

Emergency Information Products

02 December 2025

Key points

- In emergencies it is critical to frequently create and publish information products, to enable speedy decision making
- CORE is UNHCR's solution for ensuring key data and information on displaced people is made available to all in the early days of an emergency
- Emergency maps are important to organize and orient the humanitarian response
- Mapping templates are available to facilitate the production of official UNHCR maps
- eSite is UNHCR's centralized platform where GIS users can find data, maps and support
- Only good quality data should be used to generate information products

1. Overview

The information products in an emergency are typically characterized by a rapid-fire frequency of release to enable speedy decision-making. They must be rapidly digestible and self-contained to influence management's quick decision making. Rapidly publicly releasing information products is both vital and difficult, and having a clear idea of which datapoints are priority to get at the outset of an emergency is essential to not waste time and resources, or to create information distractions that are of low priority. For these reasons, UNHCR has introduced standard emergency information products.

2. Relevance for emergency operations

UNHCR has several tools, resources and methodologies to support Information Management Officers (IMOs) and operations to quickly create and release emergency information products. The quick production and publication of information products is critical in supporting a

coordinated and effective response. They help to quickly establish a common understanding of the situation and allow all responders to get on the same page.

3. Main guidance

There are several resources available to help emergency operations create and publish information products quickly and frequently. Below four of these are described: CORE, Emergency Mapping, Mapping templates and eSite.

Data Visualization Guidelines

All charts and data visualizations created by/for UNHCR should follow the Data Visualization Guidelines available at dataviz.unhcr.org.

Data quality

Good data is crucial for creating accurate info products in a humanitarian context. When disasters or crises hit, decision-makers need real-time, reliable info to allocate resources, like food, shelter or medical supplies, where it's most needed. If the data is not of good quality, help might go to the wrong places, or critical needs might get overlooked.

Having quality data also builds trust with stakeholders, like governments and aid organizations. If they're confident in the info you're providing, they're more likely to collaborate and make data-driven decisions. This is key for fast and effective humanitarian responses.

a) CORE

CORE (Comprehensive Overview of the Response to Emergencies) is UNHCR's solution for establishing recognizable, predictable, and consistent information products which are publicly released in the early days of an emergency response.

CORE products support UNHCR's leadership and coordination role in refugee emergencies through the development and dissemination of quality information products to support evidence-informed action, enhance the visibility of the response and its impact, mobilize funding, etc. The guiding philosophy of CORE is to make the best use of information available, and to consistently make it available for analysis and re-use by UNHCR partners, the wider humanitarian and development community, donors, researchers, and other public audiences.

CORE is not an information system in and of itself. These may be UNHCR information systems or systems of the government, authorities, or partners.

CORE products are designed to become more detailed, precise, and data-centric over time. A CORE product in the first week may rely mainly on secondary data, and include more general information, narrative, and estimates. By the third or fourth week, it is expected that the CORE product will be several pages with more disaggregated data, verified information, and cover various aspects of the response.

CORE products are intended to meet information needs in the early days of a refugee

emergency. After several weeks or months, CORE products can transition to other types of information products, which could be dynamic dashboards, monthly bulletins, or other regularly maintained products.

The products are posted, along with other relevant information outputs, on UNHCR's [Operational Data Portal](#) (ODP).

UNHCR staff interested in more technical guidance on CORE products, can access [the CORE guidance](#) on the UNHCR Data Community Hub. Please note this is accessible only to UNHCR staff. [An overview of CORE](#) is available to UNHCR staff on the intranet.

Public facing information on CORE can be found on a [dedicated page on the ODP](#).

b) Emergency Mapping

Emergency mapping refers to the different processes involved in producing and using maps during the multiple phases of an emergency. Emergency maps are important to organize and orient the humanitarian response. Examples of such maps can be to identify the damages following an Earthquake or Tsunami, or represent the population movements triggered by an armed conflict.

First, it's necessary to gather the data that will be necessary to create the maps from different sources. In addition to the UNHCR core GIS database, some data providers which are used in emergency contexts are the [Humanitarian Data Exchange platform](#) which hosts both base and thematic data. [OpenStreetMap](#), the open data and community driven project, can also be a great source. If the data is not available in the area of the emergency, OpenStreetMap volunteer mappers can be involved to map the zone of interest. This has been done in multiple emergencies in the past. Finally, satellite images are valuable, especially if they are recent and of high resolution, and can serve as a base to create new datasets. If the required information is not available, field campaigns can be organized to collect data with the use of tools like mobile data collection devices, GPS and surveys.

The maps produced during an emergency are meant to be updated frequently as more information is gathered. The first versions of such maps might be very basic with only part of the information present. Nevertheless, these maps are important as they help understand the spatial dynamics at play and can help the first phase of the response. In addition to the common elements that compose a map (title, source, legend, scale, etc.), it is important for emergency maps to clearly indicate the date (and sometimes the hour) or the version. In very volatile situations, the context can change rapidly, and maps quickly become obsolete.

To maximize the utility of emergency maps, whether in digital or printed form, it is essential to disseminate them to the entire humanitarian community.

c) Map templates

Map templates allow UNHCR staff to produce official UNHCR maps. They come with the UNHCR logo and the official styles and colors, to represent the different geographic entities that are generally present on UNHCR maps. These include the sites hosting the people we serve,

UNHCR's offices, and international (and disputed) borders. The templates ensure a unified and recognizable look for all maps produced by the organization. By using the templates, the producer of the map can concentrate on the data and the intended message, thereby saving crucial time in the context of an emergency where maps must be produced rapidly. It's important to note that the templates serve as a base which is applicable in most cases. There may be cases where the user will have to adapt them based on the context and the available data.

The map templates are available for ArcGIS Pro and QGIS, in A3, A4 and A5 formats, in portrait and landscape. They require an internet connection to access the data from UNHCR Geoservices, but the templates can be edited to work with a local database. The files can be downloaded on [eSite](#) (accessible to UNHCR staff only) or on the [Operational Data Portal](#) (publicly accessible).

d) eSite

eSite is UNHCR's centralized platform for GIS where users can find:

- **Data:** In this section one can access and explore UNHCR's core GIS database, satellite and drone images, but also curated sectorial and thematic datasets from UNHCR and other organizations.
- **Maps:** contains base and thematic maps for integration into customized maps and the list of all web applications developed and maintained by UNHCR (Site mapping, CCCM, WASH, Health). From this section the user can access all PDF maps hosted on the Operational Data Portal.
- **Support:** Any guidance, tutorials and resources related to GIS are collected here.

Checklist

- Operations should quickly produce and publish CORE products and make data available to all partners.
- Use the mapping templates, UNHCR data visualization guidelines and the eSite online platform to support CORE products, as well as stand-alone maps and spatial analysis.
- Gather good quality, verified data.

4. Learning and field practices

[Data Visualization Platform](#)

[UNHCR's GIS Ecosystem and Best Practices \(accessible to UNHCR staff only\)](#)

5. Links

[eSite \(accessible to UNHCR staff only\)](#) [UNHCR Geoservices](#) [CORE guidance \(accessible to UNHCR staff only\)](#) [CORE products](#)

6. Main contacts

- For Mapping: GDS Mapping support: mapping@unhcr.org
- For CORE: GDS Information Product Development: dataviz@unhcr.org