# Pre-existing data

05 November 2024

## Key points

- Ensure that data presented on UNHCR maps incorporate accepted common operational datasets and established boundaries

- Ensure data collection exercises and databases use agreed CODs at country level

- Take the lead in using common datasets to set standards in operations; make colleagues and partners aware of their value and importance

- Communicate with the HQ GIS Support Team on location updates (especially with administrative level 1, 2 and places, there is a link between CODs and UNHCR administrative data and Pcodes)

# 1. Overview

Developed and endorsed by the Inter-agency Standing Committee (IASC), and disseminated by OCHA, Common operational data sets (CODs) are datasets used in humanitarian emergencies to support technical standards, improve the quality of data, and strengthen interoperability. OCHA identifies, publishes and maintains CODs for use in humanitarian emergencies on the [Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX).](#)

Core CODs are administrative boundaries and population statistics. OCHA aims to make these available for all its operational countries Other CODs (e.g., roads, hospitals, schools, hydrology, etc.) are available on the [Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX)](#). Though not all countries are included in [HDX](#), information managers officers and designated focal points in UNHCR should periodically check OCHA's [COD Dashboard](#) that provides the status and availability of Core CODs) to ensure their operations are using available CODs as the baseline for all operational data and information products.

All UNHCR staff should be aware of the contribution that COD datasets make to data collection,

sharing data, and reporting.

Please note: much of the text for this entry was taken directly from OCHA's IM Toolbox, available online at [OCHA IM Toolbox](#) and [COD Storymap](#).

# 2. Relevance for emergency operations

CODs provide a foundation for coordinating the humanitarian response in an emergency, by articulating and sharing agreed baseline data, across sectors, for mapping and other information and planning purposes.

UNHCR staff need to know about CODs as they are used as the baseline for operational data and information products (e.g., 3/4/5W, reference maps, etc.). A key aspect of the CODs is the use of a Place Code (Pcode), which is a unique alpha numeric ID used to identify locations. The COD Pcode is kept in the UNHCR administrative boundaries data as a 'source_ID' to maintain the link with the source data. All UNHCR staff should be aware of the contribution that CODs make to data collection, sharing data, and reporting. For more information about CODs please see: [COD Story Map](#). Information about new or updates to location data should be shared with the GIS Support Team ([mapping@unhcr.org](mailto:mapping@unhcr.org)).

Common Operational Datasets (CODs) are the de facto standard for the humanitarian community. They represent the best-available datasets on a range of basic subjects:

- Core CODS
    - Administrative boundaries
    - Population statistics (baseline)
- Other CODs
    - Populated settlements, towns, cities.
    - Transportation network (roads, ports, etc.)
    - Hydrology (streams, bodies of water, etc.)
    - Hypsography (elevation models, contours)
    - Humanitarian profiles (caseload)

When CODs are available, UNHCR and partners use them to inform the baseline that underpins response and planning in a refugee emergency.

# 3. Main guidance

**Underlying process – how does this work?**

OCHA maintains the agreed datasets and coordinates their distribution and updating in emergencies. If OCHA is unable to provide this service in a specific country, Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs) or other inter-agency coordination structures may identify another agency to undertake this role.

According to OCHA, each dataset has a designated 'contributor' who is responsible for identifying and liaising with 'sources' or owners to analyze, collate, clean and reach agreement on a specific operational dataset. Sponsors are identified early in an emergency and then assume responsibilities in relation to their thematic dataset. OCHA maintains lists of dataset sponsors, in each country and globally, and coordinates relations between them.

Each dataset has one or more designated source or owner. These may be national authorities or agencies, a cluster, NGO, UN agency etc. The designated contributor of a dataset is responsible for developing and maintaining a dataset and associated metadata.

**UNHCR's role and accountabilities**

UNHCR is the 'source' and 'sponsor' of several standard datasets which it maintains, updates and disseminates: on refugee locations, population statistics, border crossing points, and the presence and status of UNHCR offices, for example. Other datasets may be added at country level. UNHCR's location data is available here: [UNHCR Operational Data Portal, Refugee Situations](#).

**Considerations for UNHCR's engagement at country level**

At country level, the information management officer (IM0) should participate in meetings about CODs in Information Management Working Groups; track the names of locations, coordinates, CODs and Pcodes. (Pcodes are unique geographic (geo)identification codes, represented by combinations of letters or numbers, that identify a specific location or feature on a map or in a database.) Contact your local OCHA office for area-specific Pcodes or consult the website.

Information Management Officers should: share the Excel database of Pcodes, CODs with all operational partners to ensure that they use the same units of assessment for data analysis; liaise with them on data quality issues and data standards; participate in or organize inter-agency data groups at field level; advise partners on methodological issues (where needed); and encourage prompt reporting of data, according to agreed standards.

Distribute information products, CODs and baseline data that are to be used by all partners.

Coordinate with UNHCR GIS Support Team on update related to administrative boundaries and places.

## Annexes

[IASC Guidelines Common Operational Datasets (CODs) in Disaster Preparedness and Response](#)

[What is a GLIDE Number. When to use them and why they are useful](#)

# 4. Links

[CODs and FODs](#) [Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX) COD portal (access CODs from here)](#) [Core COD Dashboard (Review what Core CODs are available by country)](#) [COD Storymap (Information and guidance about Core CODs)](#) [OCHA IM Toolbox (Information and guidance about Other CODs)](#) [What is a GLIDE Number. When to use them and why they are useful](#)

# 5. Main contacts

Local OCHA office For questions on UNHCR datasets, contact UNHCR  GIS Support Team at: [mapping@unhcr.org](mailto:mapping@unhcr.org)