PREFACE

Foreword

This is the 8th (extensive) edition of the UNDAC Field Handbook published online in 2024. For a more comprehensive short version/guide of the UNDAC Field Handbook 2024, refer to the UNDAC Website.

The UNDAC system was originally established in 1993 by the United Nations (UN) and the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) to ensure effective coordination between national disaster management agencies and incoming search and rescue teams in sudden-onset, large-scale emergencies. It is managed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to provide support to Member States and the UN system in-country.

Over the past three decades, UNDAC has evolved and adapted to the changing requirements of the international humanitarian response system. Today, UNDAC teams are not only deployed in sudden-onset disasters, but also provide valuable support in protracted crises, technological and other types of emergencies, and are playing an increasing role as a tool and service of the UN in supporting Governments in disaster response preparedness activities. UNDAC deploys globally to ensure effective collaboration between national and local disaster management systems, international humanitarian response actors, bilateral responders including the military, national non-government organisations, civil society and the private sector, to name but a few.

Core to UNDAC practices is systematic post-mission evaluation to enable best practices and lessons learned to feed into the continuous development of the UNDAC methodology captured in this updated Handbook. This is, therefore, a living document and, as a reader and user, you should consider yourself a co-creator. Comments or suggestions for further development of the Handbook should be addressed to the Response Support Branch / Emergency Response Section (ERS) in OCHA Geneva.

Introduction to the Handbook

The UNDAC Field Handbook is intended as an easily accessible reference guide for members of an UNDAC team before and during a mission to a disaster or emergency. The Handbook is not an authoritative instruction, but rather represents an accumulation of institutional memory related to processes and procedures for coordination as seen in the scope of the UNDAC Standard Terms of Reference. Its focus is on both the what and the how of international emergency response and is grounded in the mandate of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) which manages the UNDAC system.

The Handbook is divided into nine main themes that are broadly aligned with the functions of an On-Site Operations Coordination Centre (OSOCC). Each theme is divided into chapters that are written as stand-alone documents, referencing material across all themes.

References

The UNDAC Handbook has been developed by OCHA ERS with support from members of the UNDAC system and partners. Information is drawn from a wide variety of sources:

- UNDAC best practices as captured in mission reports and training materials.
- Various OCHA, UN and Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidelines, e.g., Handbook for Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators, INSARAG Guidelines, UN-CMCoord Guidelines, and numerous others.
- World Health Organization (WHO) Emergency Medical Team (EMT) Guidelines
- Publications by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).
- Publications, technical briefs and training material from the Assessment Capacities Project.
(ACAPS) and the Emergency Capacity Building Project (ECB)

- Various Disaster Management research from Lund University (Sweden), the University of Copenhagen (Denmark), and the University of Florence (Italy).
- Scientific publications, data, analyses and inputs from the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre (JRC), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), the National Institute of Geophysics and Volcanology, Italy (INGV), the International Science Council, and the UK Health Security Agency.

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