Community Engagement and Accountability Surge Review
Findings Report

Contents

1. Introduction

Over the last decade, IFRC has invested significant human and financial resources into strengthening community engagement and accountability (CEA) surge capacity and quality. This investment has seen 157 people trained through six CEA surge trainings since 2017[1]. More than 100 CEA surge have been deployed and over 150 people have been registered as CEA in the IFRC's Rapid Response Management System (RRMS).

To guide future investments in CEA surge, this review seeks to identify any gaps in CEA surge capacity, assess the effectiveness of CEA surge trainings at preparing people for deployment, and examine how to better engage and support CEA surge after trainings.

Four key learnings to emerge from this review include:

1. **A lack of funding is limiting National Society CEA deployments**

   Limited funding for operations means CEA surge positions are often only possible if they're fully funded by a partner National Society (PNS). This has led to a decline in National Society (NS) CEA surge deployments, despite them making up the largest portion of CEA trainings. In contrast, PNS deployments are increasing. This is leading to frustration amongst NS CEA surge members, limiting their opportunities for development, and threatening localisation commitments.

2. **Demand for CEA surge has declined in recent years**

   CEA deployments as a share of total IFRC deployments have declined in the last two years following a spike in CEA surge for the Ukraine response. CEA surge is less likely to be called out for natural disasters than epidemics or population movement. It is important to understand if this decline in demand is due to increased NS capacity, or a de-prioritisation of CEA in operational needs, potentially again due to funding constraints.

[1] The 2017 training held in Africa was a regional disaster response team (RDRT) training.

3. **CEA surge trainings are very effective, but we need more than trainings**

   While effective and appreciated, CEA surge trainings are not enough to ensure there is sufficient, skilled, and engaged CEA surge available when needed. Many of those trained are not deployed (due to lack of demand), and even with adequate capacity in the roster, there are still challenges meeting CEA surge requests. A CEA surge community of practice would help to alleviate some of these challenges by providing opportunities for more active ongoing engagement, continued professional development, mentoring, and shadow deployments.

4. **Working relationships are the biggest challenge for CEA surge**

   Rather than technical issues, working relationships with other surge colleagues and the NS posed the biggest challenge to CEA surge on deployment. This included surge colleagues not understanding the role or value of CEA, and non-existent or overwhelmed NS counterparts. This led to CEA surge spending most of their mission negotiating with sectors to integrate CEA or implementing CEA approaches that won't be sustained by the NS. While CEA surge trainings can be improved to better prepare people for these challenges, it also requires the support and engagement of IFRC's surge team, other sectors, and NS to address.

The CEA surge journey

IFRC's investment in CEA surge capacity has aimed to ensure our emergency operations are accountable to communities and meet commitments to transparency, participation, and listening and acting on feedback outlined in the Principles and Rules for Red Cross and Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance and the Code of Conduct in Disaster Relief.

CEA surge trainings have increased the number of skilled and experienced people available to deploy in emergencies. The CEA surge is the highest level of CEA training within IFRC and follows the same scenario-based methodology as IFRC's surge leadership trainings[2]. CEA surge trainings are a significant investment, costing an average of CHF 60,000, requiring eight facilitators, and lasting seven days. Trainings are co-sponsored by partner National Societies[3], many of whom now have their own CEA surge rosters.

The CEA surge training was developed in line with IFRC's surge optimization process, which saw CEA adopted as part of the Core Competency Framework applicable to all surge personnel. A CEA surge technical competency framework was also developed, which outlines the behaviours, skills and knowledge expected for CEA technical roles.

In 2023, IFRC undertook research in the Africa region to better understand CEA in emergency operations. Hundreds of community members, volunteers, and staff were consulted on current practices, expectations and challenges. The research led to the development of 10 minimum actions for CEA in emergencies. These actions are supported with guidance, tools, templates and training.

Besides tools, training, and guidance, CEA staff at all levels in IFRC and partner National Societies have worked tirelessly to raise awareness of the importance of CEA in emergencies with colleagues at all levels, from programmes to operations to leadership.

[2] For example, The Coordination, Assessment and Planning Training (CAP).
[3] For example, the British, Canadian, Netherlands, and Swedish Red Cross Societies.

2. Methodology

The objectives of this review include:

1. **Mapping current CEA surge capacity and support within IFRC**. To identify any gaps in capacity and how we can better manage the roster, including tracking people's development and establishing a CEA surge community of practice. Through this process, the CEA surge roster within RRMS will also be updated.
2. **Analysing CEA surge alerts and deployments since 2017**. To understand trends, difficulties in meeting alerts, and challenges faced by CEA surge personnel. This will help us understand CEA surge needs and how we can better support CEA surge personnel before, during, and after deployments.
3. **Evaluating the effectiveness of CEA surge trainings at preparing people for deployment.** To identify improvements to future CEA surge trainings and find ways other than trainings to develop peoples' skills and experience.

This review used the following methods:

- **Literature review** of existing analysis and reports. This includes the IFRC Surge Trend Report 1996-2023, IFRC Surge Meta Analysis 2023, IFRC Surge Strategic Plan 2024-2028 and a meta-analysis of previous CEA Surge Training evaluation reports from 2022, 2023 and 2024.
- **Secondary data analysis** of existing surge data. This includes public deployment and alert data on the IFRC Surge Dashboard and more detailed CEA surge deployment, training, and RRMS records.
- **Quantitive data collection through a KOBO survey completed by 132 CEA rapid response personnel**. The survey asked about respondents' capacity, availability and deployment preferences; barriers to deploying; experiences and challenges while on deployment; community of practice preferences; and the effectiveness of the surge training at preparing them for a deployment.
- **Qualitative data collection through 14 key informant interviews** (KIIs) with CEA surge and IFRC staff. This includes seven CEA surge who have both attended a training and deployed. All five IFRC CEA regional leads, and two CEA senior staff at the global level were also interviewed. Interviews asked about experiences and challenges with the CEA surge roster; barriers responding to CEA surge alerts; experiences and challenges while on deployment; strengths and gaps in the CEA surge training; and community of practice and ongoing professional development needs and suggestions. Where questions aligned, qualitative data gathered through the KOBO survey was analysed alongside KII responses.

3. Summary of findings and recommendations

Summary of the main findings

- **There is good CEA surge capacity within RRMS**. There are now 130 people registered as CEA, 83 are available to deploy at the current time. Most have been CEA surge trained (88%), with 97% ready to deploy into officer level implementation roles (called tier 1), and 28% able to deploy as a coordinator/management level roles (tier 2). Just over half (51%) work in disciplines other than CEA, while 45% have CEA surge deployment experience.
- **In theory, there is sufficient French and Spanish capacity to meet the number of alerts**. Just over 31% of the roster speak French and 22% Spanish. However there are less Arabic (9%), Russian, and Portuguese speakers (both 5%). Despite this, challenges persist in meeting surge requests requiring specific languages that need to be further explored.
- **There have been 105 CEA surge deployments since 2017, and 90% of alerts met.** Despite challenges in finding people, IFRC CEA staffs' hard work has paid off. Since 2021, only two alerts were stood down due to a lack of suitable applicants.
- **The reasons people are not available are not what we think**. IFRC staff said language requirements, lack of availability for longer missions, role type, and location, as the main challenges in meeting alerts. However, the majority of CEA surge were flexible about role type, emergency, and mission length. In fact, there was a preference for longer missions. Work and family commitments were the main reasons CEA surge gave for not being able to deploy. However, many CEA surge did not have accurate contact details in RRMS and 13% don't receive alerts.
- **CEA surge deployments are more common for red level epidemics and population movement responses,** and below the IFRC average for natural disasters and orange and yellow level emergencies.
- **CEA surge deployments have decreased in the last two years.** As a share of total IFRC surge deployments, CEA deployments have declined since 2017, particularly over the last two years. A lack of alerts was raised across the survey and in KIIs by IFRC staff and CEA surge. The percentage of operations with a CEA surge each year has fluctuated from three (2020) to eight percent (2021).
- **National Societies make up a larger proportion of trainings, but they are deployed less than partner National Societies (PNS).** For example, NS make up 47% of trainings and PNS 38%. But PNS represent 41% of deployments, while NS are only 34%. In fact as a share of all CEA deployments, NS deployments are decreasing, while PNS are increasing. This is due to operational funding constraints that mean only fully funded CEA surge can be deployed. This is causing frustration amongst NS roster members and IFRC CEA staff.
- **CEA surge trainings are highly appreciated, but only 20% of those trained have been deployed after attending a training**. 157 people have been trained through six CEA surge trainings with 78% approved for deployment. While 90% said the training prepared them well for their deployment, valuable suggestions to improve the training were also shared.

- **Roster membership reflects the organisations who have invested most in CEA**. Besides IFRC, the Canadian, British, Kenyan, Swedish and Netherlands Red Cross have trained and added the most people to the roster. However, this does not correspond exactly with deployment data. The British, Swedish, Australian and Cote D'Ivoire Red Cross and IFRC the top sending organisations for CEA surge.
- **Africa and Europe deploy and receive the most CEA surge.** They have also trained and added more people to the roster. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has the lowest number of CEA surge and deployments, which aligns with deployment rates by region overall.
- **CEA surge roster, deployments, and trainings are predominantly female.** 72% of the roster, 62% of deployments, and 60% of training participants were female.
- **Deployments are split equally between tier 1 and tier 2 coordinator**, with no clear process for deciding if a position should be tier 1 or tier 2.
- **Working relationships presented the biggest challenge for CEA surge during a deployment.** This included a non-existent or overwhelmed NS counterpart, lack of understanding of CEA amongst the other sectors, or challenging external relationships. Navigating these challenges requires highly developed people skills.
- **IFRC CEA technical support to CEA surge is highly valued.** But the role of IFRC CEA staff in supporting CEA surge needs to be formalised, including the division of responsibilities between Geneva and the Regions.
- **A CEA surge community of practice is much needed and wanted.** 88% of respondents would find a CEA surge community of practice (COP) useful, but this needs to be a small, informal space where people feel safe to share. The COP should be used to provide a mentoring and buddy system to new CEA surge.

Key recommendations

1. Develop a system and identify the resources needed to maintain the CEA surge roster within the IFRC CEA team in Geneva. This includes updating members' status following deployments and as they meet recommendations given following trainings.
2. Establish a CEA surge community of practice on IFRC Communities to:
    - Improve capacity to maintain your RRMS profile and respond to alerts
    - More proactively promote alerts, and understand for each alert why there might be low response rates
    - Facilitate peer to peer discussion, through sharing deployment experiences and access help to address challenges
    - Support ongoing learning and development through trainings, refresher sessions, webinars, and sharing new and existing tools and resources
    - Provide a CEA mentoring and buddy system to those going on their first CEA surge deployment.

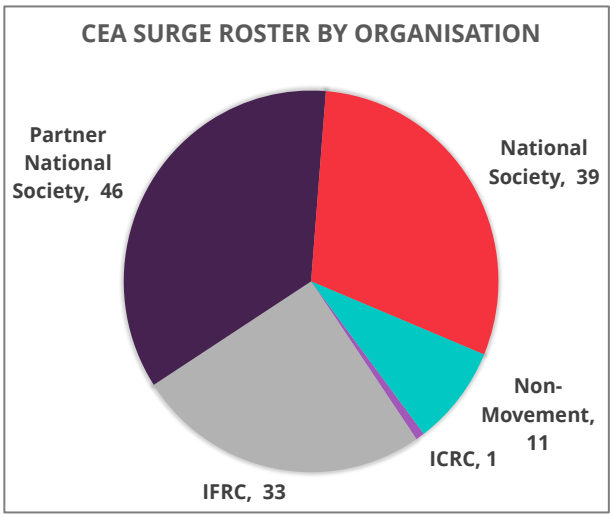
3. Investigate why CEA surge is deployed less in natural disasters and why deployments are declining overall, and if action needs to be taken to address this.[4]
4. Work with the IFRC surge team and partners to address the frustrations and constraints linked to deployment funding. For example, adding more NS to PNS CEA rosters and improving transparency over alert funding.
5. Develop standard operating procedures on the role of CEA staff at the regional and global level in CEA surge deployment alerts, selection and support. Ensure all new regional leads are briefed on CEA surge processes and procedures.
6. Adopt guidelines to decide if a surge position should be tier 1 or 2. For example, consider making all positions tier 2 if there is only one CEA surge deploying
7. Advocate and support other sectors to include sessions on community engagement, including the role of a CEA surge, in sector and operation manager surge trainings. This will require support from IFRC's surge team.
8. Reduce the frequency of CEA surge trainings from annually to bi-annually and investigate other methods to build CEA surge roster members skills and experience. For example, through offering more shadow mission opportunities and ongoing professional development through the CEA surge community of practice.
9. CEA surge trainings should be targeted at addressing the main gaps in the roster in relation to language, sex, skills, regions, and organisations.
10. Revise the CEA surge training to reduce the theory and intensity, and allow more time for real-life case studies, experience sharing and reflection. Scale up the focus on participation, soft skills, working with the sectors, CEA and PGI joint working, and CEA in epidemics. This will also be critical to ensure more CEA surge are able to deploy into interagency coordination roles. Also consider revising the scenario to start later in the operation as this may be more realistic for the majority of CEA surge deployments.

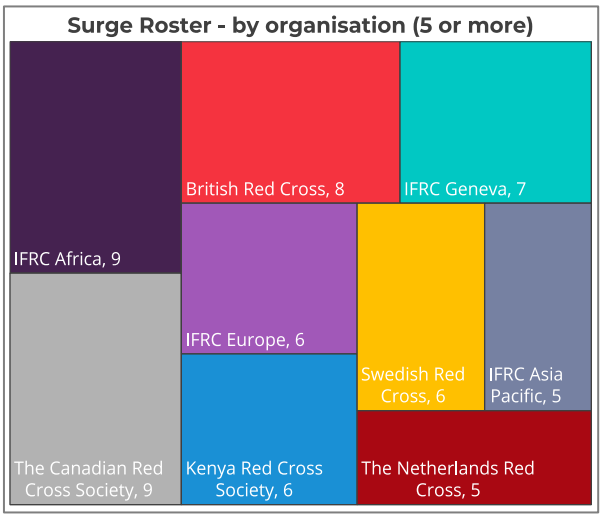
[4] If CEA surge deployments are declining due to increased NS capacity, no action is needed. However, if deployments are declining because CEA is not seen as a priority, then action is needed.

4. CEA Surge Roster Findings

Demographics

There are 130 CEA rapid response within RRMS[5], including 58 nationalities and 46 Movement organisations. PNS make up 35% of the roster, NS 30% and IFRC 25%. The membership of the roster reflects the PNS and NS who have invested most in CEA, with the Canadian, British, Swedish, Netherlands and Kenya Red Cross all having five or more members. The CEA surge roster is predominantly female (72% / 28%).

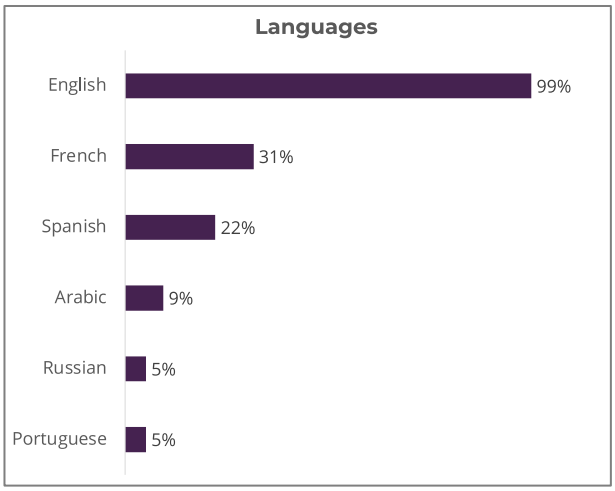




Capacity

Most CEA surge (88%) have attended a CEA surge training. The majority (97%) are approved for tier 1 (officer) deployments, with 28% also approved for tier 2 (coordinator). The remaining 3% were recommended to complete additional trainings or gain more experience before being deployed. CEA surge come a range of different disciplines, although 49% work in a CEA role[6]. Roster members speak 39 different languages, with English and French the most common. Just under half (45%) have been deployed.

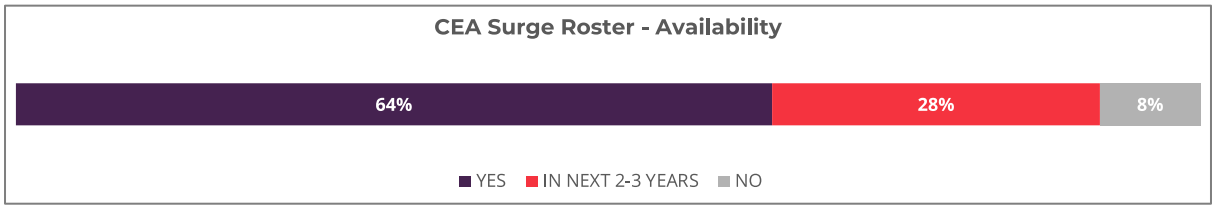
SECTOR	#
CEA	49
Project Coordination	11
Communications	10
Management / leadership	9
Disaster preparedness / response	6
PMER	5
CEA & PGI joint role	4
WASH	4
Health	4
PMER & CEA joint role	3
Volunteer	3
IM	2
Others – Food security, environment, PGI, CVA, HR	all 1

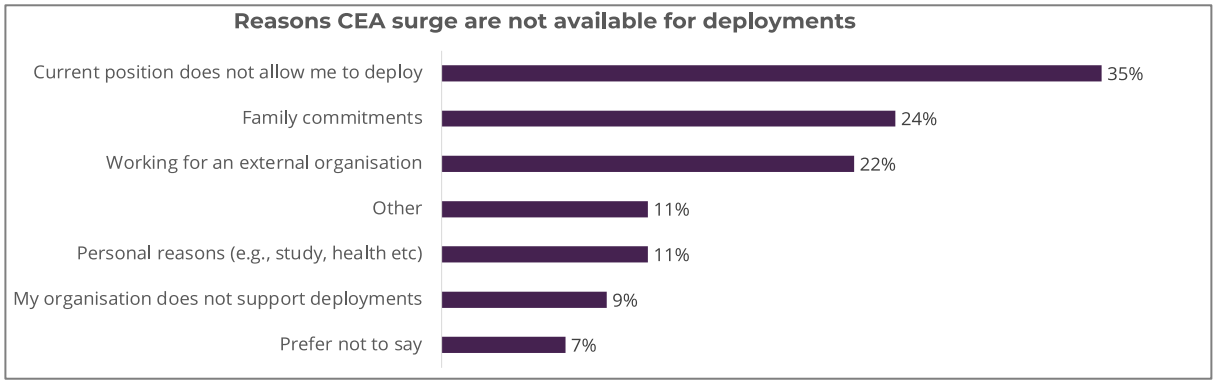


[5] Reduced from 156 at the start of the review process. 28 people were removed, mainly due to incorrect contact details, and 2 people were added who have mission experience but had not been included in RRMS.
[6] 43% in a dedicated CEA role, 3% in a CEA/PGI, and 3% in a CEA/PMER role.

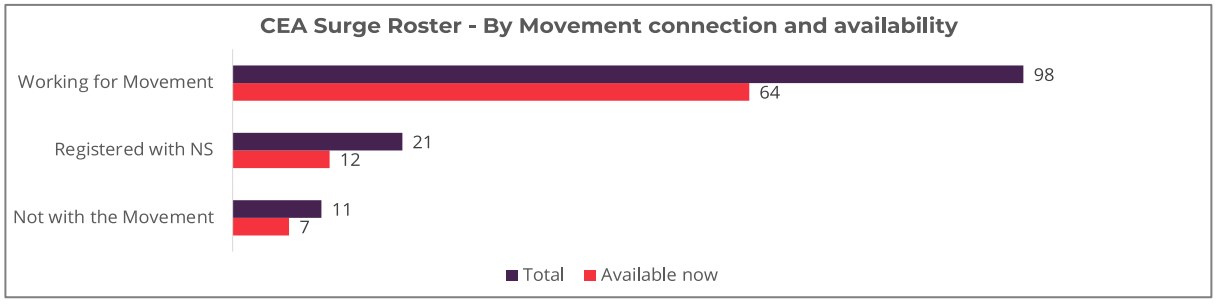
Availability

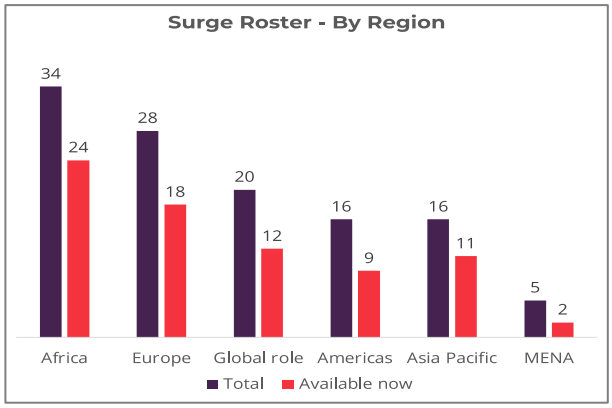
Almost two thirds (83 people) of the CEA surge in RRMS are available to deploy now. While current position was the top reason why both men and women are unavailable to deploy, women did cite a broader range of reasons than men. However, the proportion of women citing family reasons was not proportionally higher than men.

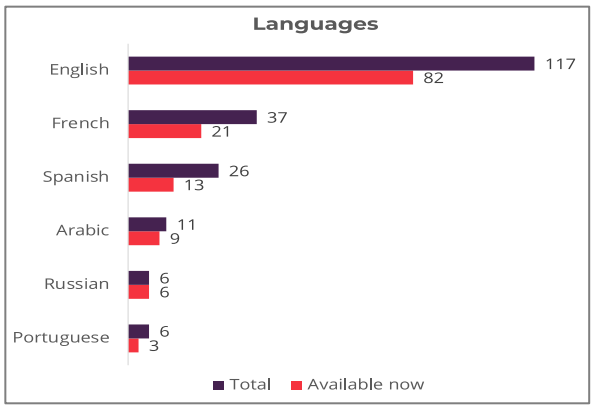




Of the 83 people available now, 77% are working for the Movement and 14% are registered with an NS[7]. Africa has the highest number of CEA surge members, followed by Europe[8]. English is the most widely spoken language, but there are French, Spanish, and Arabic speakers available to deploy. Portuguese is the least available language.



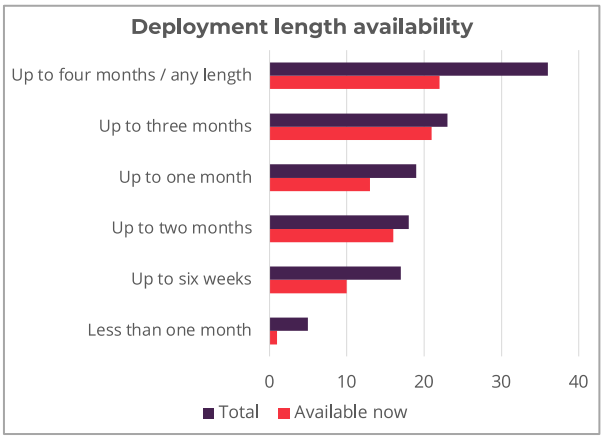


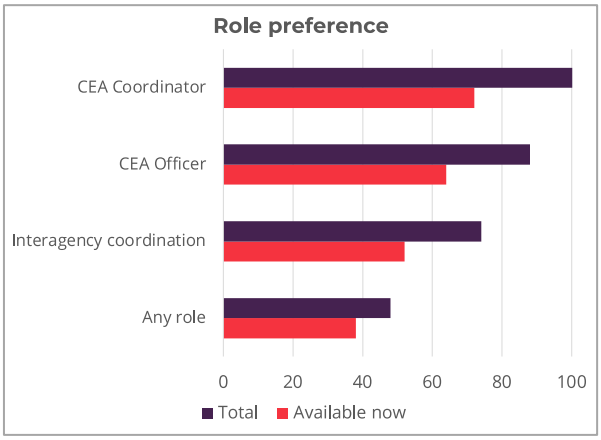


[7] Within those registered with an NS, eight are part of a PNS roster and four are registered as NS volunteers
[8] The region was determined by where the person is working now, so European PNS staff based in Africa were classed as Africa rather than Europe.

Preferences

Most CEA surge are flexible about the type of role, emergency, and mission length they prefer. Overall, there is greater availability for longer missions, with 43 surge members available now and willing to deploy for three months or more. There is a slight preference for the CEA coordinator role (72 available now) over the CEA officer role (64 available now). CEA interagency coordination was the least preferred role (52 available now). Most (71%) are willing to deploy into any type of emergency, but those who did specify preferred natural disasters (25%) and population movement (22%).





Roster challenges

Most CEA surge did not report any challenges receiving and responding to CEA surge alerts. However, 13% of survey respondents reported not receiving any alerts. During KIIs, several CEA surge asked for more information on how to keep their RRMS profile up to date and on deployment timeframes and selection. The survey did highlight that for many CEA surge, their contact details are out of date in RRMS.

IFRC CEA staff also reported the biggest challenge with the roster is ensuring peoples' profiles are up to date. This includes changing peoples' tier as they gain experience or updating their deployment status once they have met recommendations given at the end of a surge training. CEA surge mission appraisals are not routinely shared with IFRC CEA technical staff, and this was seen as a key barrier to ensuring we keep an accurate record of peoples' experience.

In general, IFRC CEA staff in the regions are not engaged in managing the CEA surge roster. Although several regions have included CEA surge members in their general CEA communities of practice. However, as one regional respondent noted, "*there needs to be someone focused on managing the roster, as the regional leads may not have the time to do this properly.*" There is also clarity needed over what happens if surge members leave the Movement, "*When people leave the NS what happens with them? How can we keep them in the system? Involved? We can't afford to lose them always.*"

While IFRC CEA staff felt the overall skillset and capacity of the CEA surge roster was good, some gaps identified included language skills and stronger data analysis skills.

Key findings – CEA surge roster

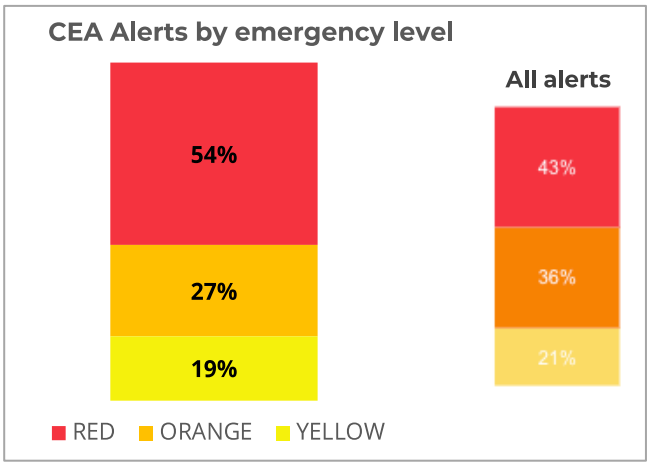
- 130 CEA surge within RRMS, from 46 different Movement members
- 83 people are available to deploy now, 76 of these are within the Movement
- PNS represent 35% of the roster, followed by NS 30% and IFRC 25%
- Besides IFRC, the Canadian, British, Kenya, Swedish and Netherlands Red Cross have the most members
- 88% of CEA surge have been CEA surge trained and 45% have deployed
- 97% are approved for tier 1 officer deployments, and 28% for tier 2 coordinator
- 51% come from disciplines other than CEA
- 31% speak French, 22% Spanish, 9% Arabic, and 5% Russian or Portuguese
- Work and family commitments are the main reasons people are not available
- Africa has the highest number of CEA surge followed by Europe
- Respondents are flexible about role, emergency type, and mission length they would prefer – with a preference towards longer 3-4 month missions
- Some CEA surge are not receiving alerts
- IFRC CEA staff are experiencing challenges keeping the CEA roster up to date.

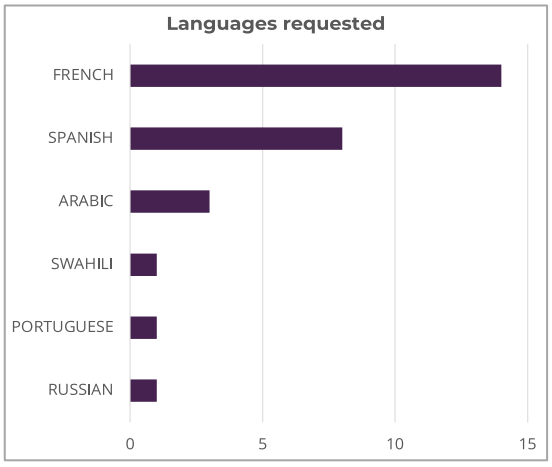
Analysis - CEA surge roster

- Overall, there is a good level of capacity within the CEA surge roster in terms of both availability and skills. Therefore it is not a lack of roster capacity which is leading to low response rates to alerts.
- One contributing factor could be the lack of awareness of how to maintain your RRMS profile and the surge alert and deployment process. Therefore, it is recommended to hold a webinar for all CEA surge roster members (with the IFRC surge team) on how to manage your RRMS profile and expectations and timelines around responding to alerts. This could be held as part of the new CEA surge community of practice (see section 7) and address other challenges around deployment funding, appraisals, and what happens if you leave the Movement.
- The revised CEA surge roster will be shared with IFRC surge team in Geneva so RRMS can be updated with the correct contact information.
- Develop a system and identify the resources needed to maintain the CEA surge roster within the IFRC CEA team in Geneva. This includes updating members' status following deployments and as they meet recommendations given following the CEA surge training.

5. Findings - CEA Surge Alerts

There have been 59 CEA surge alerts from 2021 to October 2024. Alerts were almost evenly split between requests for a CEA coordinator (53%) and CEA officer (47%). CEA surge alerts are more likely for red level emergencies. Excluding English, French was the most requested language (24%), followed by Spanish (14%). This means, in theory at least, there is sufficient language capacity within the CEA surge roster to meet the number of alerts i.e., there are 21 French speakers available now and 14 alerts requesting French language skills over the last four years.



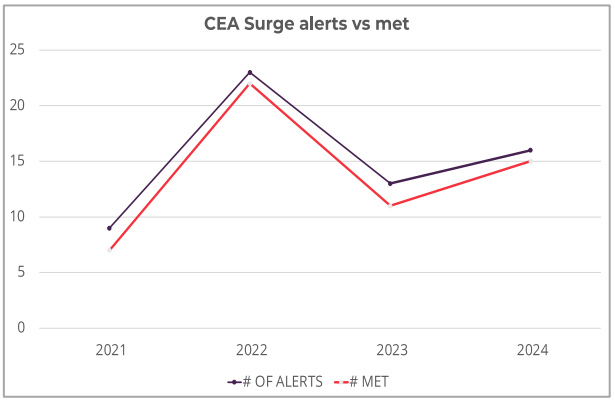


IFRC challenges in meeting alerts

IFRC CEA staff reported the main challenges they face in meeting CEA surge request as language requirements; lack of availability for longer missions; officer roles being less appealing; response location and complexity putting people off; and less willingness to deploy to epidemics. However, these are not reflected in the CEA surge survey responses on preferences and availability. This suggests there are additional barriers preventing CEA surge from responding to alerts. As one IFRC respondent noted, "*It's easy to be on the roster but another to actually deploy. People say they are committed to deploy but then don't. We need to find ways to make it more attractive. Offer more opportunities.*

Stand downs

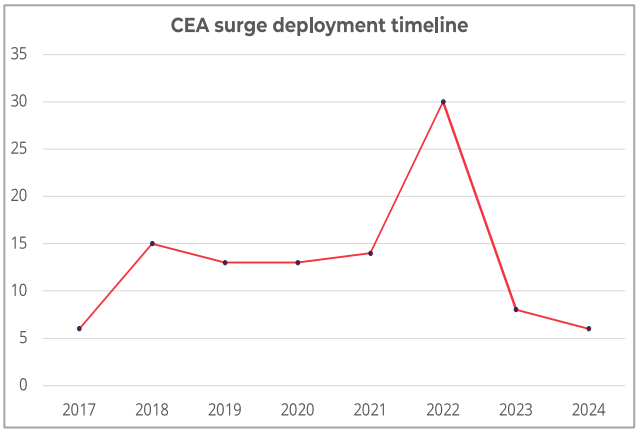
Most surge alerts were met (90%) with only six stand downs. These were due to changes in operational needs (3), no suitable applicants (2), and filled outside the surge system (1). While language requirements were cited as a key challenge in meeting surge requests, this does not appear to be a factor in stand downs as French or Spanish were requested in only two of the unmet alerts. The type of position does not also appear to be a factor, as half the stand downs were for a CEA coordinator and half for a CEA officer.

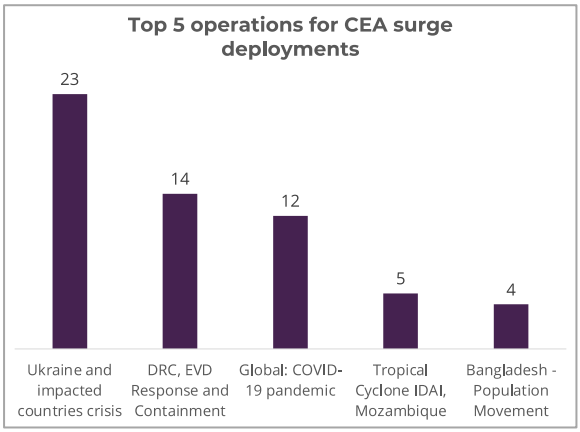


6. Findings - CEA Surge Deployments

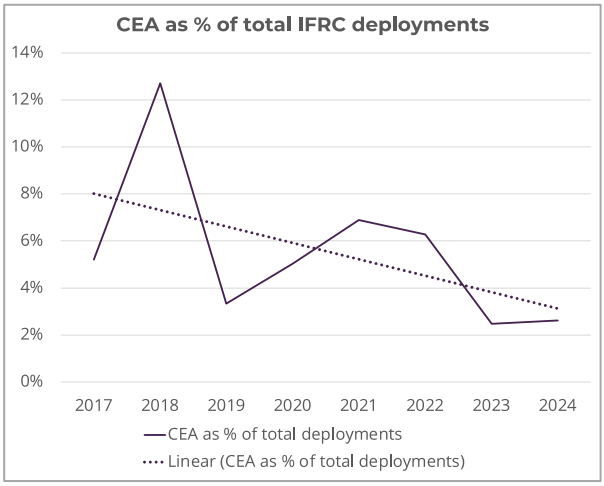
Where, when, and how many

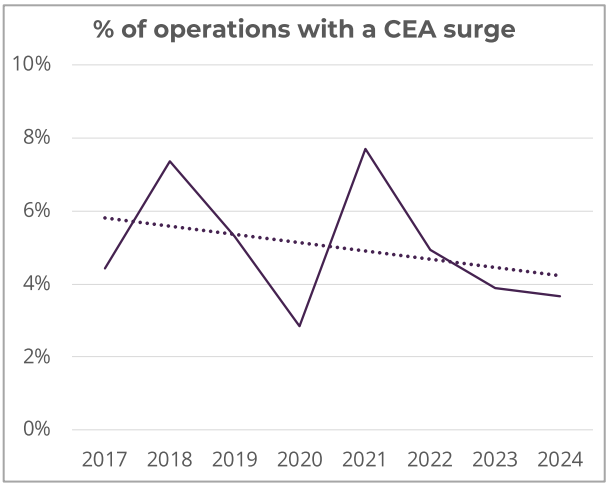
There were 105 CEA surge deployments between 2017 and mid-2024, which gives an average of 14 CEA surge deployments a year. Deployments peaked at 30 in 2022 due to the Ukraine response, which is the operation with the highest number of CEA surge deployments to date. The average CEA surge deployment duration is 1.7 months.



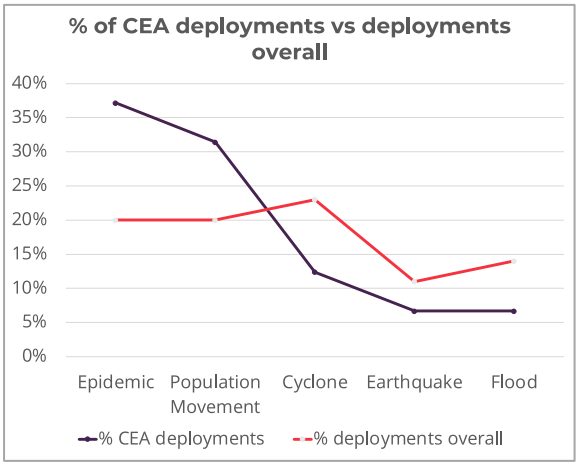


The number of CEA deployments has declined in the last two years. Between 2018 and 2021, CEA surge deployments remained steady at 13-15 deployments per year, with the 2022 peak for the Ukraine response. However, in 2023 and 2024, CEA surge deployments dropped by almost half to around 8 per year. Indeed, CEA surge deployments as a share of total IFRC deployments have declined since 2017 by almost half. This is in contrast to PGI and PMER deployments, which have increased as a share of total IFRC deployments, and cash which has remained steady. The number of operations each year with CEA surge has also declined but less so the number of deployments overall. A lack of CEA surge alerts was raised as a major issue in both KIIs and the survey. This was attributed to CEA not being seen as a priority in rapid onset emergencies, or NS refusing IFRC support.





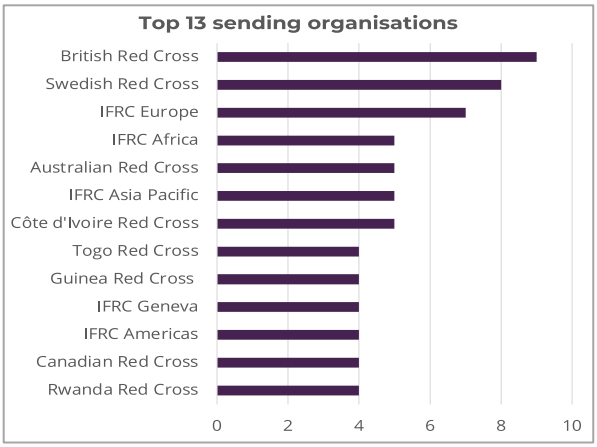
CEA surge are more likely to be deployed for epidemics or population movement, and less likely for natural disasters[9]. More than half of all CEA surge deployments (56%) were for red level emergencies. While deployments into orange or yellow level emergencies are below the IFRC average[10]. Given floods, epidemics and cyclones are the most common types of emergency since 2017[11], it is worth investigating if CEA is seen as less valuable or needed in certain types or levels of response.

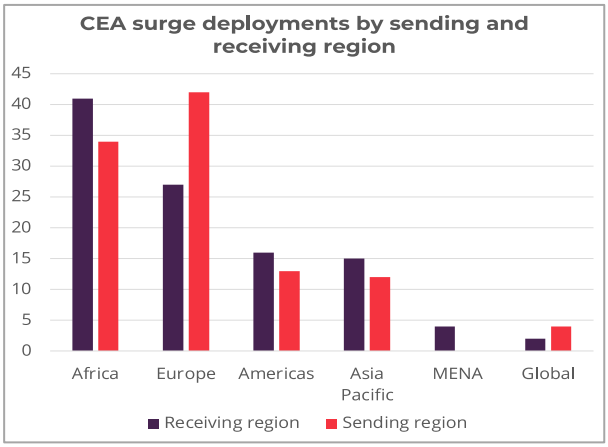


Who is being deployed?

CEA surge deployments are predominantly female (63%) and in line with the current ratio of the roster (female 72% / male 28%)[12]. Many of those deployed have attended or facilitated a CEA surge training (62%). As with alerts, deployments are split almost equally between tier 1 CEA officers (49%) and tier 2 CEA coordinators (51%). Men and women are deployed into tier 2 management positions equally. Deployment data and KIIs suggest the decision over whether a position is tier 1 or tier 2 is fairly arbitrary. In reality, a CEA surge deploying on their own is likely to perform both tier 1 and tier 2 duties.

Africa and Europe Regions both deploy and receive the most CEA surge, although Europe's high receipt rate is due to the Ukraine crisis. The organisations who deploy the most is similar to the roster distribution, but there are differences (see section 6 for a comparison across roster, deployments and training). This could be partly due to some NS deploying the same person multiple times. For example, all five Côte D'Ivoire deployments were the same person. While most have deployed once (62%), 11 people have deployed twice, and five have deployed more than three times.





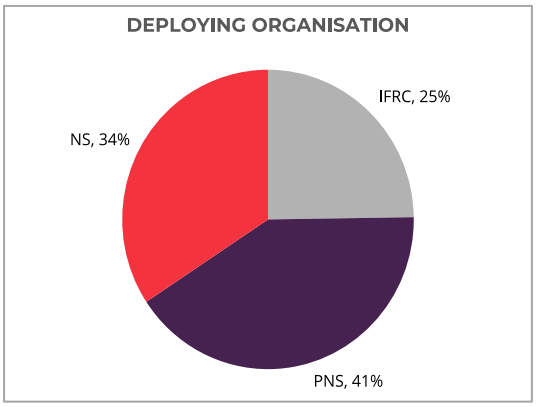
[9] This was compared with other cross-cutting functions such as PGI, cash, and PMER and the same patterns were not observed. For example, PGI and cash were less likely to be deployed for epidemics, but more likely for population movement, and in line with the average for cyclones and earthquakes. PMER was in line with overall deployment trends for all types of operation.

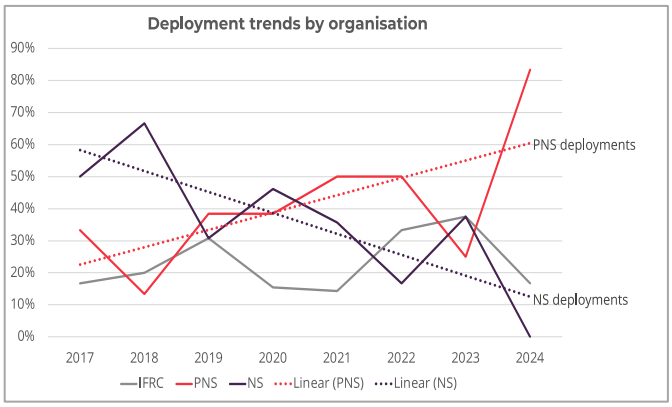
[10] This was particularly the case for yellow level emergencies. While only 13% of CEA surge deployments were for yellow level emergencies, they represented 38% of overall IFRC surge deployments.

[11] According to IFRC's Go Platform, based on all operations since 2017.

[12] This data includes all deployments since 2017, while the roster sex ratio only represents the current time.

PNS have the largest share of the roster and the largest share of deployments (41%). Analysing deployment data over time, shows NS deployments are decreasing, while PNS are increasing. Many NS respondents shared frustration that they have less opportunities to deploy and asked for more transparency, including making it clear in the alert if the position is funded or not. IFRC staff also acknowledged sometimes they have to select funded candidates over better qualified un-funded candidates. As one respondent noted, *"for cholera we had people but no money to deploy them".*

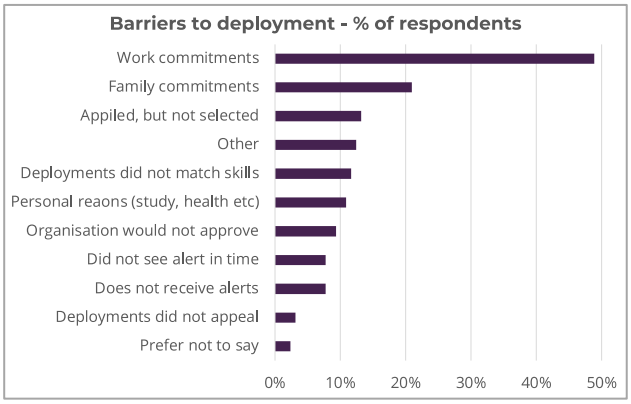


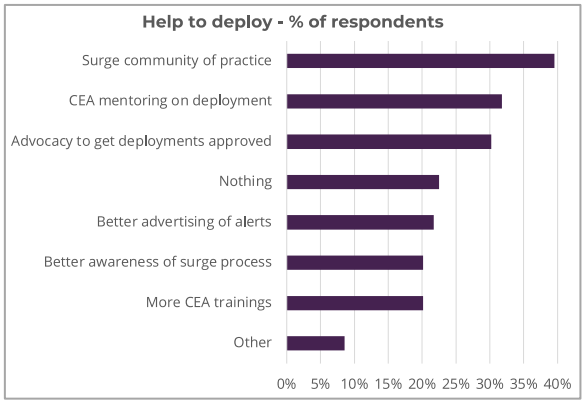


Deployment barriers and enablers

The main reason both male and female CEA surge are not available to deploy is work commitments. However, women were twice as likely to cite family commitments, or not having the skills required, as a barrier to deploying. Men were twice as likely to cite not being selected, or not seeing or getting the alert. Most KII respondents said the process to deploy with IFRC was simple and straightforward. However several did report challenges with their own organisation approving the deployment in a timely manner. One respondent experienced serious challenges transitioning from an IFRC contract to a PNS roster deployment. IFRC respondents noted that while slow deployment processes are out with CEA control, we do have a duty of care to CEA surge to keep them informed.

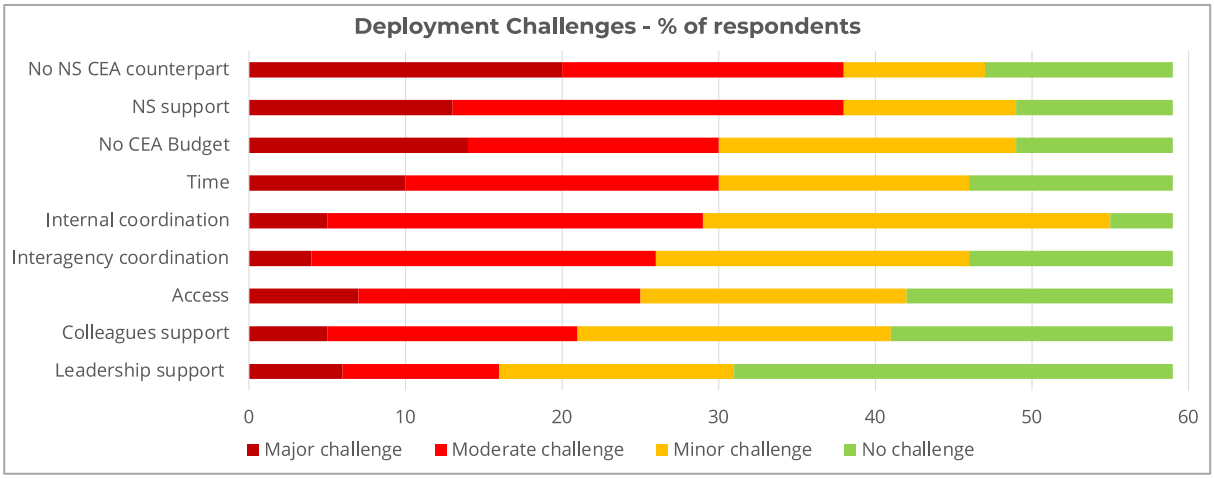
A surge community of practice, mentoring, and advocacy to deploying organisations, would most help CEA surge to deploy.





Challenges while on deployment

Lack of an NS counterpart or support for CEA were the most serious challenges experienced by CEA surge[13] while on deployment. One respondent discussed how their counterpart was missing for 60% of their deployment. This leaves CEA surge struggling to *"find the balance between not overstepping and still delivering and doing the work. Managing these kind of politics is not easy."* As one person explained, *"This affects the sustainability of what we're doing. The things we put in place are not continued. We need to be able to link CEA within the operation to regular, long-term, CEA actions within the National Society."*



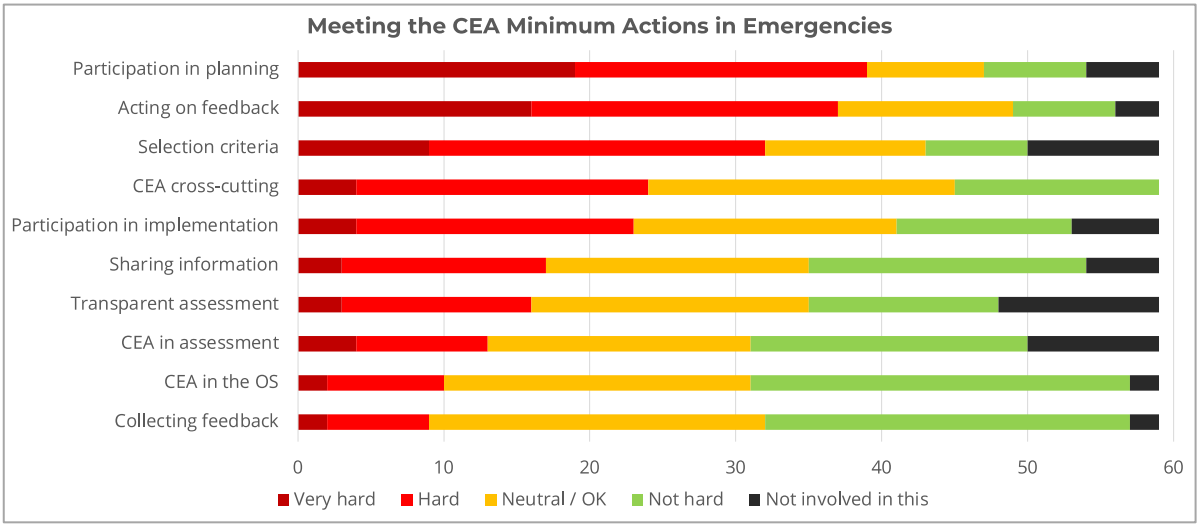
While lack of support from colleagues was less of a challenge in the survey, this was mentioned frequently in the KIIs. Both CEA surge and IFRC staff discussed challenges with other sectors not understanding the role or purpose of CEA. One person explained, *"I had to educate the other sectors on the role of CEA. I worked with a cash delegate who thought CEA was an admin role and asked me to create folders for them. This was time-consuming and made it harder to integrate accountability in the response. Other sectors need to include CEA sessions in their surge trainings, for example in the CAP, CVA and shelter trainings."* This also led to challenges in CEA surge knowing where to focus their efforts. As one noted, "*What is our role? Just to advise or to insist? When there is a very low understanding of CEA amongst the other sectors, should we spend time training IFRC delegates or focus on the NS?".*

Many respondents reflected these challenges highlight the need for CEA surge to have well developed people skills, such as advocacy, negotiation, and flexibility. For example, "*I learnt to be patient and humble, and to advocate for the work that needed to be done. It was sometimes a bit disappointing to work with people who told you that they knew everything and didn't need your support. However, through humility and perseverance I managed to show them that they needed my technical support and that I needed their support too. It was a win-win situation. By the end, we were very happy to achieve some great results."* These skills were also important when working with external partners such as governments, "*The government was very controlling. I had to shift how I looked at things and adapt to their way of working. The ability to shift mindset was critical to overcome the barriers."* The importance of strong people skills was also discussed by IFRC staff, *"the first deployment commonly don't realise they need to negotiate with the entire operation to get things done".*

[13] 59 survey respondents had deployment experience. Open comments were analysed with KII responses.

Meeting the CEA minimum actions

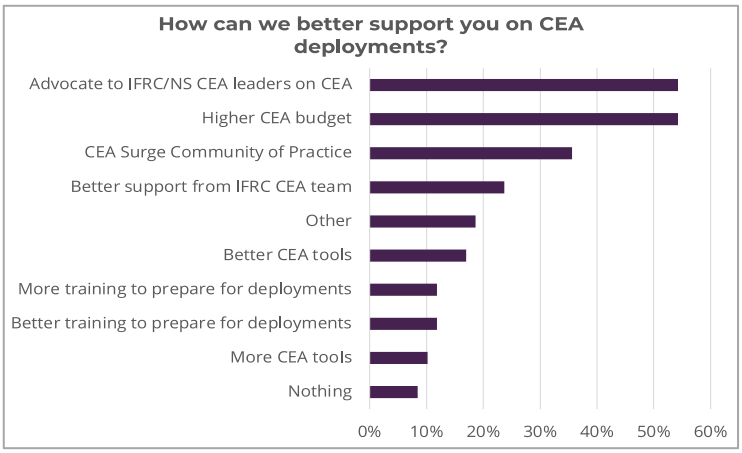
CEA minimum actions in emergencies linked to participation and acting on feedback were seen as the hardest to implement in an operation. The results highlight the difference between collecting feedback (one of the easiest actions) and acting on it (one of the hardest). Several respondents also discussed the heavy workload involved in setting up community feedback mechanisms. These results suggest areas to focus on more in the CEA surge training, and where it may be helpful to share more case studies and guidance.

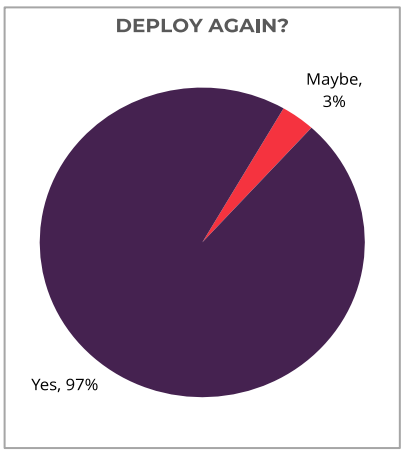


Respondents reflected again on the importance of soft skills in meeting or not meeting the CEA minimum actions in emergencies. *"There were some operations where I didn't have any problems, and others where I really struggled to do anything other than carry out certain small activities. Integrating CEA requires not only the knowledge you learned in trainings, or your own work experience, but also the way you behave with your colleagues and leadership. There will be times when you will have to impose yourself to do your job, times when you will have to be patient, and times when you will have to be diplomatic."*

Support during deployments

Advocacy to leadership on the importance of CEA, adequate CEA budget, and a CEA surge community of practice would help CEA surge feel better supported on a deployment. This aligns with the challenges raised in the previous section. The importance of supportive leadership was also raised in KIIs, "*Ukraine was great as the HeOps made the case for CEA.*" Almost all CEA surge would deploy again.





Technical support from IFRC CEA staff at the regional or global level was highly appreciated and valued by CEA surge. This helped them to identify resources, validate decisions, understand the NS, and connect with other CEA surge in regional responses. Comments included, *"When I was deployed, I felt I had a strong CEA network across the Europe region and with the Geneva team, and that was so helpful throughout the response, especially for troubleshooting technical issues, and learning from other CEA delegates in real time"* and *"the Africa team involved me in their departmental meetings which was great and helped me feel part of a team and understand my role better."* However, it is important this support is clearly signposted, structured, and available one-to-one, as well as in a group.

Informants also discussed the importance of a good handover and briefings, noting, "*Handover is very important – and what makes or breaks it is the amount of time you have."* A suggestion included sharing a handover report in advance so face-to-face time can be used to delve into issues which can't be written down. Peer support, mentoring and shadow missions were also mentioned, and these are discussed in section 7.

IFRC CEA role in deployments

Several IFRC informants discussed confusion over the role of Geneva versus the regions in surge selection and support. This was more pronounced in regions where the CEA regional lead was newer to IFRC surge processes. One region explained a good example of splitting responsibilities, *"the region and country do the CEA surge selection, while colleagues in Geneva can help advocate and push for a CEA surge in the joint task force calls."*

There are also challenges with operations not involving regional CEA staff in CEA surge alerts, selection and support. This can lead to CEA surge not connecting with ongoing work and *"reinventing the wheel"*. One IFRC regional lead noted, "*PNS seconded deployments are impossible to follow up as they don't see us as a technical line. They only work with the operational manager and their NS manager"*. This is not unique to CEA and Europe Region is developing SOPs to ensure technical staff are part of surge selection and support.

CEA surge availability and deployment length was raised multiple times. While IFRC staff felt many roster members struggled with longer missions, this was not reflected in survey responses, which showed a preference for longer 3-4 month missions. This could point to a disconnect between CEA surge members' overall preferences and what is practically possible when an alert is issued. As one IFRC respondent explained, "*Our opportunities don't fit everyone on the roster. Many are not dedicated CEA staff, and they have multiple roles. So if they go away for 3 months, then 2 or 3 positions within the NS are empty."* A solution included more flexible and overlapping deployments between IFRC CEA staff and surge deployments. Regardless, IFRC is transitioning to longer deployments so solutions will need to be found. As one IFRC respondent shared, *"The biggest complaint from the NS involved in the Ukraine response was the rapid rotation of IFRC surge people."*

IFRC staff also reflected that those with less hands-on CEA experience, or who are unfamiliar with IFRC processes and tools, require more 'hand-holding' from the IFRC CEA team. One respondent explained, "*We should be deploying people who have been trained and have proved they can do XYZ. But until they deploy, we don't know what kind of help or support they need. Everyone's first deployment is taking a chance. But then we should follow up where there are gaps and support them."*

Key findings – CEA deployments

- 105 CEA surge deployments since 2021, averaging 1.7 months
- 90% of CEA surge alerts since 2021 were met. Only six were stood-down
- CEA surge deployments, as a share of overall IFRC deployments, are declining
- Most CEA surge deployments are for red level emergencies, and more likely for epidemics or population movement, than natural disasters
- PNS CEA surge deployments are increasing, while NS deployments are decreasing
- 62% of those deployed have attended or facilitated a CEA surge training
- Deployments are split equally between tier 1 officer and tier 2 coordinator
- 63% of CEA surge deployed are female
- Africa and Europe deploy and receive the most CEA surge, with British, Swedish, Australian and Cote D'Ivoire Red Cross and IFRC the top sending organisations
- Work and family commitments are the main barriers to CEA surge deploying
- Key challenges on deployment included lack of an NS counterpart or support, limited time and budget, and lack of understanding of CEA amongst the other sectors. Navigating these challenges requires highly developed people skills
- The hardest CEA minimum actions to implement are those linked to participation and acting on feedback
- Advocacy to NS and operation managers, a more adequate CEA budget, and a CEA surge community of practice, would help CEA surge most on deployment
- Technical support provided by IFRC staff to CEA surge on deployments is highly valued and appreciated, but the roles of Geneva and Regions is not always clear.

Analysis – CEA deployments

- Investigate why CEA surge is deployed less in natural disasters and why deployments are declining overall, and if action needs to be taken to address this[14]
- Adopt guidelines to decide if a surge position should be tier 1 or 2. For example, consider making all positions tier 2 if there is only one CEA surge deploying
- Work with the IFRC surge team and partners to address the frustrations and constraints linked to deployment funding. For example, adding more NS to PNS CEA rosters and improving transparency over alert funding
- Establish a CEA surge community of practice to provide peer support, mentoring, and raise awareness of surge processes (see section 7)
- Continue long term work advocating to NS leadership on value of CEA, for example through the Ambassadors Network

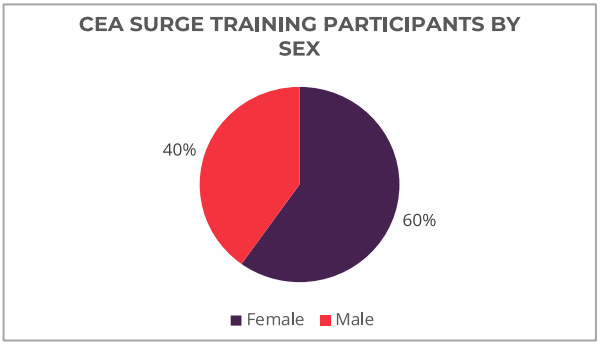
[14] If CEA surge deployments are declining due to increased NS capacity, no action is needed. However, if deployments are declining because CEA is not seen as a priority, then action is needed.

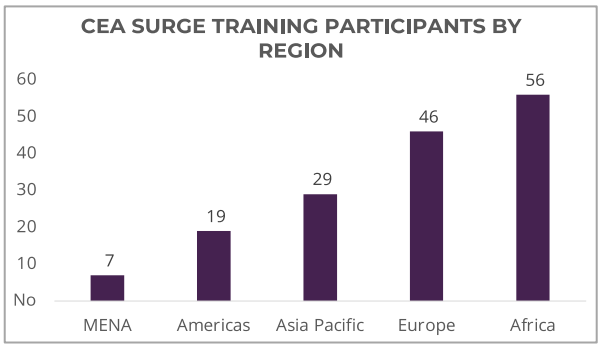
- Identify improvements to the CEA surge training and develop more case studies and guidance to address the most common deployment challenges. For example, community participation in operations, people skills, and feedback mechanisms
- Advocate and support other sectors to include sessions on community engagement, including the role of a CEA surge, in sector and operation manager surge trainings. This will require support from IFRC's surge team
- Develop standard operating procedures on the role of CEA staff at the regional and global level in CEA surge deployment alerts, selection and support. Ensure all new regional leads are briefed on CEA surge processes and procedures
- Work with IFRC surge team to ensure the role of regional technical leads in CEA surge alerts, selection and support is clear and communicated to operations
- Work with the IFRC HR and surge team to address any contractual issues arising from deploying NS or IFRC staff through PNS rosters.

7. Findings - CEA surge trainings

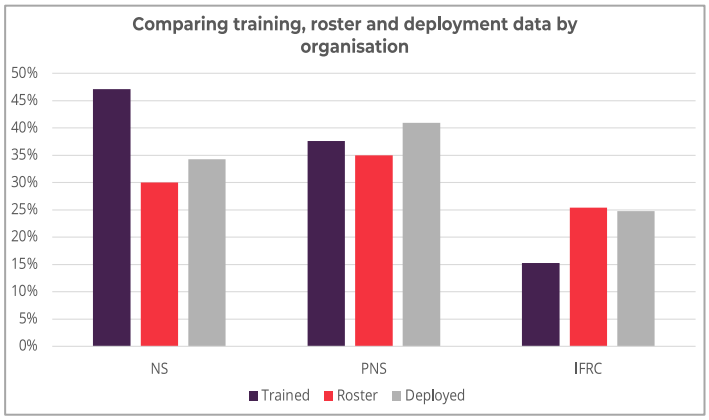
Training numbers

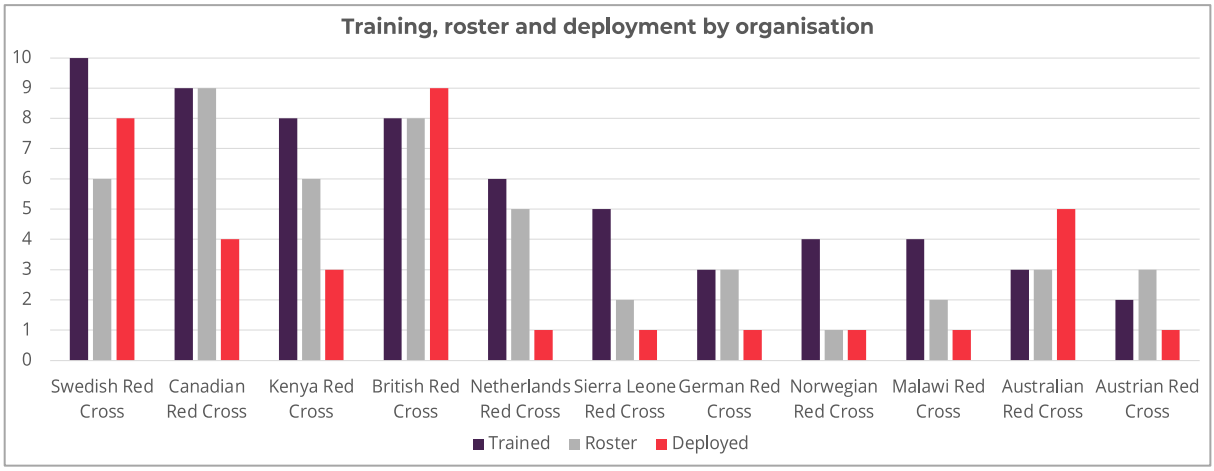
Since 2017, 157 people have been trained through six CEA surge trainings. Africa and Europe have the highest number of CEA surge trained participants. Almost half of those trained are from NS (47%) and 60% were female.





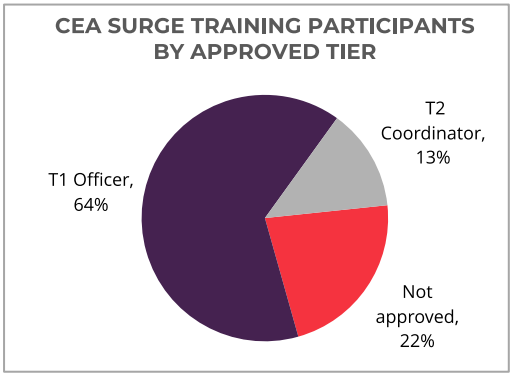
Comparing training, roster and deployment data highlights some interesting findings. For example, while NS make up the largest proportion of those trained, they are deployed less than PNS. This is most likely linked to funding constraints on the need to deploy fully funded candidates. NS also have a lower share of the roster than PNS despite higher training rates, pointing to the issues with retention once NS staff leave the Movement. Organisations who have trained the most CEA surge aligns with those who have invested in developing CEA rosters, including the Swedish, British and Canadian Red Cross. However, the data comparison below shows some organisations with high rates of training, do not have corresponding rates of deployment or roster membership.



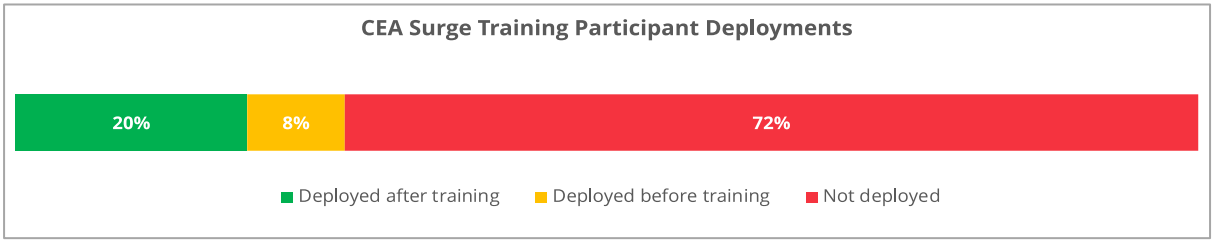


Training outcomes

Sixty-four percent of CEA surge training participants were approved for tier one deployments, which is the aim of the training. Thirty-five participants were not approved for immediate deployment and given recommendations to complete additional trainings or gain specific experience before being deployed. NS participants were less likely to be approved for immediate deployment, highlighting the need for long term investment in strengthening NS CEA capacity through approaches such as the Ambassadors Network.

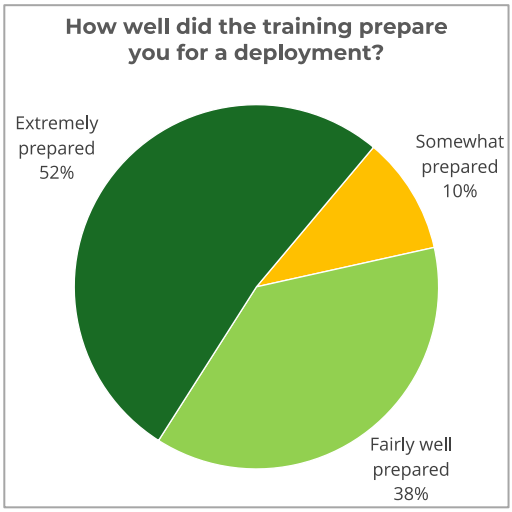


Only 20% of those trained have been deployed as CEA surge after attending a training. This means for every 24 people attending a CEA surge training, only 5 are deployed. There is however a good retention rate with 73% of those trained still on the roster today.



Training effectiveness

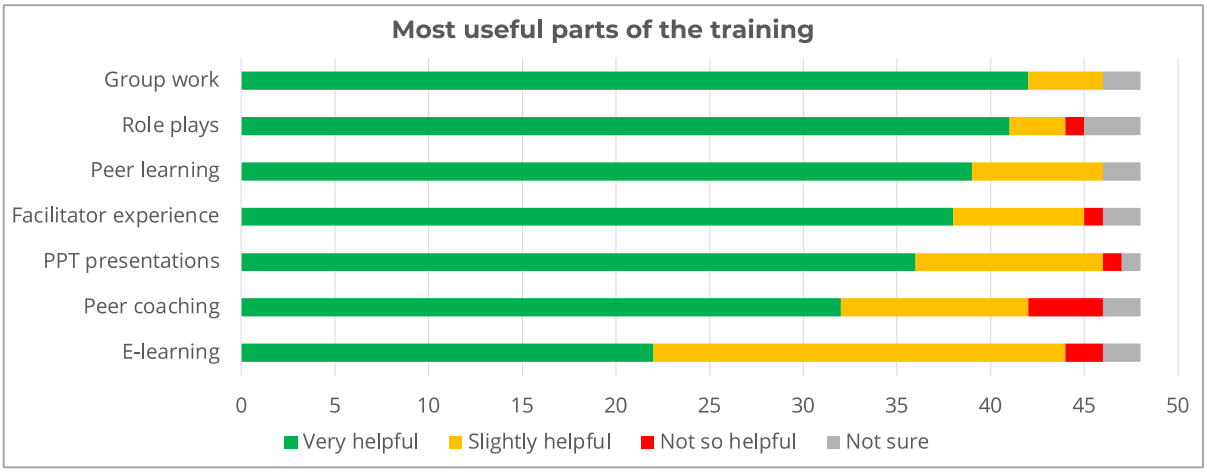
Ninety percent of respondents said the training had prepared them well for their deployment. This was echoed in the KIIs, *"the tools, knowledge and skills gained during the training helped a lot during the deployment".* Respondents also discussed the intensity of the training, *"the days were very packed which was sometimes challenging – but content and method wise – it's the best training I ever attended"***.** However, one respondent did note that while the training does a good job of preparing people for tier one roles, it is less effective at preparing them for tier two tasks such as advocacy, negotiation and coordination.



Training Methods

The interactive parts of the training, including scenario-based group work, role plays, and learning from each other's experiences, were widely reported as the most helpful at preparing people for a deployment. Many respondents discussed how the scenarios and role plays were very realistic and worked well to build confidence and familiarise people with the CEA toolkit. As one person explained, *"The dynamics of the role plays in groups and the possibility for both the acting groups and the observers to listen to feedback from the coaches in real time, with practical tips and the sharing of personal experiences that took place on their respective missions was the most valuable thing for me."*

The peer coaching approach was more divisive, with 67% saying it was very helpful, but 8% saying they found it not so helpful. Although this was recalled as being very useful by many of the key informants. The 'supportive environment' of the training was also consistently mentioned in training evaluations. Not surprisingly, e-learning and pre-reading generated the least enthusiasm, however most people (92%) still found it very or at least slightly helpful. None of the training approaches were rated as 'not at all helpful'.



The survey, KIIs, and training evaluations, all included feedback that at times the training is too theoretical, and that more time should be given to group work and discussion of real-life examples and challenges. The intensity of the training was also raised frequently. While many noted this was good as it represents the reality of a deployment and allows a lot of content to be covered in a short time, it does limit the time available for reflection and experience-sharing. As one respondent said, "*The training could use more space and time to learn the tools and ask questions. The focus seemed to be on getting to the next thing.*"

Suggestions included reducing the amount of content overall, allocating less time to taught sessions (PPTs), and replacing theoretical content with more real-life case studies. This would allow more time for group work, discussion, and reflection. This will require that all participants attending the CEA surge have a solid understanding of CEA, given the teaching time will be reduced[15]. As one respondent notes, *"this is not the training to teach you CEA".* Several informants suggested offering an online (live) CEA in emergencies training before the in-person training starts. There were also frequent requests in surge training evaluations for more peer learning and social opportunities.

Training content

Sessions on feedback mechanisms and assessments were mentioned by several KIIs as being particularly helpful. One responded noted, *"The context analysis session was really helpful and reminded me to ask all those questions when I was deployed. I had to meet all the same people in the field as in the assessment role play in the training. We ended up getting different information from external key informants, compared to internal volunteers. This made us change our approach and scale up our efforts to properly understand the context."*

During KIIs, respondents struggled to point to any sessions that were not useful that could be cut down or removed. However, many valuable suggestions were shared on

[15] The teaching content in the CEA surge training was scaled up after previous trainings due to gaps in participants' CEA knowledge.

content that could be added to improve the effectiveness of the training. Most of these address the common challenges experienced by CEA surge while on deployment (see section 5) and repeat the request for a CEA surge community of practice (see section 7).

A common suggestion was to allocate more focus to developing soft skills, including negotiation, coordination, advocacy, diplomacy and people management. Respondents felt this would help them to better navigate the relationship with their NS counterpart, build buy-in with leadership and sectors, and coordinate better with external partners. Linked to this, respondents also requested a better understanding of what the other sectors need from CEA and how to overcome any reticence to integrating CEA. Suggestions included using the CEA surge training scenario to focus on only one or two sectors and pushing for more intense collaboration between CEA and the sector in the scenario role plays and groupwork. As one respondent explained, "*we need more on how to break the ice when you arrive – it doesn't matter how good technically you are, you need to be able to engage. You need to have the ability to be pushy but polite in an emergency, and strategies to get in with the teams and work around blockages*."

The CEA surge training scenario follows the disaster response cycle, starting with the assessment. However, several respondents noted that in reality, CEA is often deployed later in the operation. As one person asked, *"How often do we really start the operation at the beginning with everyone there?"* Respondents said more guidance and examples were needed on the role of CEA surge if they are deployed mid-way through the response.

Several respondents across both surge training evaluations and KIIs raised the need for more practical examples of how CEA and PGI can work together in an operation. One respondent explained, *"The linkage between PGI, Safeguarding and CEA in actual operational work is challenging and still needs a lot of explanations and clarifications…the materials should be amended to show a clear linkage between the three topics."*

Finally a common reflection was the need for CEA surge to be able to adapt the CEA theory to different contexts. In particular, the role of CEA in epidemic response was raised as a potential gap in the training that could warrant more attention.

Key findings – CEA surge trainings

- 157 people have been through six CEA surge trainings (94 female / 63 male)
- 47% of participants came from NS, 38% from PNS and 15% from IFRC
- Africa and Europe have the highest number of CEA surge trained people
- Swedish, Canadian, British and Kenyan Red Cross have trained the most people
- 78% of participants were approved for deployment following the training
- Only 20% of those trained have been deployed after attending a training
- 90% said the CEA surge training prepared them well for their deployment
- The interactive parts of the training were rated as the most useful.

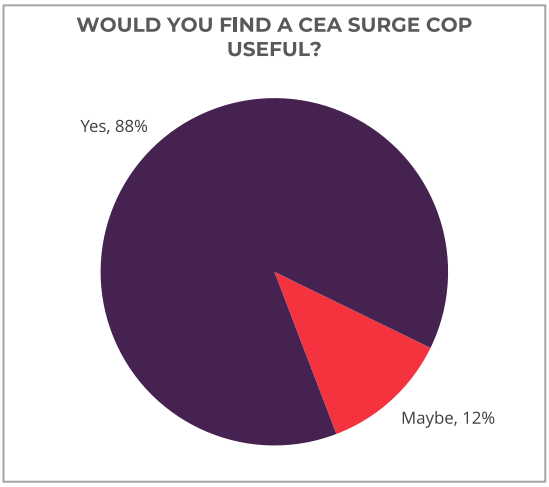
Analysis – CEA surge trainings

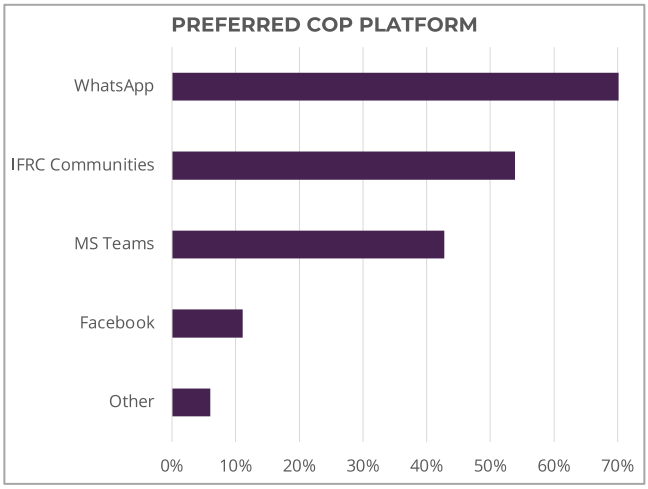
- Reduce the frequency of CEA surge trainings from annually to bi-annually and investigate other methods to build CEA surge roster members skills and experience (see the next section)
- Revise the CEA surge training package to reduce the theory and intensity, by removing some content, allocating less time to PPTs and taught sessions, and replacing theory with case studies and real-life examples
- Identify opportunities to integrate more time for experience sharing, peer learning, and social interaction, for example by adding optional evening activities
- Modify the CEA surge training content, including the scenario, to allocate more time and focus to developing soft skills, integrating CEA in the other sectors, CEA and PGI joint working, and the role of CEA in different types of operations, especially epidemics. Also consider revising the scenario to start later in the operation as this may be closer to the reality for the majority of CEA surge deployments.

8. CEA Surge Community of Practice and Professional Development

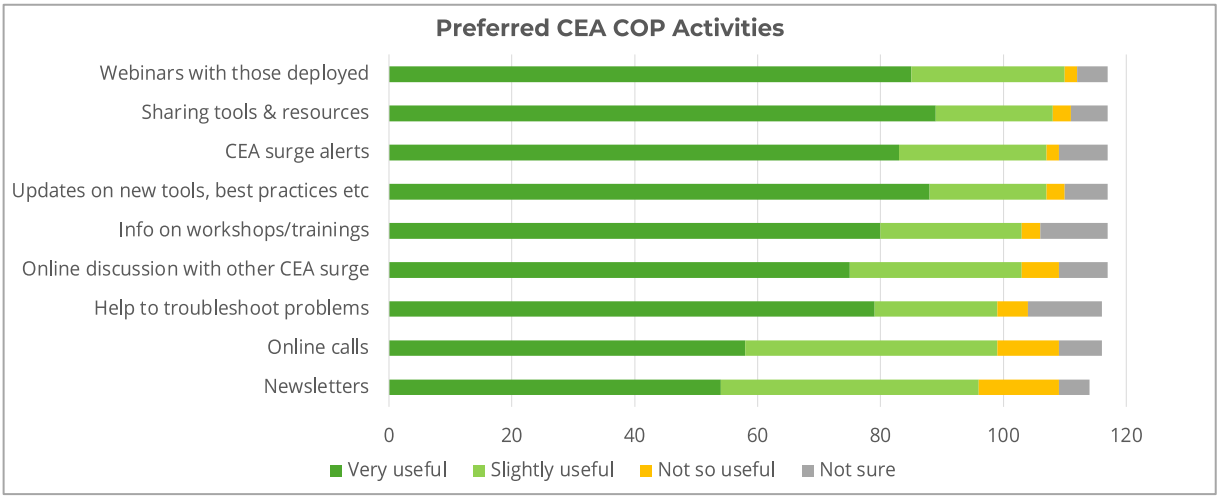
CEA surge community of practice

Most CEA surge members said they would find a CEA surge community of practice (COP) useful. Key informants said this should be a place to meet, share experiences, keep people engaged and enable continual learning. Preferred platforms were What's App and the new IFRC communities of practice site (https://communities.ifrc.org/). While a CEA surge WhatsApp community has been established, not all CEA surge are members, and as one person noted only IFRC admins are able to post. People overwhelmingly stressed that the CEA surge COP should be a small, informal, safe space, where people feel comfortable to ask questions and share challenges, with the option for direct messaging.





Almost all respondents discussed that the COP should be a way to provide mentoring and a coaching and buddy system, particularly for those with less CEA surge or IFRC experience. Suggestions included paring people together, *"Anyone deploying for the first time is assigned a mentor who calls them and has an informal, private one to one conversation. So they can ask some of the embarrassing questions you wouldn't ask surge – like what to pack etc."* A mentor was also seen as very valuable while on deployment, both for CEA technical advice, *"when you deploy you need a trusted person who has deployed and can be there to guide you and help you"*, and emotional support, *"someone you can complain and offload to when things are hard."*



Other COP activities seen as useful in the survey and raised during KIIs included:

- Sharing deployment experiences, challenges and lessons learned through end of mission webinars and case studies. A good suggestion included asking all CEA surge to complete a short survey at the end of their deployment to more systematically gather examples of impact from CEA surge deployments
- Online sessions to refresh and update peoples' skills on CEA approaches and tools
- Inviting other sectors to share on how we can better support them and integrate CEA in their work
- Share updates on new tools, research, case studies, trainings, and surge alerts
- Interactive sessions to troubleshoot common challenges and solutions. For example using scenarios of real-life situations encountered in operations and discussing potential solutions to address them
- Using the roster for more than deployments, for example to review or develop new CEA tools and materials for use in emergencies
- Several people noted events should be interactive and at different times to accommodate multiple time zones.

Professional development

Shadow missions were commonly mentioned as a successful technique to build confidence and experience, both as part of a surge deployment or outside of surge. One respondent explained, "*IFRC CEA staff could deploy with the CEA surge for the first two weeks to support them and introduce them to the NS. Or new CEA surge can join someone more experienced for a short time to do a specific task. Even taking an NS staff to help deliver a training to another NS exposes them to a different country and a different NS and allows us to give them direct feedback. This worked really well in Asia Pacific and people really appreciated this.*" However, it was noted that shadow missions and mentor systems need to be well planned, "*We need to be clear about roles and responsibilities, and what it means to be shadowed / shadow, and the aim of this.*" Several respondents felt partners would be willing to support a shadow mission deployment fund, if it supported NS staff to gain more experience. The IFRC disaster management team in Asia Pacific financially supports NS staff to take up shadow missions within operations.

Other suggestions included weekend workshops to develop CEA coordinator skills, such as advocacy and negotiation, or to get into the mechanics of feedback management.

However as one respondent noted, *"Actually it's personal initiative – people need to practice and do. They need to get into the field with their own NS and build their hands on experience."* A suggestion to support this included having participants develop an action plan following the CEA surge training on what they would like to improve in their own NS, and then providing technical support and follow up to deliver this.

Key findings – CEA surge community of practice

- 88% of CEA surge would find a CEA surge community of practice (COP) useful, but this needs to be a small, informal space where people feel safe to share
- Preferred platforms included WhatsApp and IFRC Communities
- A mentoring and buddy system was suggested by most respondents
- Sharing deployment experiences and learning; updates on new tools, approaches, and trainings; learning from other sectors; skills refreshers; and interactive troubleshooting, were all seen as useful COP activities
- Shadow missions were also suggested as a good way to build skills and experience

Analysis – CEA surge community of practice

- Establish a CEA surge community of practice on IFRC Communities (as a sub-group under the main CEA COP). Use this to share updates on alerts, trainings, new resources etc, but also to encourage peer to peer discussion and sharing
- Organise regular CEA surge COP events, including webinars to hear from those who have deployed, update on new tools and approaches, provide mini-trainings on key CEA skills, troubleshoot common challenges, and hear from guest speakers from other sectors and organisations
- Develop a concept note to establish a CEA surge mentoring approach, outlining how this would work and roles and responsibilities
- Scope out opportunities to scale up CEA shadow missions, including identifying potential funding, and roles and responsibilities.

9. Conclusion and next steps

According to the data, there is sufficient CEA surge capacity within RRMS, in terms of language, availability, and diversity of disciplines. Yet, IFRC CEA teams are still facing challenges meeting CEA surge requests. Investing in a more vibrant and active CEA surge community of practice (COP) should help to improve awareness of surge alerts, hopefully leading to an increase in response rates. However, the COP can also be used to understand for each alert why people are not available. This could help shed light on the number of CEA surge required to be able to successfully and easily respond to any alert.

The declining CEA surge requests also create cause for concern. There is no point investing in supply, if there is no demand. This will require deeper discussion with IFRC operations and surge teams to understand if the decline in demand is due to increased NS capacity, or a de-prioritisation of CEA in operational needs, perhaps due to funding constraints. It will also be important to address the issue of declining NS deployments by working with those PNS who do fund deployments to find creative solutions.

While it is clear CEA surge trainings are effective at preparing people for deployments, they could be more closely linked to the realities of an operation. This includes scaling up content around community participation, acting on feedback, and soft skills such as negotiation and advocacy. However, it is important to look beyond trainings and find other ways to build CEA surge' skills and experience through continued professional development. This includes options such as shadow missions, mentoring approaches, and using the CEA surge COP for peer learning, skills refreshers, and ongoing trainings.

Of course, all of this will require human and financial resources to put in place. This includes staff time to dedicate to developing the CEA surge COP, organising events, revising the training, and developing the standard operating procedures and guidance required. However, CEA does not operate in a vacuum and many of the challenges and recommendations can only be addressed with the support and involvement of other departments and organisations. This includes IFRC's surge and operations teams and those PNS investing in CEA surge.