



United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

# Handbook for **Emergencies**

Second Edition



United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

# Handbook for Emergencies

**Second Edition**

---

## Using the Handbook



Chapters may be located quickly by using the key on the contents page. Particular subjects may be located by using the index. The handbook is structured as follows:

### **Section One**

summarizes UNHCR's mandate of international protection and the aim and principles of emergency response;

### **Section Two**

deals with emergency management;

### **Section Three**

covers the vital sectors and problem areas in refugee emergencies, including health, food, sanitation and water, as well as key field activities underpinning the operations such as logistics, community services and registration. The chapters in this section start with a summary so that readers, who might not need the full level of detail in each of these chapters, can understand the basic principles of the subject quickly;

### **Section Four**

gives guidance on the support to field operations, primarily administration and staffing;

### **The Appendices**

include UNHCR's *Catalogue of Emergency Response Resources*, which set out what resources can be immediately deployed, and how and when. The appendices also include a "Toolbox" which gathers, in one location, the standards, indicators and useful references used throughout the handbook.

In addition to the *Catalogue of Emergency Response Resources*, another key companion reference is the *Checklist for the Emergency Administrator* to which is annexed many of the essential UNHCR forms, policy documents, and guidelines referred to in this handbook, which are necessary for the administrator setting up a new office. Another key companion reference is the *UNHCR Manual* – this is valid at time of going to press; however, chapter 4 of the *Manual* dealing with programme and project management is due to be updated and replaced by the *Operations Management System Field Manual*.

**Any part of this handbook may be copied or adapted, provided that the source is acknowledged.**





# Handbook for Emergencies

## ■ Table of Contents

Section	Chapter	Page Number
	I Using the handbook	III
	II Table of contents	V
	III Introduction	VI
	IV Abbreviations	IX
	V UNHCR mission statement	X
<b>I. UNHCR principles</b>	1 Aim and principles of response	2
	2 Protection	10
<b>II. Emergency management</b>	3 Emergency Management	26
	4 Contingency Planning	34
	5 Initial Assessment, immediate response	42
	6 Operations Planning	48
	7 Coordination and site level organization	56
	8 Implementing arrangements	66
	9 External relations	82
<b>III. Operations</b>	10 Community services and education	94
	11 Population estimation and registration	118
	12 Site selection, planning and shelter	132
	13 Commodity distribution	148
	14 Health	154
	15 Food and nutrition	184
	16 Water	210
	17 Environmental sanitation	228
	18 Supplies and transport	248
	19 Voluntary repatriation	272
<b>IV. Support to operations</b>	20 Administration staffing and finance	290
	21 Communications	310
	22 Coping with stress	318
	23 Staff safety	324
	24 Working with the military	334
<b>V. Appendices</b>	1 Catalogue of emergency response resources	340
	2 Toolbox	368
	3 Memoranda of understanding	378
	4 Glossary	400
	5 Index	402

---

## Introduction



Effective emergency preparedness and response has been a major priority of UNHCR throughout the decade. In 1991, during my first field mission as High Commissioner, I witnessed the sudden and dramatic exodus of hundreds of thousands of Kurdish refugees from their homes in Iraq to Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Since then, the Office has responded to a long list of massive outflows.

These crises have caused widespread human suffering and put great demands on our Office, prompting us to develop an effective and speedy response mechanism. We have established a revolving internal roster that ensures the deployment of UNHCR staff within 72 hours. Standby arrangements with external agencies for rapid deployment of their staff have also been created. We have devised and implemented staff training, as well as specific management tools to maintain our readiness to respond quickly and effectively to emergency situations. To address humanitarian needs urgently, a centralized stockpile of goods has been assembled, which includes governmental packages of humanitarian assistance.

Having dispatched over 300 missions throughout the world since 1992, the office now has in place a solid emergency response model, an achievement for which we can all be proud. Undoubtedly, this model will face further challenges as grave human displacements continue to occur. However, this pattern is changing from the humanitarian emergencies of the early nineties. Arising more frequently now are scattered crises, often of a relatively smaller scale and with limited international visibility. Conflicts are mostly internal and more localized, although external involvement continues to play an important role. Those forced to flee their homes, as well as the humanitarian workers assisting them, are increasingly targeted by the warring factions. On the positive side, improved communications, even in some remote locations, have enhanced our ability to operate. In addition, UNHCR has worked under new cooperative arrangements with other humanitarian agencies or even governmental institutions, including military forces.

This revised and updated Handbook provides useful guidance as our Office continues to cope with the swift and increasingly dangerous nature of fresh displacement. It stresses the importance of pre-emergency planning, as well as planning throughout every stage of a crisis. It focuses on setting coordination priorities, as well as contingency and operational planning. Important information has also been included regarding staff safety and working with military personnel, as well as a section addressing the issue of how to cope with personal stress.

Reflected in this edition is the dedication and experience of field staff and specialists both within the office and from partner organizations, which spans the last 17 years since the original UNHCR Handbook was first published. I would like to gratefully acknowledge what is an exemplary group effort.

This Handbook will assist colleagues to meet the challenges ahead as we cope with the changing nature of emergencies. It should serve as a reminder that displacement crises require carefully prepared and well managed responses that optimize the unique strength and capacities of various groups and organizations. As we face these new challenges, let us look forward to fine tuning this response model that our Office has worked so hard to establish.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sadako Ogata". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.



## **ABBREVIATIONS**

### **Organizations**

DPKO	Department of Peace-keeping Operations
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IASC	United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
ILO	International Labour Organization
MCDU	Military and Civil Defence Unit of OCHA
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSECOORD	United Nations Security Coordinator
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

### **Other Abbreviations**

DO	Designated Official
ABOD	Administrative Budget and Obligation Document
DSA	Daily Subsistence Allowance
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator
GIS	Geographical Information Systems
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IOM/FOM	Inter-Office Memorandum/Field Office Memorandum
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
MT	Metric tonne
SITREP	Situation Report

---

# UNHCR's Mission Statement



UNHCR, the United Nations refugee organization, is mandated by the United Nations to lead and coordinate international action for the world-wide protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee problems.

UNHCR's primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. UNHCR strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another state, and to return home voluntarily. By assisting refugees to return to their own country or to settle in another country, UNHCR also seeks lasting solutions to their plight.

UNHCR's efforts are mandated by the organization's Statute, and guided by the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. International refugee law provides an essential framework of principles for UNHCR's humanitarian activities.

UNHCR's Executive Committee and the UN General Assembly have also authorized the organization's involvement with other groups. These include people who are stateless or whose nationality is disputed and, in certain circumstances, internally displaced persons.

UNHCR seeks to reduce situations of forced displacement by encouraging states and other institutions to create conditions which are conducive to the protection of human rights and the peaceful resolution of disputes. In pursuit of the same objective, UNHCR actively seeks to consolidate the reintegration of returning refugees in their country of origin, thereby averting the recurrence of refugee-producing situations.

UNHCR offers protection and assistance to refugees and others in an impartial manner, on the basis of their need and irrespective of their race, religion, political opinion or gender. In all of its activities, UNHCR pays particular attention to the needs of children and seeks to promote the equal rights of women and girls.

In its efforts to protect refugees and to promote solutions to their problems, UNHCR works in partnership with governments, regional organizations, international and non-governmental organizations. UNHCR is committed to the principle of participation by consulting refugees on decisions that affect their lives.

By virtue of its activities on behalf of refugees and displaced people, UNHCR also promotes the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter: maintaining international peace and security; developing friendly relations among nations, and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.