This is the first Operational Plan (OP) for Syria since the onset of the conflict and the launch of the Complex Emergency Appeal in June 2012. This OP is one of two complementary planning tools—with the revised Emergency Appeal—that will be used in parallel in 2020, both of which are informed by a Federation-wide multi-year transition strategy. Together, the IFRC’s revised emergency appeal and OP aim to support, sustain and increase the Syrian Arab Red Crescent’s (SARC) operational and structural capacity for a continued and efficient emergency response through technical support, as well as long-term sustainability through capacity building and organisational development for SARC’s headquarters and branches.

The OP for Syria is a step in IFRC’s transition strategy and is in anticipation of the closing of the Emergency Appeal in December 2020 (subject to further consideration throughout 2020). The primary focus of the OP is on strengthening the organisational capacities of SARC. SARC is a very different National Society from the one in 2011 when the conflict began. SARC has served its communities, and international partners, resolutely over the past eight years and will continue to do so. With the continually changing context in many parts of the country, the IFRC will support SARC to preserve its key role in emergency response whilst developing
robust early recovery programmes and a holistic transition strategy. This will be done jointly with Movement partners through coherent and collective National Society Development programmes to ensure that SARC is able to transition from being a critical actor in the country during the years of conflict, to a sustainable partner for the long-term future.

Furthermore, there is no doubt that Movement coordination is key to our collective partnership with SARC through the complexity of emergency response and transition to a new operating environment. The IFRC is fully committed to increasing its focus on Movement coordination to the extent that is required/expected by SARC, ICRC and Movement partners. At the Secretariat level, we recognise that strong performance in Movement coordination is an expectation of Federation members, and we anticipate this will be a focus for the Secretariat moving forward, again, as agreed with SARC as lead for Movement coordination in Syria.

Finally, as IFRC moves towards the end of 2020, it is anticipated that those of SARC’s services that are supported by IFRC in the Emergency Appeal will be fully ‘rolled’ into the OP for 2021. Consequently, whilst the focus of this current OP and its budget is on strategies for implementation, provision has been made in the appeal code to allow for SARC’s prioritised services (i.e. health and livelihoods) to continue into 2021 and financial support can be allocated accordingly.

**Country Profile**

Throughout 2019 we have witnessed the evolution of the Syria crisis in all its complexity. While in some locations there is increasing stability and with it the need for more in-depth needs assessment and nuanced programming, in other areas devastating violence has dominated peoples’ lives, most particularly in Idlib and now in North-East Syria where tens of thousands of people, many of whom are women and children are fleeing their homes in search of safety. As always, SARC has responded immediately with emergency relief alongside ICRC, INGOs and UN partners. At the time of writing (November 2019) the events underway in North-East Syria and the numbers of people in acute need is fluid and expected to rise as the situation unfolds.

“Expected to remain complex”, is how most humanitarian actors working within Syria assess the operational context and this is not an oversimplification. It is the most appropriate way to describe a setting where humanitarian needs are presented in more than 80 per cent of the population, regardless of how forgotten they might be by the international community. The Government of Syria (GoS) has recovered control over most disputed governorates. However, the remaining disputed areas are vast with large populations. In addition, the fall of Islamic State group in North Aleppo, Ar-Raqqaa and Deir-ez-Zor does not mean that the

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1 Strategies for Implementation relate to critical IFRC functions which support National Societies organisationally such as improving SARC’s operational preparedness for emergency response and support to its disaster management and strategic planning for recovery.
threat of armed conflicts has disappeared, ambushes, sniper and similar attacks are still happening in these areas.

Describing the crisis needs to be done through the lens of the people affected; this is very much a crisis that impacts people in different ways. Firstly, recognizing the acute needs in areas that are still disputed and engaged in conflict, such as the North of Syria including, Idlib. Secondly, the needs of households within communities that are no longer experiencing fighting but still bear the consequences of eight years of conflict through damaged infrastructure, blighted economic conditions and prospects. SARC has been responding to the needs of these communities, and the years of conflict have profoundly changed the National Society. In the months and years ahead, the third important subject of analysis is what the nature of these changes are, and how SARC should evolve to retain its relevance in Syria.

Even in areas of Syria which are now more stable, there are still large-scale vulnerabilities, limited services, as well as lost and damaged infrastructure and unproductive assets. Children bear the psychological consequences of years of violence and displacement. In both urban and rural settings infrastructure lies destroyed or in disrepair, limiting access to shelter, basic services and livelihood opportunities. These factors, in turn severely undermine the ability of communities to recover. For SARC being strategic in where it prioritises its resources based on engaging with its humanitarian partners in mapping how vulnerabilities will be addressed to ensure that gaps are covered is key. SARC’s Strategic Plan 2020–2022 will guide this prioritization and will be supported by partners in the coming years.

Recent factors aggravating the crisis emanate from the high, and rising, exchange rate of the Syrian Pound to the US dollar—reaching in November 2019 more than 900 SYP per USD. The financial and other impacts of sanctions, especially
inflation, means that a large portion of income to the country, and funding to SARC is reduced due to a loss in exchange. As sanctions can be expected to continue, poverty will remain while food and other distribution programmes are pushed to the point of unsustainability, or radically reduced beneficiary numbers. This is factored into SARC’s programming for 2020, with the need to move from food aid to livelihoods recognised in the SARC Strategic Plan 2020–2022 that Federation partners will support. The transition recognises that sudden cuts in budgets are not just a paper exercise but ones with real consequences to vulnerable people and the reputation of SARC as an organisation and needs to be managed carefully and responsibly.

SARC’s volunteers and branches. Prior to the crisis, the fourteen branches were autonomous, and the headquarters was light. Responding to the crisis, and fulfilling the mandate that it took on, necessitated a growth in headquarters both in size and role. As the context changes and SARC transitions, National Society Development at the SARC national headquarters and capacity strengthening at branches become prime objectives and, in both cases, enhancing their sustainability in capabilities and resources.

National Society Profile

The Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) is headquartered in Damascus, with a branch in each of the fourteen governorates of Syria, and 65 active sub-branches. SARC has more than 10,000 staff and active volunteers working across its headquarters, branches and active sub-branches. This staff includes all personnel in SARC health facilities active across Syria.

SARC is the main humanitarian actor in Syria with an assigned coordination mandate for international assistance. Through its network of staff and volunteers, and presence across most of the country, it remains the largest national provider of humanitarian services in Syria. SARC works closely with local communities providing humanitarian assistance to more than five million internally displaced people, affected host communities and returnees.

Since 2011, SARC has faced, and responded to unprecedented demand on its human and technical resources in the face of one of the world’s worst humanitarian crises of recent decades. Together with the Red Cross & Red Crescent (RCRC) Movement, United Nations (UN) partners and number of International and local Non-Governmental Organization partners, SARC’s operational capacity expanded exponentially in a short span of time: from an office with a handful of staff in 2010 to now more than 10,000 volunteers and staff across the country.

Since the start of the crisis, SARC’s humanitarian assistance has reached 80 per cent of those people in need, for instance SARC’s live-saving and life-sustaining health assistance reached a peak in 2018 with a total number of consultations provided exceeding 3 million people including reaching 1.8 million patients across a network of 128 health facilities, both static and mobile-based, and this has continued throughout 2019.
Role of the IFRC Country office

The IFRC has been present in Syria since the mid-1990s with a permanent representation office since 2007. Currently the IFRC has a dedicated team based in Syria and is supported by the regional office in Beirut which provides additional assistance to the response operation and capacity development initiatives. The IFRC team in Syria is integrated with SARC to support the National Society from its Headquarters and coordinates operational matters with partner National Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). IFRC participates as an observer in the Humanitarian Country Team meetings and in technical sector meetings.

Movement Footprint

Founded in 1942, SARC is an independent humanitarian organization in Syria. SARC was recognized by the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva (ICRC) in 1946 and is committed to the Geneva Conventions and the seven Fundamental Principles of the International Movement of Red Cross and Red Crescent (RCRC Movement). SARC’s range of services includes emergency relief, water, sanitation, health, livelihoods, and community services targeting vulnerabilities.

Eight Partner National Societies have delegates in Syria: the British, Canadian, Danish, Finnish, German, Norwegian, Swiss and Swedish Red Cross Societies with the imminent arrival of the French Red Cross Society.

In late 2019 SARC completed its Strategic Plan for 2020–2022 which provides an articulated point of reference for partners’ support. The result will be a more collective approach that orientates around SARC’s strategy, bringing other planning exercises into a complementary role and ensuring they inform each other, and are monitored.

The ICRC has been present in Syria since 1967 and is working as a key operational partner with SARC. The ICRC has five offices in Syria, employing international staff and resident staff. The main areas of support to SARC are emergency assistance, economic security, health (First Aid, PRP, mental health, and PHC), water and habitat, risk education (WEC), restoring family links, forensic, promoting humanitarian values and strengthening SARC capacities.
STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- STRENGTHEN NATIONAL SOCIETY CAPACITIES
- INFLUENCE OTHERS AS A LEADING STRATEGIC PARTNER
- ENSURE A STRONG IFRC
STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

STRENGTHEN NATIONAL SOCIETY CAPACITIES

As highlighted in the above Background section, the Federation will continue supporting SARC’s humanitarian response to the ongoing crisis in parts of the country in 2020, through the Syria Complex Emergency Appeal. This Operational Plan’s focus is on the medium and longer term, to ensure that SARC is not only ready to respond, but also able to assess vulnerabilities and capacities, as well as differing risks throughout the country. Syria is highly vulnerable to landslides, floods and droughts as well as water scarcity, extreme heat and wildfires, in addition to the recognition that the conflict is far from over in all parts of the country and could easily flair up or remain turbulent for years to come. Furthermore, the rate of people returning to Syria is rising, often based on messaging that things will be alright, but this means that disaster response and humanitarian assistance agencies, including SARC, need to be able to deploy at short notice should the need arise. It is important to recall Syria experienced five successive years of drought prior to the conflict that created, then, one of the biggest humanitarian crises in the country. Climate change is significantly impacting the drought in Syria, affecting agricultural resources and must be considered accordingly.

It is not just the Syrian landscape that has changed since the outset of the crisis, SARC itself is a very different National Society to the one it was in 2011, then branches were autonomous and were supported by a four-person headquarters in areas of volunteer management, service provision and resource mobilization. Whilst SARC continues to provide emergency response on a daily basis it is also navigating its transition through the crisis and concentrating on its sustainability for the future. To this end an Organizational Development and Strategic Planning (OD&SP) unit within SARC headquarters has been established in recent years, with its first substantial deliverable being to facilitate the development and finalization of the SARC Strategic Plan 2020–2022.
Organizational development and response capacity strengthening activities in this Operational Plan are drawn from the priorities outlined in the SARC Strategic Plan 2020–2022. SARC is, in many ways currently a National Society with many great strengths, although with aspects that need to be made more efficient or the burden shared to make it more equitably sustainable. There have been organizational development initiatives by Federation partners, which whilst valuable to capacity building and operational support processes, are often not joined up. IFRC will work with SARC’s OD&SP unit towards developing a logically phased plan that can be implemented as SARC maintains its operations in response, recovery and resilience, relevant to its organizational capacity and country conditions.

To take on the role of effecting change within SARC, the OD&SP unit needs to be supported and given the resources required, more specifically a strategic planning officer, a NSD officer and a branch development officer, working under the head of unit to deliver on capacity building informed by the Movement’s OD/NSD approach. It is strongly recommended that an OD/NSD delegate is taken on within the IFRC Country Office who is experienced in OD/NSD in conflict, and more specifically how National Societies transition from one mandate, with the accompanying resources that partners have provided, to a post-conflict one whilst maintaining relevance and being sustainable. Additionally, SARC’s leadership has now re-prioritised branch development to ensure a model that is sustainable in to the future with ICRC a key partner in supporting such development with plans to fund a branch development officer in SARC, along with other collaborative activities with Movement partners.

This Operational Plan has a multi-year approach, in which IFRC will support SARC to be operationalised better, with systems and structures in place to deliver the SARC 2020–2022 Strategy and the accompanying branch development roadmap.

The recognized goal is for SARC to improve the quality and accountability of its services. Programme capacity building support will focus on:

1. Improving SARC’s operational preparedness for emergency response and support to its disaster management and strategic planning for recovery.
2. Building the capacity of SARC’s headquarters and branches to improve their performance through OCAC certification.
3. Promote proper mechanisms for volunteers’ motivation and retention.
4. Promote SARC to be recognized as a credible, trustworthy and effective partner in design and delivery of humanitarian services

In support of strengthening the SARC capacity in response and preparedness, a significant focus will be placed on improving and enhancing the existing capacities of the National Society considering a multi-hazard approach. SARC
will prepare for the roll out of the Preparedness for Effective Response (PER) capacity strengthening approach, process, and methods following on from the orientation in Q4 of 2019, and earlier learning from response reflections with Federation partners.

German Red Cross is providing support to SARC’s efforts to assess the status of its network of warehouses, some owned and others rented, to ensure sustainability of SARC as an organization not over-burdened by infrastructure costs that are not needed or fundable. Norwegian Red Cross is taking the lead with a number of partners to support finance development and procurement development. British Red Cross is supporting on human resources and MEAL development. A number of disaster management/operational capacity building initiatives have been supported by German Red Cross, Danish Red Cross and in collaboration with IFRC. Many partners are working together on such initiatives either technically or through the provision of funding.

Finally, for its sustainability SARC must retain its position as a trusted, relevant local actor in Syria that partners wish to develop long standing relations with. There is a clear path forward for Disaster Management development, with SARC and partners acknowledging that investment in systems and coordination towards developing enhanced needs assessments and targeting, including information management and MEAL technical support is needed. In this manner SARC will be able to provide in-depth information to partners, which may open lines to support a broader range of operations. One example comes from SARC streamlining processes with WFP’s needs assessment process targeting 800,000 households in specifying revised needs. This process will be well documented and used to ensure the knowledge is not lost and can be replicated by SARC branches, staff and volunteers.

**Key activities:**

- Support SARC’s OD&SP Unit through the provision of an OD delegate and support to the Unit’s set up.
- Together with SARC’s OD&SP Unit develop an OD and branch development plan for SARC, inclusive of Federation interested partners.
- Continue to support SARC’s MEAL unit with an increased focus on Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) as well as monitoring. Conduct a CEA self-assessment that guides further formalization of the approach into SARC’s community-based activities, this will include documenting lessons learned on activities from SARC’s programmes that showcase informal community engagement initiatives.
- Revisit, revitalize and re-socialize SARC’s policies and processes in terms of youth and youth engagement and ensure funding for the volunteer insurance.
- Collaborate with Federation partners to develop a platform to support SARC in forward thinking HR planning.
Together with Federation partners, ensure infrastructure (e.g. telecommunication/ICT) is in place and adequate to support all other software development initiatives

Enhance IFRC’s technical capacity to support SARC’s initiatives especially around preparedness and response mechanisms (e.g. DM delegate). This will allow for a number of aspects to be advanced through strong coordination with interested Movement partners:

• Develop ToRs related to the PER approach with an aim to strengthen national disaster preparedness and response mechanism
• Formulate concept of NDRT on emergency response in line with the existing RCRC Movement mechanisms
• Develop disaster response SoPs and contingency plans, according to assessment results, prioritized with a practical timeline as well as prepositioning of integrated response/relief items, as per the contingency plan
• Together with partners, support SARC in preparing and piloting a contingency plan, based on positioning with authorities in establishing its mandate with Syria’s National Disaster Response Plan
• Provide SARC technical support in preparing a national emergency response fund mechanism in anticipation of disaster so a response can be financed without delay, towards 2021

Support SARC together with partners in developing a roadmap towards institutionalizing cash models for humanitarian response for its programmes as well as support to the Movement Cash Coordinator and their support to SARC in the Movement Cash working group

Coordinate exploration and analysis to support RCRC in identifying alternatives in shelter and NFI solutions

Development and implementation of a transition action plan for 2021 with mapping of SARC’s & health partners’ work, ensuring doing no harm and aiming for sustainability in this key priority area for SARC.

THE NATIONAL SOCIETY HAS THE NECESSARY LEGAL, ETHICAL AND FINANCIAL FOUNDATIONS, SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES, COMPETENCIES AND CAPACITIES TO PLAN AND PERFORM
STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

INFLUENCE OTHERS AS A LEADING STRATEGIC PARTNER

Throughout 2020 Federation partners will work with SARC in developing analysis of humanitarian needs and operational context. This will help in prioritising the response to those in need and engage in advocacy through objective and evidence-based analysis. This key function will also enable SARC to bridge information gaps, including through better liaison and structured external coordination in the field, and equip Federation-wide partners with solid positions and advocacy messages to nurture their dialogue with decision makers, key stakeholders or donors.

As a trusted and respected local actor, SARC is well positioned to affect and influence real change in its auxiliary role. However, SARC must be supported to develop its advocacy capacity and approaches in a manner consistent with the Fundamental Principles and its auxiliary role to the government. The IFRC will also work with SARC to ensure that the Red Cross Red Crescent humanitarian response is professionally communicated, understood and supported by internal and external stakeholders. A focus on continued positive media and social media outreach and effective support to the partners’ communication of activities they support.

As SARC transitions to ensure its relevance in the coming phase of Syria’s future, increasing and diversifying its funding portfolio, nationally and internationally becomes crucial. This is a core message that its Federation partners have been giving.

Key activities:

- Analysis and strategic identification of topics for principled actions and advocacy, development of position papers and key messages
- Continual follow up on opportunities and commitments from donor led conferences, such as Brussels III, as well as identifying upcoming funding streams and non traditional donor engagement on supporting Syria and the region
- Together with partners support the OD and strategic planning department in providing SARC-wide sensitization on RM
- Develop and socialize an internal concept note that guides resource mobilization for 2021

THE IFRC AND SARC INFLUENCE DECISIONS AT LOCAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS THAT AFFECT THE MOST VULNERABLE
ENSURE A STRONG IFRC

In the transition period SARC is moving into, enhanced accountability towards the communities it works with, the partners it works alongside and the donors whose resources it has been entrusted with has been identified as core.

Operational coordination amongst SARC, IFRC and Partner National Societies, with ICRC, will ensure alignment on issues of operational quality, efficiency, coherence and accountability of the agreed operation/programmes and relevant support to the strengthening of SARC. A problem-solving approach based upon trust and respect will underpin this stream of work. Working within an empowered SARC’s Partnerships and Programme Support Unit (PSSU), Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (PMEAL) and Information Management (IM) departments will take a pivotal supporting role to ensure evidence-based decisions by management. Building on existing practices, technical working groups will meet regularly to ensure harmonized work between partners working in the same technical area. Frequent interactions and collaboration with the Humanitarian Country Team and cluster meetings established through the IASC coordination system. Participation of SARC representation should be ensured in all external sectoral meetings and coordination. IFRC will work with all Movement partners to improve Movement coordination and promote shared leadership among Federation partners. The Council of Delegates resolution on Strengthening Movement Cooperation and Coordination (SMCC) and the RCRC Principles and Rules for Humanitarian Assistance, demands a more aligned approach. In 2020 this strategic level will be revisited for the Movement partners involved in the response.

Finally, as more IFRC staff support their SARC colleagues in field missions to previously inaccessible areas, security management protocols will be reviewed and, together with SARC and ICRC Security focal points steps will be put in place that places staff and volunteer safety at the core.
Key activities:

- Strategic engagement with Movement partners
- Develop and implement a Federation/Movement wide coordination framework
- Continued updating of IFRC's risk registry and development of an accountability framework for Syria
- Train SARC technical and management staff on IFRC procedures, including finance, administration, logistics and procurement
- Ongoing review and update (where necessary) IFRC security guidelines and Security Risk Register to accommodate increased number and scale of field missions of staff
- IFRC security delegates from regional and HQ have advisory missions to Syria, with trainings as appropriate
- HEAT training for all IFRC staff
- Follow up on internal audit results with proactive discussion with SARC
- Develop and disseminate relevant updates, highlights, decision papers
Contact information of the IFRC Country office, for partners who wish to find out more

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