013.
- GSDRC, Approaches to remote monitoring in fragile states, 2018.
- Humanitarian Learning Centre, Remote monitoring in SDC: challenges and opportunities, Humanitarian Learning Centre, Institute of Development Studies and SDC, 2019.
- IASC resources relating to accountability and inclusion, <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/covid-19-resources-relating-accountability-andinclusion>
- ODI, https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/odi-mladaptivemanagement-wp569-nov19_0.pdf
- WHO, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technicalguidance/risk-communication-and-community-engagement>.