# Situation Report

OCHA

Product Guidance

**OWNER**

Head of Office

**FOCAL POINT**

**Headquarters**
The Coordination and Response Division (CRD) is the focal point for substantive support (content, accuracy and political sensitivity, etc). The Reporting Unit is the focal point for technical support (guidance, standards and templates, etc).

**Field**
Reporting focal point with support from an Information Management Officer.

**PURPOSE**

A Situation Report is a concise operational document intended to support the coordination of humanitarian response in an acute crisis. It should provide an update on the current needs, response and gaps in a given emergency.

A Situation Report helps actors directly involved in the humanitarian emergency to be aware of ongoing work, and to inform the wider humanitarian community and other interested stakeholders about developments in the field. It is also used for advocacy and resource mobilization.

A Situation Report should give a factual and neutral account of an emergency response. To the extent possible in the time frame available, a Situation Report should analyse and report on trends in the situation and the response.

In some cases, it may be relevant to issue a regional Situation Report covering multiple countries affected by a crisis. These regional reports provide a broad overview of the response across the region and compare the priority needs and gaps of each affected country. These reports are therefore less operationally focused.

There should be only one version of an OCHA Situation Report in the public domain at a time. For example, the field should not circulate Situation Report No. 1, which is then slightly altered by Headquarters but also issued as Situation Report No. 1. (See below: Frequency.)

**TRIGGER**

A Situation Report should primarily be issued during the acute phase of an emergency (complex emergency or natural disaster), i.e. at the onset of a new crisis or deterioration of an ongoing emergency.

It can also be issued immediately prior to the onset of a major crisis to assist with preparedness. If only minimal information is available, a Flash Update e-mail may be issued instead. (See Flash Update guidance for more details.)

The term "Situation Report" and the corresponding template should not be used to report on protracted crises where the humanitarian situation may be dire but is not rapidly changing. A Humanitarian Bulletin should be used for this purpose. (See Humanitarian Bulletin Product Guidance for more details.)

The Head of Office is responsible for deciding if an event merits a Situation Report. This judgment should be made in consultation with the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) where applicable, and on the advice of the staff in country and/or the responsible CRD Desk Officer. (See below: Drafting.)

TRIGGER continued

* Things to consider, among others, when deciding to issue a Situation Report:

- What are the numbers of dead and missing people and are they likely to rise?
- How significant is the number of dead and affected people in the context of the overall population figure?
- How many people may be affected?
- Has the Government declared an emergency and/or requested international assistance?
- Will a Flash Appeal be issued? Has there been a CERF request?
- Is an OCHA Emergency Task Force being established?

FREQUENCY

The first Situation Report should be issued just prior to the onset of a major crisis or within 24 hours of the onset of the emergency. In the initial phase of the emergency, a Situation Report should be issued every day. As the situation becomes more stable and the information changes less frequently, reporting should move to every second or third day and eventually once a week. Do not issue Situation Reports beyond a one-week cycle. (See Life Cycle of a Situation Report visual.)

Once the emergency response phase has subsided and the issue frequency stabilizes to once a week, the Head of Office is responsible for deciding when to phase reporting into a Humanitarian Bulletin. This decision should be made in consultation with the RC/HC, and on the advice of the relevant staff in country and the CRD Desk Officer. (See Reporting Product Cycle visual for more details on how these products relate to each other.)

Recipients should be informed of this change when the last Situation Report in a series is issued. Include the following text in the body of your last e-mail: “This is the last Situation Report for [emergency], unless unforeseen developments occur. For more information on [country], go to [website] or read the following regular report: [report name].”

*Things to consider, among others, when deciding to transition to a Humanitarian Bulletin:

- Has the acute phase of the crisis ended?
- Is the Situation Report being issued beyond a one-week reporting cycle?
- Is the information not changing as rapidly?
- Does the situation require targeted messages supported by analysis rather than cluster response activity?
- Is there a cluster monitoring framework in place for the appeal?

AUDIENCE

The Situation Report has multiple audiences with differing requirements. The primary audiences to consider include humanitarian actors in the affected country, humanitarian actors outside the country, OCHA staff outside the country and donors.

- Humanitarian actors working in the affected country want to be able to assess the overall situation and response and know what other organizations are doing.
- Humanitarian actors outside the country want to decide whether to intervene based on gaps in the response.
- Donors want to track the overall response and gaps in order to make funding decisions.
- OCHA staff outside the country use Situation Reports as a basis for other types of internal and external reports.

Other important audiences include national Governments, civil society organizations, affected people, the media, the private sector and the public.

## FORMAT

The standard templates for OCHA Situation Reports should be followed in all cases. Templates are available for single-country and regional Situation Reports. These are available in Arabic, English, French and Spanish. There is also an English-language RC Situation Report template available.

All Situation Reports should have the following section headings: Highlights, Situation Overview, Funding, Humanitarian Response, and Coordination. There are text boxes for Background on the Crisis and Contact Details. There are figures boxes in the Situation Overview and Humanitarian Response sections to draw out important figures.

Note: Only use the Background on the Crisis box from issue No. 2 of the Situation Report. For issue No. 1, place this information in the Situation Overview section.

For single-country Situation Reports, the Humanitarian Response section should include headings for the main clusters/sectors for which information is available. The cluster information should be delineated by needs, response, and gaps and constraints, except for the service clusters (logistics and emergency telecommunications), which only report on response and constraints. (See below: Content.)

For regional Situation Reports covering multiple countries, the headings under the Humanitarian Response section should be country based rather than cluster based. In this case, individual cluster headings should not be used. (See below: Content.)

Note: If there is no information available, remove the figures boxes or the headings for each cluster/sector, including the needs, response, and gaps and constraints.

## DRAFTING

The reporting focal point (Public Information Officer, Reports Officer, Humanitarian Affairs Officer or other title) is responsible for compiling the first draft of the Situation Report.

The focal point should work closely with the office's Information Management Officer on data, graphics and layout. He/she should also work closely with the office's focal points for cluster coordination and public information. An internal editorial group is a useful mechanism to encourage a whole-of-office approach to the production of a Situation Report.

Note: For emergencies in a country where there is no OCHA Country Office, the RC's Office produces an RC Situation Report.

## CONTENT

The content should be concise and the style should be a quick, factual account of the situation. The narrative should focus on what has happened during the reporting period. The figures should include the totals from the reporting period as well as cumulative totals from the start of the crisis (e.g. 2,000 people were newly displaced during the reporting period. This brings the total number of people displaced since the start of the crisis to 50,000).

The main events leading to the crisis can be included in the Background on the Crisis text box at the end of the report so that space at the front of the Situation Report is reserved for the latest, most critical information.

For country-based Situation Reports, each cluster reports on the specific needs, response, and gaps and constraints in their operational area. One of the most important numbers to have is the total number of people in need. Without this, response activities lack context. (See Needs, Response, Gaps and Constraints Guidance Note for OCHA Staff for more detailed instructions for drafting the cluster sections.)

For regional Situation Reports, the narrative should provide an overview of the situation in each affected country, including the top priority aspects of the response. To the extent possible, a comparative analysis should be given of which country has the most needs and gaps.

SOURCES

The main sources of content for the Situation Report are humanitarian partners and actors in the field. They include cluster and sector leads as well as the national Government, national and international NGOs, civil society organizations, affected people, parties to the conflict, donors and the media.

Make sure the information requirements for the Situation Report are clear to humanitarian partners. Work with them on defining the process (deadline for inputs, whether there is a revision period), and explain the frequency and maximum length of entries.

Provide regular feedback on the content they submit. If it is useful, create an informal group for OCHA and cluster reporting focal points to collaborate virtually through an e-mail, a Skype group or in person through regular meetings. (For more details see Cluster Situation Report Guidance Note and related Word-based input template, or Excel or web-based Common Request Form.)

Hint: Providing links to cluster or partner web pages is a good way to keep the content in a Situation Report concise, while at the same time offering a way for the reader to get more information if required.

MAPS AND GRAPHICS

Situation Reports should include a location map on the first page, especially at the beginning of the crisis when the geography of the location might not be well known. (Location maps can be downloaded here: http://reliefweb.int/location-maps.) As the crisis evolves, more-informative maps should be used to visualize key data, such as population movements, access constraints or distribution points. Larger A4 maps should be included at the end of the report or as a separate attachment.

Be careful when using maps from non-UN entities as they may use different boundaries or country names than those endorsed by the UN. Add the following disclaimer when appropriate: "OCHA is not responsible for maps and visuals produced by third-party content providers."

Use tables or graphics throughout the report to display a set of figures that changes over time, such as the number of shelter kits distributed or the number of people in camps. This helps break up the text and will be appreciated by the reader. Do not use photographs unless they have an operational purpose (e.g. satellite imagery).

For support with a map or graphic, work with field-based information management officers, or contact the Advocacy and Visual Media Unit at ochaavmu@un.org or the Reporting Unit at ochareporting@un.org.

CLEARANCE

**For non-corporate emergencies**, the Situation Report is cleared by the Head of Office. For OCHA regional offices, only OCHA-branded Situation Reports are cleared by the Head of the Regional Office. RC Situation Reports are cleared by the RC in country.

**For corporate emergencies**,[1] the Situation Report is cleared through Headquarters. The Director CRD may decide to transfer responsibility for clearance and distribution to the field as the crisis stabilizes.

The Head of Office has responsibility for the content and quality of the Situation Report prior to its arrival at Headquarters. The Desk Officer should supplement the report with Headquarters' information as necessary, and in consultation with field colleagues, around politically sensitive language. The final report is then cleared by the Director CRD before being distributed.

[1] Corporate emergencies typically result in: i) widespread destruction and devastating human, economic, environmental and material loss in a country and possibly in neighbouring countries, ii) widespread population displacement and iii) widespread disruption of a society's ability to function. To provide a robust degree of coordination, the ERC will declare a corporate emergency and OCHA will draw resources as needed from across the organization. See PI on the Role of Country Offices: http://ochanet.unocha.org/PG/Policy%20Guidance/PI%20on%20Country%20Offices%20-%20final.pdf

## DISTRIBUTION

**For non-corporate emergencies**, the Situation Report is distributed in the field to a local audience and copied to the CRD Desk Officer for onward distribution. The decision to send it to the global distribution mailing list will be decided by CRD on a case-by-case basis. The same applies to RC Situation Reports.

**For corporate emergencies**, the Situation Report will be distributed through Headquarters using the global distribution mailing list.

When e-mailing the Situation Report, the subject line should read: "OCHA Country Emergency Situation Report No. [x]". The Situation Report should be attached as a PDF file to prevent alteration. Limit the file size as much as possible. Alternately, provide a link to the web page where the report is stored.

In the body of the e-mail message, cut and paste the text from the Highlights section so that busy readers can access that information without having to open the attachment or follow the website link. Make it an option for your audience to get on and off a distribution list.

If the Situation Report is issued by the field (for non-corporate emergencies), the focal point in country is responsible for sending the Situation Report to ReliefWeb (submit@reliefweb.int). The Desk Officer should ensure that this has been done. If the Situation Report is issued by Headquarters (for corporate emergencies), the Desk Officer is responsible for sending it to ReliefWeb.

An office may also want to share the Situation Report using social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook.

## NAMING CONVENTIONS

The title of a Situation Report should follow this format: OCHA Country Emergency Situation Report No. [x].

When saving a Situation Report file, use the following metadata format: OCHACountryEmergencySitrepNo.[x]Date.

## TRANSLATION

Situation Reports produced for non-corporate emergencies and cleared by the field can be distributed in the most appropriate language for the local humanitarian partners (e.g. Spanish, French or Arabic). If a locally distributed, non-English-language Situation Report is forwarded by the Desk Officer to the global distribution list, an English-language version should also be made available.

Situation Reports produced for corporate emergencies and cleared by Headquarters should always be distributed in English.

It is the responsibility of the Country or Regional Office to provide translation from the local language into English, when necessary. Translation support may be available at Headquarters depending on the language (contact ochareporting@un.org for support).

## RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PRODUCTS

A Situation Report is part of OCHA's portfolio of information products. OCHA's other operationally focused information products include a Flash Update e-mail, Humanitarian Bulletin, Humanitarian Snapshot and Humanitarian Dashboard. Information from an OCHA Situation Report also informs public information products such as Press Releases and ERC or Field Key Messages.

Guidance is available for each of these products on OCHAnet.