

Mission Report

Movement Coordination Officer (MCO)

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Executive Summary

This was the second deployment of an MCO, and all recommendations of Penny Elghadi in the first MCO's mission report are still valid.

In a conflict of eight years already, the latest escalation caused a peak of the humanitarian needs, media attention and funding. With a NS well versed in SMCC, the Movement was in a good position to respond.

The Movement has accomplished the following until now:

- The National Society shows extraordinary ownership and vision and is truly in the center of the Movement operations.
- On the first day of the escalation a Mini-Summit took place
- Two days later a Joint Movement Statement was released.
- The Movement coordination mechanisms at strategic, operational and technical level are (re-)established and functioning.
- A joint Mobilization table was developed.
- The IFRC USG and the ICRC OPDIR visited the context jointly.
- The partners agreed to support the very capable NS by embedding staff to work under the leadership of URCS.
- Currently, a Movement picture is being developed.
- The objectives of the MCO-mission were achieved and an exit strategy for the position is implemented.

The willingness of the Movement partners to support the overwhelmed NS, opened door for new views and inspired to reconsider traditional approaches. At times, it also triggered the attempt to try out something new in the middle of the crisis, which resulted in lengthy discussions and delayed decision-making. However, most issues could be resolved jointly.

A few topics to continue working on:

- Supporting a capable but overwhelmed NS
- Joint support with regards to URCS capacity to absorb funding
- Re-establishing links between URCS HQ and branches
- Change of briefing narrative for people arriving in Ukraine
- Agreement about interpretation of key terminology

In a few years, if the conditions allow it, the Movement response to the current phase in the Ukraine conflict could be good practice in many ways. However, those who were part of the negotiations know that it was not always an easy road.

The upcoming CoD as well as the ongoing discussions around the CIP / SA-SM are politicizing the discussions in the field to a degree that I hadn't seen before. Strong positions being brought into Ukraine from delegates briefed on the respective agendas are hampering need-based discussions on the ground.

This report lists some recommendations and conclusions at the end. One is worth to be mentioned here: The investment in SMCC paid out. Similar support should be considered in all countries prone by conflict or disaster.

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Introduction

The latest escalations in February 2022 marked the peak of a conflict that had been ongoing for the last eight years. The Movement has initially published an appeal for 250 Mio CHF, but the humanitarian needs and the public's willingness to help increased the planned amount considerably.

This has led to a Movement response which is one of the biggest in scope and funding in the last decades. The country has functioning law and order mechanisms and while this conflict has caused impact on the global food and oil supply, markets and banks in Ukraine are still working.

The URCS¹ as NS in an SMCC pilot country is used to work with Movement partners. Currently, the media attention and funding landscape is focusing on Ukraine and the NS is keen to use this occasion for scaling up to cover the considerable humanitarian needs and to position themselves for the long run.

Even though political analysis foresees that the conflict will not be over in the nearest future, but with a strong URCS, dedicated partners, enough money and media attention paid to this humanitarian crisis, the Movement is in a good position to respond effectively and efficiently, if the two international components find a way to avoid competition.

This report aims at depicting the situation and efforts from a MVT perspective during my deployment as MCO.

SMCC

General: During the CoD 2013, SMCC was ratified for the first time. It fills the gap between the theoretical Seville Agreement and Supplementary Measures and the realities on the ground. More and more often, the lines between mandates are not clearly cut and insisting on traditional approaches can create friction, even competition, among the partners.

Specific: To pilot SMCC, which is a concept, a toolbox, but also a mindset, several country labs were set up and Ukraine has been one of them since 2016. The SMCC progress report of 2017 states:

*"Findings presented in this report are based on data gathered in various settings as well as from close monitoring of five specific contexts chosen as country "laboratories" (Haiti, Philippines, South Sudan, Syria and Ukraine) that benefited from a greater focus from the project's coordination team. SMCC implementation has translated into a number of achievements which are grouped into three categories in this progress report, namely coordination, preparedness and response."*²

In Ukraine, this led to an MCA, which is still valid until 2023, an SFA, also still valid until 2023, and established MVT coordination mechanisms. The URCS, thanks to their leadership and the support of the Movement, have built capacities in many areas which are now useful to position themselves as auxiliaries to the government.

MCO Tool

General: In 2019, in the aftermath of a cyclone in Mozambique Penny Elghadi, the first MCO, was deployed. The MCO is one of the tools within the SMCC toolkit³. Direct access and reporting lines to all in-country leaders allow a more objective view and neutral advice. While not having any decision-making capacity, the task of the MCO is to foster a conducive working environment in which MVT

¹ URCS website: [Home – Товариство Червоного Хреста України \(redcross.org.ua\)](https://redcross.org.ua)

² SMCC Progress report 2017 : [CoD17_5-SMCC-Progress-Report-final-clean-with-annexes-EN.pdf](https://rcrcconference.org/) (rcrcconference.org), at 1

³ SMCC toolkit website : [SMCC Toolkit](https://smcc-toolkit.org/)

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coordination leads to a more efficient response. The task on the other hand is not to substitute management or take the responsibility to coordinate the humanitarian response in the emergency. Instead, the MCO supports MVT partners in establishing or adapting MVT coordination mechanisms and in assisting in problem-solving. This makes this role multi-faceted and thus it is based on the necessary freedom to adapt to the upcoming demands in a timely manner. The MCO is not a referee nor a manager, but rather a mediator, facilitator and adviser.

Specific: I was deployed around three weeks after the decision was taken in the Mini-Summit. Due to extensive, valuable briefings and complicated logistics, I arrived one month after the latest escalation. In the meanwhile, the MVT partners in country had started to recreate dissolved structures, scaled up, lived in parking lots and worked in bunkers. Despite the hardship, from the beginning on all tried hard to work on complementarity and coordination. A comparison between the “before and after” coordination showed that an intensified MVT coordination was ongoing even if at times rather bilaterally, ad hoc and not structured. Therefore, I adapted my take on this role from supporting to build MVT coordination towards supporting to redirect and formalize MVT coordination in Ukraine and ensure general MVT efforts to enforce the central role of the URCS.

URCS in the center

The capacity of the URCS allows the MVT partners to walk the talk. Not only is the NS fully aware of the SMCC-approach, but they also welcome the partners’ support and advice without losing their identity of vision. Their rigorous resistance to get involved in MVT politics is creating a space in which only need-based discussions are permitted. Supporting this objective was my main motivation throughout this mission. URCS insisted on two things when negotiating the embedding of MVT staff into their structures (see below): The colleagues should stay longer than a few weeks only to grant some stability and all should be well-trained in SMCC. In my eyes, this summarizes the desired MVT environment in Ukraine.

Movement Coordination

One of my main tasks was to re-establish the MVT coordination mechanisms and adapt them to the ongoing crisis and MVT set-up. At this point, the coordination of the Movement response has been fully handed over to the Head of International of the URCS. It is important to balance the need for information and coordination with the number of meetings that people have to attend to. How many meetings are too much?

Strategic Level

At strategic level, all agreed to conduct a Mini-Summit follow up meeting to see if the decisions taken at the initial Mini-Summit were still valid. This proved to be the case as only small adaptations to the fast-changing situation had to be done.

In bi-weekly platform meetings, the three in-country leaders of URCS, ICRC and IFRC updated each other. At these occasions I also shared the status of MVT coordination in Ukraine and addressed achievements and challenges. These meetings are also attended by the deputies or liaison delegates as observers. MoM are produced and sent to the attendees, the Operational Level as well as the PNS team leaders in-country to guarantee transparency and consistency.

The atmosphere during the strategic meetings was always cordial and without friction. There was a genuine sense of urgency and willingness to cooperate.

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Operational Level

To start operational working level meetings, it was agreed to establish the Movement Emergency Operation Center (MEOPS), which was to virtually simulate a physical Emergency Operations Center. This failed the first time because of too many updates. The URCS Deputy Director General and HoOPS managed to turn this meeting in a real working meeting, discussing e.g. operational budgets. A Communication staff is providing situational updates and the security team informs about the latest security situation. This and the decisions taken during the meeting are consolidated in MoM prepared by a URCS Communication representative.

Technical Level

Ten Working Groups (WG) have been created: CEA/AAP, Communications, CVA, Health, Logistics, NSD, PMER, Relief, Security, Shelter. All WGs have assigned team leaders who are responsible to call for the weekly meetings, to write MoM, distribute them to the different key people at the next level as well as all in-country PNS team leaders, and who are aware that if not already started, the WG should work towards a joint plan which would eventually feed into a joint operational plan. The SOP have been explained in a coordination meeting for the WG team leaders and further disseminated. The intend is that all WGs are run by URCS and in those cases where URCS is not able, this was delegated to a partner who is leading the WG on behalf of URCS, knowing that once URCS is ready, they will take over.

Regional Level

This MVT coordination has not been established until now, even though recently, the URCS had a first national meeting with all regional branches. URCS has 25 regional branches and over 200 local branches. To organize the link between HQ and branches, the URCS intended to set up regional hubs with a HQ staff in every regional branch. This idea was rejected by the branch secretaries, however, the URCS leadership still plans to establish a system with the same objective. I proposed a three-level approach to MVT branch coordination: 1. A weekly F2F-meeting at regional branch level with representatives of all partners working in the oblast of the branch. This follows an example already running in Lviv Oblast. In addition - and like in every meeting - MoM are to be produced and sent to the HQ. 2. Quarterly regional branch meetings compiled of several regional branches and the most active local branches and led by a representative of URCS HQ. This again, includes the partners working in the area. 3. At least yearly national branch meetings in Kyiv, organized by URCS HQ. one part of this meeting can be held in attendance of MVT partners. The Director General agreed to the idea.

Movement Partners' coordination

After the first weeks I conducted a partners' meeting to update about the ongoing and planned MVT coordination in Ukraine. There is a great appetite in PNSs for meetings which provide update. MoM or operational updates as shared on a regular basis from different partners are not sufficient to satisfy this need and there was a risk that WG meetings are turned into update meetings. Therefore, this deserved a separate mechanism. The IFRC Special Representative had created a Membership Coordination meeting to update about Secretariat information. This was appreciated by PNSs who in an informal environment could ask questions throughout the different coordination levels. To avoid duplication, we agreed to extend this meeting format to a MVT coordination meeting, inviting also URCS and ICRC. The URCS Head of International will start these mechanisms after the current relocation to Kyiv.

Sustainability in this crisis

Disruption in a conflict can be expected. With such a considerable population movement also loss of HR capacity can be expected. However, as Movement partners we are responsible to make sure that

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the NS is not worse off after the crisis than before. That is why IFRC and ICRC jointly worked on “NSD in Emergencies”. This approach is prioritizing the NSD needs according to the situation and ensures that partners also invest in the development of the NS when engaging in crisis response. Sustainability is a key factor in any development work, so it should also be considered in Ukraine as part of the MVT coordination.

Embedding

One of my proposals in my first meeting with the URCS Director General was to embed international experts in URCS structures to substitute lack of HR in the NS for a limited period of time, to support from within and to report directly to the NS. While assisting in the direct response, the embedded staff members can also build capacities in their respective departments. The organization who deployed the staff in the first place is also responsible for the in-country and outside the country costs related to the staff. The complication starts when it comes to the status/HQ-Agreement, the administrative support and the security umbrella which covers the delegate. I drafted an SOP for the partners related to the embedding but IFRC and ICRC in BUD and GVA still have to agree if the IFRC integration agreement and ICRC L2-Security agreement are possible in combination or not. The IFRC and ICRC here in Ukraine have recommended not to consider this as an option as it would not be practicable.

NSD in emergencies

The URCS has a solid NSD plan developed and is waiting for the partners to commit to it. There is a competent and visionary leadership at URCS for NSD, however the NSD delegate who is meant to support URCS has not yet arrived. It would be important to support these efforts of the NS in aligning partners and building on real commitments when it comes to NSD.

Exit strategy

In week three of my stay in Ukraine, I realized that it will be useful to support the NS in MVT coordination beyond the work of an MCO, ideally transiting from a MVT position to a URCS position. I drafted a JD for an embedded person in URCS' International Department to advise on MVT coordination. Thankfully, the SMCC team and the three in-country leaders agreed to the exit strategy and managed to recruit Helga Thorolfsdottir, a very experienced delegate who had worked with Icelandic RC, ICRC and IFRC and who knows the region and NS from previous assignments. This, as well as the above-mentioned components will contribute to a more sustainable approach in the MVT support to the NS. Many more considerations along the way are possible and necessary.

MVT Achievements

The MCO is only a tool of SMCC and thus of the Movement. While I believe the objectives of my mission have been achieved, it makes sense to look at the achievements of the entire Movement during the crisis so far.

1. SMCC country lab Ukraine has developed mechanisms to build on in crisis.
2. The National Society shows extraordinary ownership and vision and is truly in the center of the Movement operations.
3. Great support, flexibility and solidarity for URCS from MVT Partners
4. General atmosphere of good will and MVT spirit
5. MVT reacted fast and established improvised MVT coordination mechanisms
6. On the first day of the escalation a Mini-Summit took place and the Mini-Summit follow up meeting confirmed decisions of first Mini Summit
7. Two days later a Joint Movement Statement was released.
8. The Movement coordination mechanisms at strategic, operational and technical level are

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(re-)established and functioning.

9. Partners agree to embed staff at URCS and there is good progress on recruitment of international delegates by MVT partners
10. A joint Mobilization table was developed.
11. The IFRC USG and the ICRC OPDIR traveled together for the first time and visited Ukraine.
12. Eight ICG Heads of International organized their joint trip to Ukraine to understand better how to support.
13. Currently, a Movement picture is being developed.
14. An MCO was deployed and an exit strategy for the position is implemented

Challenges worth mentioning

At the time of this mission, the MVT was about to renegotiate the SA-SM. This leads to internal politics hampering MVT performance in Ukraine. Only if both international components recognize this as a problem and discuss it openly, loss of MVT efficiency can be mitigated. Below some points which created more specific challenges:

1. Lack of physical proximity of the MVT partners
2. Fast changing situation and absolute need for flexibility
3. Overwhelmed and uprooted National Society
4. Difficulty to (re-)create URCS HQ-branch links
5. Influx of resources versus capacity of NS to digest those
6. Political tensions between ICRC and IFRC (e.g. regarding security agreements)
7. Delay in development of a MVT Mobilization Table
8. Diverse interpretations of key definitions (e.g. conflict, co-convenor)
9. Risk of duplication when implementing Membership – and MVT coordination
10. Ongoing discussion about possibility to combine IFRC integration agreement and ICRC Security agreement

Recommendations

MVT Dynamics

- As far as I know this was the first time, that a Mini-Summit was conducted on the first day of the crisis. This proved as extremely useful and is recommended for any other disaster or conflict situation. The format which was developed for Ukraine could be used as a template as it only needs little adaptations for other crises.
- The Mini-Summit follow up meeting could be replicated in crises in which the acute phase is lasting weeks. Thus, all partners can officially agree on the decisions from before have to be adapted or not. This avoids unnecessary friction at different levels and is an important referral document.
- To have one briefing package for all who are coming into Ukraine or any other SMCC country, can align the MVT narrative and prevent misunderstanding. The IRCS already has a briefing package which needs to be adapted and enriched with Communication guidelines, maps, contact lists, situation analysis, background information on URCS, etc. to allow a fast added value of the incoming delegate. I haven't managed to implement this in my time in Ukraine.
- Current MVT dynamic had a negative impact on the operations in Ukraine. There is a risk that examples from the Ukraine MVT operations will be used in statutory meetings or the CIP/SA-SM update to set a precedence. With this in mind, people are working on their respective

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agenda instead of the common MVT goals. It would be important that all recognize this as an issue so that pragmatic solutions at field-level can be found jointly.

- Xavier Castellanos, during his visit proposed a very good idea. He said that making the Red Pillar work should be a performance issue. Following this suggestion, SMCC performance indicators could be developed and applied for all MVT relevant positions.
- It should be avoided to pilot MVT approaches during crisis as this can create friction if not well understood by all. Questions around those MVT approaches could be discussed and agreed upon during “peace-time” (e.g. MVT Mobilization Table)
- To prevent irritations, avoid unilateral or bilateral decisions and postpone the decisions-taking until the next appropriate MVT coordination mechanism is due or call for an ad hoc meeting.
- To enhance understanding for different mindsets and processes, consider embedding of Surge/RD staff in “peace-time” into other MVT components as part of the professional training.

MVT Coordination

- For a faster deployment, increase the MCO pool and standardize MCO selection decision-making between the international MVT components.
- Add to consider an exit strategy to the job description of the MCO. Embedding could be one option.
- It will be important to revise and adapt existing MVT coordination mechanisms after URCS’s move to Kyiv. There is a great potential in physical proximity, especially operationally.
- Discuss and develop the coexistence of membership- and MVT coordination (objectives, risks for overlapping, etc.) in one context.
- Put liaison delegates in place for the cooperation with other MVT components to avoid bottlenecks or mixing between hierarchical levels.
- MVT IM is of utmost importance to avoid duplications and use the same data when doing MVT reports. Ideally, the systems would be set up so that they can be easily migrated to the NS to continue to administer and update the information.
- Developing one joint reporting-template for the NS and passing on the responsibility to the partners to make this compatible with their back-donors demands, would mark a real step towards SMCC and the support to a NS during and after a crisis.
- Sending out the already developed survey will help to see if Partners are satisfied with the current MVT coordination or what should be adapted.
- Consider sending out the prepared MVT newsletter to counter-balance wrong narratives which are divisive instead of unifying. Increase chances of consumption of the newsletter by adding important MVT coordination lists.

MVT Communication and NSD

- Over four weeks after the media crisis, it is important to find the right time to consider the resumption of joint MVT Communication in Ukraine.

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- Consider conducting a perception survey in the population of Ukraine to understand the current reputational risks. One year ago, the NS had already done it, so this provides a very good baseline.
- In some crises, it might be useful to have a “MVT Communication Officer”, who would compile one source of MVT data, support Joint Statement, MVT Communication with partners, develop a joint narrative, etc.
- For this crisis, but also for any other MVT operation, consider developing a platform which ensures interoperability. Thus, people save a lot of time by e.g. working on one document or looking for information related to partners.
- Develop a pool of “NSD in emergency” profiles and send an expert from the beginning.
- The MVT promised to support URCS with a FD delegate. This is important and in addition the NS is in need of Financial Management support to handle the incoming funds from partners in an accountable way. The URCS is very diligent but might not have “enough hands” to manage the entire influx, output and reporting needs.

Conclusions

In many ways the Movement has every reason to be proud of its response in Ukraine. Much of it is owed to the URCS, a National Society with a history in SMCC and strong ownership. Those two factors, as well as the will of all partners “to make the red pillar response work”, brought this Movement operation to another level. This also means that if there would have been a National Society with less self-confidence, less understanding of Movement coordination, less openness to Movement partners and their suggestions, the results in week 11 would look very different. **A first conclusion must be: SMCC investment is worth-while.**

The National Society has early on gained the trust of the partners, who were then ready to walk the talk when it comes to putting the URCS in the center. Not only became the National Society the recognized lead in Movement Coordination, but the partners also decided to embed their staff into the host organization, consciously renouncing to some of the visibility. When looking at how the National Society could get to this level of trust, one easily recognizes that it links to their visionary leadership, the structures in place and their understanding of how much stronger they are with a Movement behind them. **The second conclusion must be: The Movement performance is closely correlated with the quality of the National Society (leadership).**

The next CoD will take place in a few months and the ongoing discussions about the CIP/SASM revisions are in the last phase of negotiation. While IFRC is establishing its membership-coordination in a holistic way, the ICRC is determined to protect its mandate in conflicts and internal strife. Upon arrival to the briefings, it became clear that the positions of ICRC and IFRC were strong and allowed little space for negotiations because both, IFRC and ICRC, were concerned that decisions taken in this highly observed MVT response in Ukraine, would set a new direction and be used during the statutory meeting. This unfortunate timing has potential to impact the cooperation in the field. The MVT’s in-country leaders recognized this and didn’t spent too much time on hard positions. **The third conclusion must be: It helps to agree that there is an issue and consciously and jointly decide to separate HQ discussions from field discussions.**

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As mentioned before, disruption of MVT coordination in a conflict is normal and as MVT we must not be too strictly judging ourselves when things are not running smoothly throughout. The support from the back offices in the first weeks of the crisis was immediate, unbureaucratic and flexible. In the middle of a large-scale crisis, flexibility is key and too many formalized processes can hinder the quick response. **The fourth conclusion must be: Sometimes «good» is good enough and improvisation is appropriate in times of disruption.**

My Mission – A personal view

My first thought when thinking about this mission is gratitude. I am grateful for being part of this Movement, for having been amazed by the determination and vision of the URCS and the readiness of all Movement partners to “make it work”. All colleagues in Ukraine worked very hard to make the best out of what we can bring to people in need as MVT. There are also times when we can stop, look at what has been done and pat each other’s shoulder in pride.

Being an MCO is a privilege and an honor, like also my predecessor Penny Elghady wrote in her End of Mission Report. I completely agree with her, as I do with all recommendations in her report that remain valid. I tried to build on what she created.

Because I strongly believe in the MVT and what we can achieve jointly, it was particularly tough when I saw how much politics played a role in this response. Once I expressed my disappointment and mentioned that it seems it is all about space. A MVT colleague answered to me: “No, it is all about money and positioning!” I had seen this in other places before but never so profoundly. It remains to be seen if after the Statutory meetings the situation will relax. I sincerely hope so.

From the beginning of this mission, I wondered if the MCO is an inclusive position, accepted as integrated part of all three components and thus receiving information and meeting invitations from all; or if it is more of an exclusive position which protects the neutrality by not being invited to intra-organizational meetings and by not being shared with a lot of information. At the beginning I was shocked not to receive invitations and information, whereas later I saw this as an advantage which prevented me from being pulled too much into political discussions. Not having a more granular sense of belonging to a specific organization made me feel lonely on a personal level at times. This was however compensated by the honor to hold this MVT position.

I would like to thank all the colleagues from URCS, ICRC and IFRC I got to work with and learn from. Special thanks goes to the five people I reported to: URCS Director General Maksym Dotsenko, ICRC Head of Delegation Pascal Hundt, and consecutively the IFRC Head of Delegation George Gigiberia, the Special Representative Alexander Matheou and the Head of Delegation Michael Kramer. Your support was great, immediate and steady. Despite your busy schedules you always found time to provide guidance, listen to suggestions or answer my questions.

Big thanks to the amazing URCS team who inspired me in so many ways and enhanced my strong belief in SMCC even more. A warm “Thank You” also to care-takers of SMCC in Geneva, Bushra Ghazanfar and Nicolas Luyet for their consistent guidance.

It was a real pleasure and learning experience to work with you all!

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Glossary

BUD - Budapest

CIP – Complementary Impact Project

F2F – Face to face

GVA _ Geneva

HoOPS – Head of Operations

HQ - Headquarter

ICG – Informal Consultative Group

IM – Information Management

JD – Job description

MCA – Movement Coordination Agreement

MCO – Movement Coordination Officer

MoM – Minutes of Meeting

MVT - Movement

NS – National Society

Oblast - Region

SA-SM – Seville Agreement /Supplementary Measures

SFA – Security Framework Agreement

SMCC – Strengthening Movement Coordination and Cooperation.

URCS - Ukrainian Red Cross Society

WG – Working Groups