Situation Reports

OCHA

Product Guidance

OWNER

Emergency Relief Coordinator

FOCAL POINT

Headquarters
Director, Coordination and Response Division (CRD)
Field
Head of Country Office or Regional Office

PURPOSE

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

An OCHA Situation Report is used to help actors directly involved in the humanitarian emergency to be aware of what each of them is working on and to inform the wider humanitarian community about developments in the field. It is also a resource mobilization tool.

A Situation Report should be a factual, neutral, unbiased and unemotional accounting of an emergency response. There should be only one OCHA Situation Report per emergency in the public domain at a time. (See below, Frequency)

TRIGGER

A Situation Report should only 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 on-going emergency.

The term "Situation Report" and the corresponding template should not be used to report on chronic emergencies where the humanitarian situation may be dire but is not rapidly changing. A regular weekly humanitarian bulletin or monthly humanitarian update should be used to convey this information (contact ochareporting@un.org for a template).

The Head of Office (or delegate) is responsible for deciding whether an event merits an OCHA 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)

The decision to issue information in a Situation Report or to include it in a regular weekly or monthly report should not delay the proactive collecting and consolidating of information on the event. The information will be needed regardless of its final format.

Things to consider, among others, when deciding to issue a Situation Report:
What are the numbers of dead and missing and are they likely to rise? How many people may be affected? How significant is the number of dead and affected in the context of the overall population figure? Has there been a GDACS alert? Has the government declared an emergency? Has the government requested international assistance? Is an UNDAC team on standby to deploy? 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 within 24 hours 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.

Once the emergency response phase has subsided, the Head of Office is responsible for deciding whether to phase reporting into a weekly or monthly report, or to end public reporting altogether. This decision should be made in consultation with the RC/HC and on the advice of the relevant Humanitarian Affairs Officer/Reports Officer and Desk Officer.

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 email: "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]." (Also see Life Cycle of a Situation Report visual)

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, donors, and OCHA staff outside the country.

- Humanitarian actors in the affected country want to assess the overall situation and know what other agencies are doing.
- Humanitarian actors outside the country want to decide whether to intervene.
- Donors want the big picture of how the overall situation and response are evolving in order to make funding decisions and recommendations.
- OCHA staff outside the country use Situation Reports as a basis for other types of internal and external reports.

Secondary audiences include national governments, civil society organizations, the media and the general public.

FORMAT

The standard template for an OCHA Situation Report should be followed in all cases.

Situation Reports should have the following basic headings: highlights/key priorities, situation overview, humanitarian needs and response, coordination, funding and contact details.

The humanitarian needs and response heading should include sub-headings for the main clusters/sectors. The cluster information should be delineated by needs, response and gaps/constraints, except for the service clusters (logistics and emergency telecommunications) which only have response and gaps/constraints. (See below, Content)

Other headings might include access, security and/or geographic locations. A heading or sub-heading can be removed or the designation NTR ("nothing to report") can be used when there has been no development of importance. (See embedded template for more guidance)

DRAFTING

For emergencies that occur in a country where there is an OCHA Country Office, the Humanitarian Affairs Officer/Reports Officer is responsible for compiling the first draft of the Situation Report.

For emergencies that occur in a country where there is an OCHA Humanitarian Support Unit, the OCHA staff person in country is responsible for compiling the first draft.

For emergencies that occur in a country where there is no Country Office or Humanitarian Support Unit, the UN Country Team (UNCT) or Office of the Resident Coordinator is required to produce their own Situation Report (contact ochareporting@un.org for a template). It is at the discretion of the Head of the Regional Office in consultation with the team in country and the CRD Desk Officer whether to issue a separate OCHA Situation Report or to just support the production of the UNCT or RC Situation Report. (See below, Clearance Process)

CONTENT

The main sources of content for the Situation Report are humanitarian partners and actors in the field. This includes cluster and sector leads and to a lesser extent, national and international NGOs, civil society organizations, the national government, parties to the conflict, donors and the media.

The information should not be listed cumulatively from the start of the emergency. The history of the response can be dealt with in another information product, if necessary. Situation Reports should not be a roster of organizations or projects in the field. The details of assessments or cluster/sector response activities can be hyperlinked or annexed.

Make sure the information requirements for the Situation Report are clear to humanitarian partners. Distribute the template and guidance for cluster input to the Situation Reports to cluster leads and their reporting focal points and work with them on defining the process (deadline for inputs, whether there is a revision period) and explain the frequency and maximum length of the entries. Provide regular feedback on the content they submit. (Contact ochareporting@un.org for the Guidance Note on Situation Report Input and Cluster Sitrep Template)

MAPS AND GRAPHICS

When feasible, Situation Reports should include a small map on the first page, especially at the beginning of the crisis when the geography of the location might not be well known. Larger A4 maps should be included as a separate attachment. Use tables or graphics to display a set of figures that change over time. For support with a map or graphic, contact the OCHA Advocacy and Visual Media Unit at ochaavmu@un.org.

CLEARANCE PROCESS

For non-corporate emergencies, the Situation Report is cleared by the Head of Office and issued in the field to a local audience and copied to the Desk Officer. Should the report merit global distribution, the Desk Officer should send it (as is) to the global mailing list, based on agreement with the field. Supplementary Headquarters content should be incorporated into the next numbered version of the Situation Report to avoid having competing versions in the public domain.

For the CRD Desk: When deciding whether to send the Situation Report to the global distribution list, consider the following: Does the emergency have global significance? Will an appeal be launched? Is the situation likely to escalate?

CLEARANCE PROCESS CONTINUED

For large-scale, politically complex or corporate emergencies, the Director CRD will notify the Head of Office that the Situation Report will be cleared and distributed through Headquarters. The Director CRD may decide to transfer responsibility for clearance and distribution back 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 to Headquarters. The Desk Officer should supplement the report with Headquarters information as required. The final report should be cleared by the Director CRD (or delegate) before being distributed simultaneously to a local and global audience.

In cases where local time differences may prevent issuing a timely report, the Director CRD may delegate responsibility for clearance to the Head of Office. In this instance, the Desk Officer should distribute the final version (as is) to the global mailing list. Supplementary Headquarters content should be incorporated into the next numbered version of the Situation Report.

NAMING CONVENTIONS

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

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

DISTRIBUTION

The Situation Report should be sent by email to an agreed distribution list. If no mailing list exists, the focal point should send it to their contact list, and provide a link to sign up for Situation Reports on the country website. For distribution at Headquarters, the global OCHA SitRep mailing list should be used.

Make it an option for your audience to get on and off of a distribution list. For the global OCHA SitRep list, requests to be added or deleted from the list can be sent to ochareporting@un.org with 'sitrep' in the subject line.

The subject line of the email should read: OCHA Situation Report No. [x] Country Emergency Date. The Situation Report should be attached as a PDF file to prevent alteration. Limit the file size as much as possible: An empty Situation Report template is 100KB; a ReliefWeb location map is under 50KB; a ReliefWeb situation map can be up to 1MB. The maximum file size for Lotus Notes is 3MB.

In the body of the email message, cut and paste the text from the "highlights/key priorities" section so that busy readers can access that information without having to open the attachment.

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), and the Desk Officer should ensure that this has been done. If the Situation Report is issued at Headquarters (for corporate emergencies), the Desk Officer is responsible for sending it to ReliefWeb.

TRANSLATION

Situation Reports produce for non-corporate emergencies and cleared by the field should be distributed in the most appropriate language for the local humanitarian partners (i.e. Spanish, French or Arabic). Should a locally-distributed, non-English language Situation Report be forwarded by the Desk Officer to the global Sitrep mailing list, an English language version should also be made available, depending on the capacity of staff.

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.

FEEDBACK

Within one week of the final Situation Report being issued for a long running crisis, conduct an audience survey in order to get feedback and make improvements for next time.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER OCHA PRODUCTS

If an UNDAC team is deployed, the UNDAC Situation Report, an internal report for the disaster response community, should be used as a source for the OCHA Situation Report. Information from an OCHA Situation Report is often used as the basic content of other OCHA core products. This includes but is not limited to: Press Releases, Key Messages, Talking Points and Notes to the USG/SG.

Situation Report Checklist

- ☐ 1. Is the emergency an acute crisis?
- ☐ 2. Have you provided the big picture of the response and remaining gaps?
- ☐ 3. Is all of your information sourced?
- ☐ 4. Is all of the information placed into context?
- ☐ 5. Are technical terms and uncommon acronyms explained?
- ☐ 6. Is there any information that is too vague to be useful?
- ☐ 7. Is it less than three pages?
- ☐ 8. Has it gone through the appropriate clearance process?
- ☐ 9. Have you used the OCHA template?
- ☐ 10. Is it clear what the reporting period is and when the next report will be issued?

Process for Non Corporate Emergencies

OCHA PRESENCE	DRAFTING	FINAL CLEARANCE	DISTRIBUTION
COUNTRY OFFICE	Country Office HAO compiles draft	HoO clears report for distribution	HAO distributes report to local mailing list and copies Desk Officer who may or may not forward it to global list
HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT UNIT	OCHA staff person in country compiles initial draft, sends to Regional Office	Regional Office HAO adds relevant regional content. Regional HoO clears report for distribution	HAO distributes report to local mailing list and copies Desk Officer who may or may not forward it to global list
NO COUNTRY OFFICE OR HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT UNIT	Regional Office HAO compiles draft*	Regional HoO clears report for distribution	HAO distributes report to local mailing list and copies Desk Officer who may or may not forward it to global list

* If a UNCT or RC Sitrep has been issued, it is at the discretion of the Regional HoO whether to issue a separate OCHA Sitrep.

Process for Corporate Emergencies

OCHA PRESENCE	DRAFTING	FINAL CLEARANCE	DISTRIBUTION
COUNTRY OFFICE	Country Office HAO compiles draft HoO clears report for HQ	Desk Officer adds relevant HQ content. Director CRD (or delegate) clears report for distribution*	Desk Officer distributes report simultaneously to global and local mailing list**
HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT UNIT	OCHA staff person in country compiles initial draft, sends to Regional Office Regional HoO clears report for HQ	Desk Officer adds relevant HQ content. Director CRD (or delegate) clears report for distribution*	Desk Officer distributes report simultaneously to global and local mailing list**
NO COUNTRY OFFICE OR HUMANITARIAN SUPPORT UNIT	Regional Office HAO compiles draft Regional HoO clears report for HQ	Desk Officer adds relevant HQ content. Director CRD (or delegate) clears report for distribution*	Desk Officer distributes report simultaneously to global and local mailing list**

* In cases where local time differences may prevent issuing a timely report, the Director CRD may delegate responsibility for clearance to the HoO. In this instance, the Desk Officer should distribute the final version as is to the global mailing list and supplementary HQ content should be added to the next numbered version.

** If the local mailing list is not available to the Desk Officer, the HAO in the Field or Regional Office should circulate it to the local list.