



International Search and Rescue Dog Organisation  
**Annual Report 2023**

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# Celebrated heroes

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2023 was an eventful year for the International Search and Rescue Dog Organisation (IRO). Right at the beginning of the year, the IRO and its member organisations went into action following one of the worst natural disasters in recent history: Türkiye and Syria were struck by severe earthquakes in February, which claimed over 50,000 lives. Our search and rescue dog teams immediately set off to help in the search for buried victims. On their return, they were cheered by hundreds of people around the world. It was a touching moment.

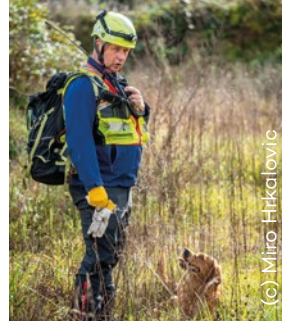
Saving lives with the help of our dogs is our number one priority. Thank you for supporting us in our voluntary activities. You make our work possible.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Balog'.

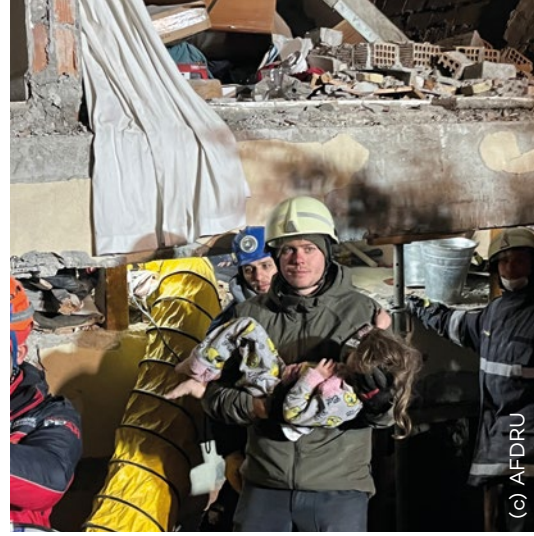
**Alois Balog**

President of the International Search and Rescue Dog Organisation

## A white and brown speckled dog, possibly a Weimaraner, is standing in a pile of rubble and debris. The dog is looking towards the right, with its mouth slightly open. The background shows a pile of broken bricks, concrete, and other debris. The image is watermarked with "© J. van der Pijl" in the bottom right corner.











# Since 1993

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## Setting standards. Saving lives.

End of 1988, search and rescue dog handlers from various organisations returned from an earthquake mission in Armenia feeling upset and thoughtful. Although they were able to successfully save lives together with their dogs, they could not help thinking that some things could have gone better. In particular, the lack of coordination and the inadequate training of many search and rescue dog teams was a major problem. The experts agreed – search and rescue dog work must be professionalised, dialogue must be improved and training must be standardised worldwide.

This marked the founding of the International Search and Rescue Dog Organisation as a global umbrella organisation for search and rescue dog work, which was sealed at a specialist conference for search and rescue dog handlers in 1993. Since then, the IRO has developed from an idealistic dream into a renowned non-profit organisation that trains search and rescue dogs to the highest standards at a regional, national and international level. As an expert partner of the United Nations, we ensure that only the best search and rescue dog teams are deployed when disaster strikes.

# IRO members worldwide

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Across four continents, the International Search and Rescue Dog Organisation connects institutions of different sizes, from small associations to state-run organisations.

Professionalism is essential in search and rescue dog work – together with our 130 member organisations\*, we ensure this is achieved in training and deployment.

\* Status: October 2024







# 130

## member organisations

41

## countries

You can find a detailed overview  
of all our member organisations  
on our website.

[www.iro-dogs.org/en/about-us](http://www.iro-dogs.org/en/about-us)





# Earthquake in Syria and Türkiye

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## Dogs save lives

On 6 February 2023, Türkiye and Syria experienced the most powerful earthquake in over a century. More than 50,000 people lost their lives. There were also several hundred missing, buried under the rubble of their homes.

Just a few hours after the quake, the first search and rescue dog teams from our member organisations headed to Türkiye. The teams spent day and night searching the ruins for survivors. They were exposed to many dangers, from broken glass and collapsing walls to strong aftershocks.

Our canine heroes braved the dangers and searched tirelessly for people buried under the huge piles of rubble. Dozens of lives were saved thanks to their courageous efforts.

When people go missing, search and rescue dogs are often the last hope. With the help of donations, we train them to find people in distress.



**HOW  
OUR  
AID  
WORKS**

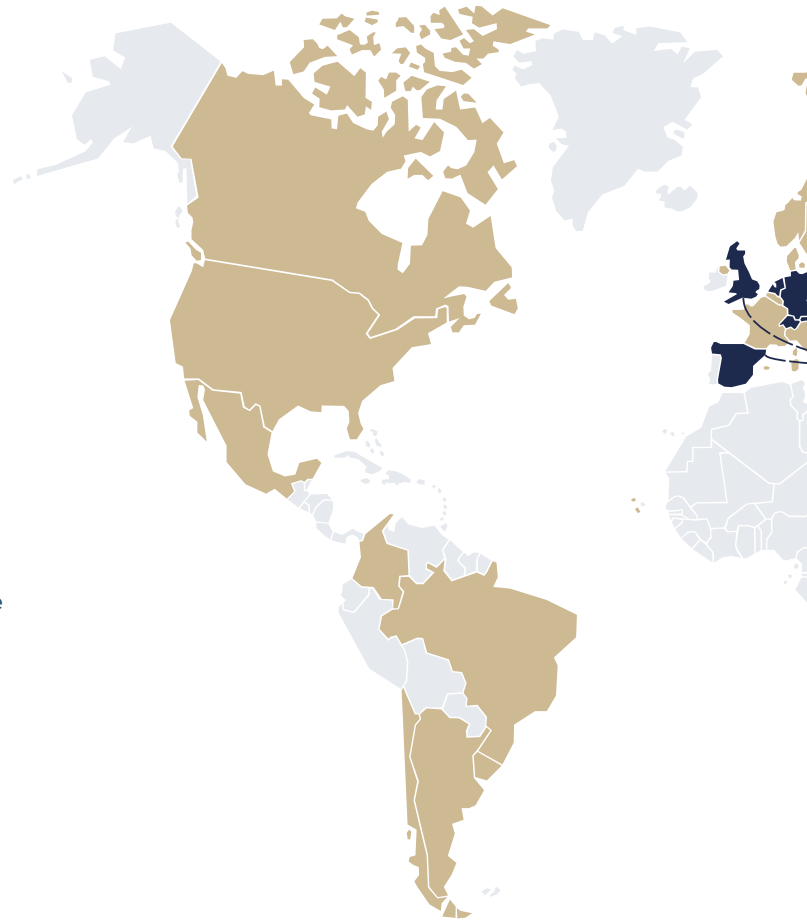
# Mobilisation of emergency forces

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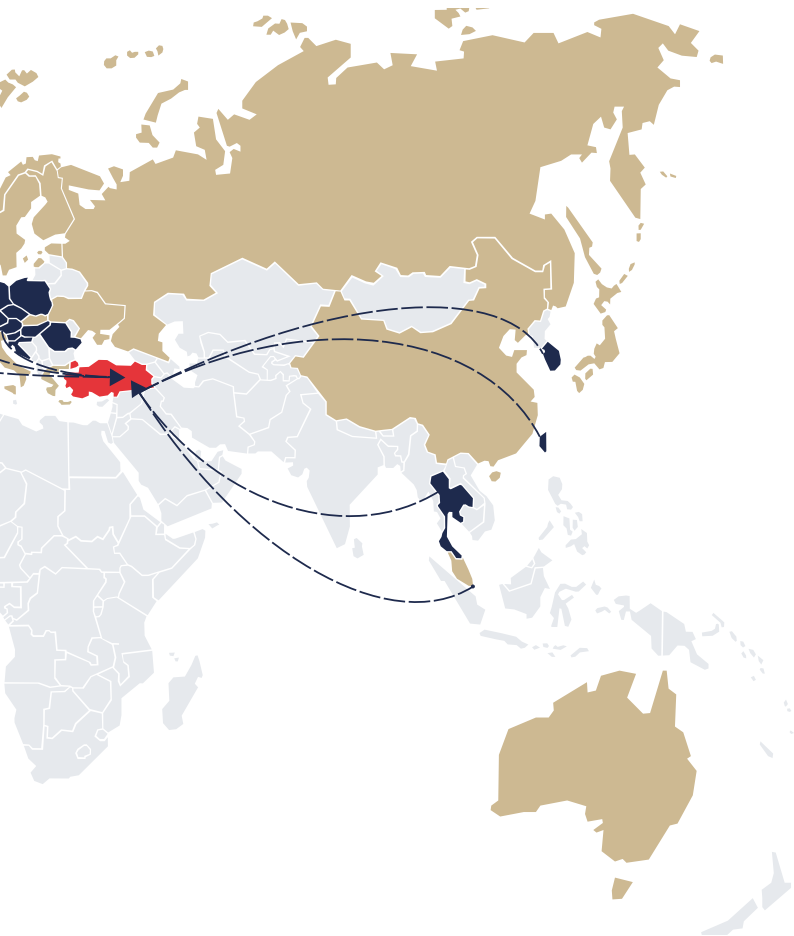
A large number of search and rescue dog teams from the IRO network were mobilised to help the people affected as quickly as possible.

The first international search and rescue dog teams arrived in Türkiye on the same day as the catastrophe occurred and began to support the first responders in the search for missing persons.

It's a race against time: the first 100 hours after such a natural disaster are crucial. After that, the probability of finding survivors under the rubble decreases.







**93**

**search and rescue dogs**

**24**

**IRO member organisations**

**17**

**nations**



# My first earthquake mission

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## Arvi helps in the search for survivors

In February 2023, I travelled to Türkiye with the Austrian Armed Forces' disaster relief team and five other fellow canines. We all had one goal in mind: to find and rescue as many buried people as possible.

The tension was clearly noticeable in everyone. In a split second my innate impatience had turned into full concentration. I was ready for this mission with every fibre of my body. When we arrived in our search area in Hatay province, my heart almost stopped in shock. There was hardly a house still standing, even entire apartment blocks had been razed to the ground.

There was chaos everywhere: noise, rubble, dust and people digging for relatives with their bare hands. But as soon as we started searching, everything around us was quiet. You could have heard a pin drop – that's how much people hoped that our barking would alert rescue efforts to survivors under the rubble.

In total, we were able to save the lives of nine people during our week-long deployment.

## Our global activities

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### Dogs are not born heroes

Saving lives with the help of dogs! This is the vision that unites all members of our organisation. With our globally recognised training programme, we ensure that dogs become lifesavers under the guidance of highly qualified, dedicated professionals:

**38**

training events took place  
around the globe in 2023.

**60**

search and rescue dog teams  
were certified as mission-ready.

**778**

dogs took an IRO Test.

**20**

The IRO was active in this many  
countries last year.



# Four-legged lifesavers

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## Search and rescue dogs as the last hope

Whether on a ski tour in the mountains, a sailing trip with friends or picking mushrooms in the forest – any of us can suddenly and unexpectedly find oneself in a life-threatening situation. While humans and modern technology quickly reach their limits, our search and rescue dogs are reliable helpers in emergencies.

### **The nose knows**

Our highly trained dogs can detect people up to 500 metres away. They can even locate buried people under metres of snow or layers of rubble.

### **On call around the clock, 365 days a year**

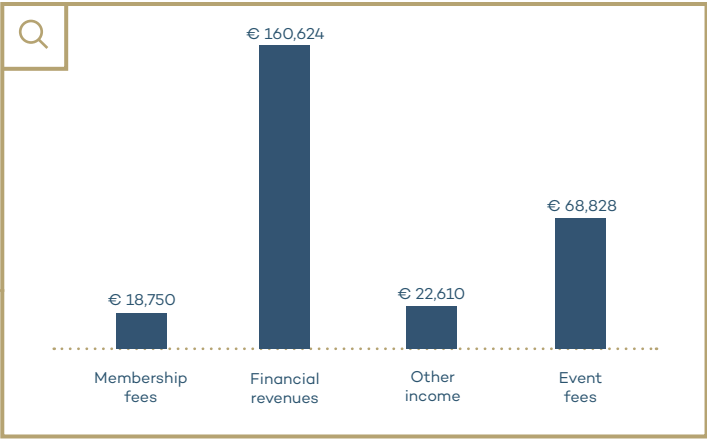
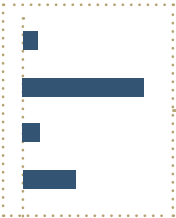
In an emergency, only minutes can make the difference between life and death. Day or night, sunshine, rain or snow storms – our search and rescue dog teams are always ready to help.

# Financial report 2023

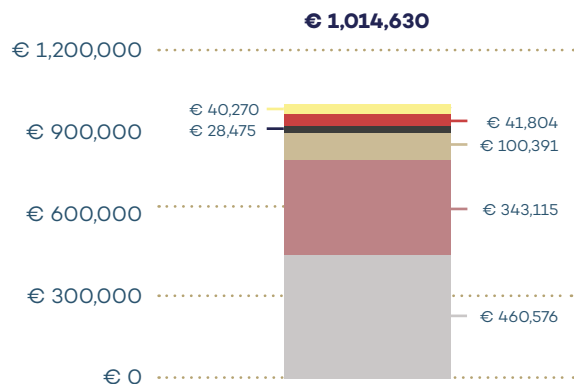
## Transparency for donors

### Income

- Membership fees
- Financial revenues
- Other income
- Event fees



## Expenditure



- **Expenses for statutorily defined purposes**
  - » Sponsor money and support for member organisations
  - » Training and testing events
- **Administrative expenditure**
  - » Personnel
  - » Operating costs training facility & office

- **Tax and legal advice, translations**
- **Marketing, Public Relations**
- **Depreciations**
- **Other expenses**

As a non-profit organisation, we rely on donations from both individuals and companies to carry out our work. There is no basic funding from the public sector.

The management of donations is audited and disclosed annually by recognised and independent experts, and the use of donations in accordance with the statutes is guaranteed.

# Amazing facts about dogs

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## 10 things you probably didn't know yet

### **Righty or lefty?**

Dogs, like humans, have a favourite paw. And this is how you can determine it: Tell your dog to lie down. Give a release signal and pay attention to the paw with which it first touches the ground when running off. This is the dominant paw.

### **Dogs have three eyelids**

One upper, one lower and the third eyelid is called the nictitating membrane. The latter protects the eye, keeping it clean and moisturised.

### **Frito feet**

The dog sweats through its paws and the mixture of sweat and bacteria creates a popcorn smell.

### **The super sense of smell**

Depending on breed and nose length, dogs have up to 300 million olfactory cells. In comparison, we humans only have 5 million.

### **Every dog's nose is unique**

A dog's nose print is just as individual as a human's fingerprint.



### **Red is yellow**

Dogs see the world predominantly in shades of yellow and blue. As a result, red and green are not part of their repertoire. Both colours look a bit yellowish to dogs.

### **Happy right tail wagger**

Wagging to the right indicates positive emotions – for example when looking at the owner. Wagging to the left is a sign of discomfort and makes the dog's heart rate rise.

### **Smarter than you think**

The average dog can learn 165 words, including signals, and the “super dogs” – those in the top 20 percent of dog intelligence – can learn 250 words, on par with that of a two-year old toddler.

### **Hidden magnetic compass**

When dogs poop, they align themselves with the earth's magnetic field. In other words, they prefer to relieve themselves along a north-south axis.

### **Dogs have a concept of time**

Dog owners know it all too well: as soon as mealtime approaches, the four-legged friend becomes impatient. Dogs have an internal mechanism that helps them recognise the time and know when they will get their food or when their owners will come home.



## **IRO**

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## **Donations**

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**Setting standards.  
Saving lives.**