

UNHCR Mapping Guidelines

February 2024

Introduction

Maps are essential tools for navigation, spatial analysis, situational awareness, and decision-making for UNHCR operations. Maps can only serve their intended purpose if they are designed with clarity, accuracy, and consistency. This mapping style guide is a set of recommendations and standards, which define how UNHCR maps should be designed and presented. They ensure our maps convey information effectively and efficiently. By following this style guide, colleagues can create maps that are professional, consistent, improve our communication with stakeholders and support effective decision-making.

General mapping guide

The guide covers the basic symbology and layout for maps. It provides standards for common geographical elements for A5, A4 and A3 layout sizes. You will also find best practices for organizing maps and insure proper representation and disclaimers.

UNHCR specific symbology

The guide also includes symbology specific to UNHCR; namely offices and the locations of forcibly displaced and stateless persons. They are designed to be easily recognizable by a wide audience, regardless of language or cultural background.

Using these symbols will help colleagues to create maps that are consistent, easily recognizable, and effectively communicate information about UNHCR's presence, location of displaced populations and the work being done to support them.

The guidelines have been developed by **Information Product Development and Analysis Unit** from the **Global Data Service (GDS)**, with the support of the **GIS Support Unit**.

For further guidance or questions, please contact:

- For the design aspect: ipda@unhcr.org.
- For GIS related questions: hqmap@unhcr.org

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Map symbology and elements

Map Symbols

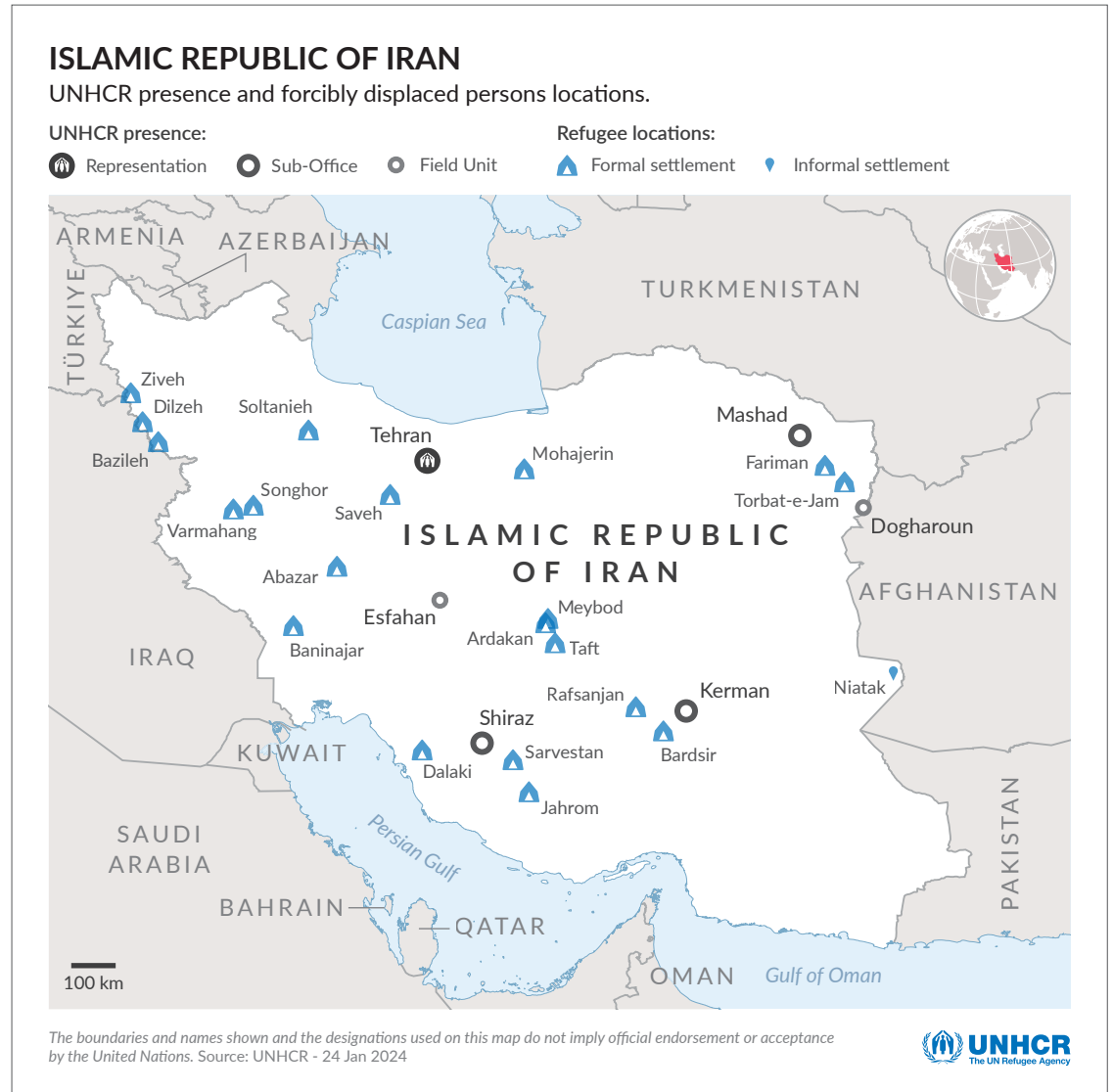
The following symbology illustrates the most common geographic features found on UNHCR maps. The recommended colours, and sizes should be used for your mapping.

However, acknowledging that all maps are different and serve a slightly different purpose, a “one size fits all” approach may not be possible in all situations. Therefore, slight **adjustments to the symbology** can be considered to ensure the most effective and legible map.



















Also, it is worth mentioning that **not all features** need be on every map. A map should only include the information absolutely necessary to convey the information needed by its audience.

Lastly, the font used in all UNHCR maps is **Lato**. If not already installed on your computer, you can download it [here](#).

All the colours are provided as **CMYK** colour mode. There is a colour conversion table on page 7 you can use to move between colour modes. Please note that **ArcGIS** seems to work better in **RGB** colour mode.



Basic map symbology

Feature	Symbol				Labels ¹				
Layer	Style	Color (CMYK)	Size (A5 A4 A3)	Extra style	Style	Font style	Color (CMYK)	Size (A5 A4 A3)	Extra style
Countries		7, 7, 7, 0			L A B E L	Regular	0, 0, 0, 60	9.0pt 10pt 11pt	All caps, tracking 150-250
Featured country		0, 0, 0, 0			L A B E L	Bold	0, 0, 0, 90	11pt 12pt 13pt	All caps, tracking 300-400
Water body		10, 2, 0, 0		Outline: 0.3pt CMYK 53, 22, 11, 0	<i>Label</i>	Italic	50, 27, 13, 0	8.0pt 9.0pt 9.0pt	Tracking 100-200
International boundary		36, 28, 27, 0	0.7pt 1.0pt 1.3pt						
		36, 28, 27, 0	0.7pt 1.0pt 1.3pt	dash: 4pt, gap: 3pt					
Disputed boundary		36, 28, 27, 0	0.7pt 1.0pt 1.3pt	dash: 0pt, gap: 2pt	Disputed boundaries will be displaced one of three ways. For further guidance, please contact GIS Support Unit: hqmap@unhcr.org				
		36, 28, 27, 0	0.7pt 1.0pt 1.3pt	dash: 4pt, gap: 3pt dash: 0pt, gap: 3pt					
Admin 1 boundary ²		36, 28, 27, 0	0.3pt 0.5pt 0.8pt		LABEL	Bold	0, 0, 0, 40	8.0pt 9.0pt 10pt	All caps
Admin 2 boundary ²		36, 28, 27, 0	0.3pt 0.5pt 0.8pt	dash: 2pt, gap: 3pt	Label	Regular	0, 0, 0, 40	7.0pt 8.0pt 8.5pt	
Coastlines		53, 22, 11, 0	0.3pt 0.3pt 0.5pt						
River		53, 22, 11, 0	0.5pt 0.5pt 0.8pt		<i>Label</i>	Italic	50, 27, 13, 0	7.0pt 8.0pt 8.0pt	
Road major		0, 35, 21, 0	0.5pt 0.7pt 0.9pt						
Road minor		0, 35, 21, 0	0.3pt 0.4pt 0.5pt						
Capital city		0, 0, 0, 90	7.0pt 8.0pt 9.0pt		Label	Bold	0, 0, 0, 90	9.0pt 10pt 11pt	
Admin 1 capital		0, 0, 0, 60	5.0pt 6.0pt 6.5pt		Label	Bold	0, 0, 0, 80	8.0pt 9.0pt 9.5pt	
Admin 2 capital		0, 0, 0, 60	4.0pt 4.5pt 5.0pt		Label	Regular	0, 0, 0, 80	7.0pt 8.0pt 8.5pt	
City/Town		0, 0, 0, 60	4.0pt 5.0pt 5.5pt		Label	Regular	0, 0, 0, 90	8.0pt 9.0pt 9.5pt	
Point of interest		Various	4.0pt 4.5pt 5.0pt		Label	Regular	0, 0, 0, 60	7.0pt 8.0pt 8.5pt	

1. **Lato** is the font used for all labels in UNHCR Maps.

2. There are many reasons it is better to depict boundaries as lines, as opposed to polygons on your map. To create lines from administrative unit polygons, please see a tutorial [here](#).

UNHCR Symbols

Below is the map symbology for **UNHCR-specific layers**. Namely the location of forcibly displaced and stateless person, border crossing points, and UNHCR offices.

Forcibly displaced and stateless persons locations

Labels: Lato regular - CMYK 0, 0, 0, 80 - Size (A5 | A4 | A3): 7pt | 8pt | 8pt

Colors: symbol color will depend on the **population type** of the location as recommended in the [UNHCR Data Visualization Guidelines](#) (see below):

- Refugees, CMYK 99, 50, 0, 0 ■
- Asylum-seekers, CMYK 99, 83, 36, 27 ■
- IDP, CMYK 90, 0, 52, 0 ■
- Returnees, CMYK 51, 36, 12, 0 ■
- Stateless persons, CMYK 15, 13, 100, 0 ■

Feature	Style	Color (CMYK)	Size (A5 A4 A3)
Formal Settlement	▲	Various color	8.0pt 9.0pt 10pt
Informal Settlement	▼	Various color	5.5pt 6.0pt 7.0pt
Collective centre	▲▲	Various color	8.0pt 9.0pt 10pt
Centre	↑↑	Various color	8.0pt 9.0pt 10pt
Individual accommodation in communities	△	Various color	8.0pt 9.0pt 10pt

Border crossing points

Labels: Lato regular - CMYK 0, 0, 0, 80 - Size (A5 | A4 | A3): 7pt | 8pt | 8pt

Feature	Style	Color (CMYK)	Size (A5 A4 A3)
Crossing points	✕	3, 1, 100, 0	6.5pt 7.0pt 8.0pt

UNHCR presence locations

Labels: Lato regular - CMYK 0, 0, 0, 90 - Size (A5 | A4 | A3): 8pt | 9pt | 9pt

Feature	Style	Color (CMYK)	Size (A5 A4 A3)
Headquarter, Regional Bureau	🏠	0, 0, 0, 90	10pt 12pt 13pt
Multi-Country Office	🏠	0, 0, 0, 60	10pt 12pt 13pt
Representation (Country, Chief of Mission, National, Liaison Office)	🏠	0, 0, 0, 90	10pt 11pt 12pt
Sub-Office	🏠	0, 0, 0, 80	9.0pt 10pt 11pt
Field Office	🏠	0, 0, 0, 80	8.0pt 8.5pt 9.0pt
Field Unit	🏠	0, 0, 0, 60	6.5pt 7.0pt 8.0pt
Planned Office	🏠	0, 0, 0, 40	6.5pt 7.0pt 8.0pt

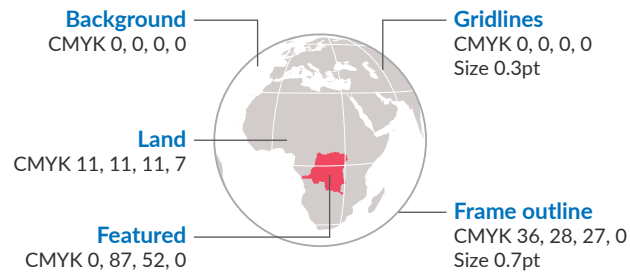
Map Elements

Below are common elements you should find on UNHCR maps. These elements help the reader to interpret the information on the map. These elements benefit from a clear and simple design.

Globe

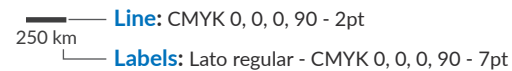
Helps the reader understand where in the world the area on the map is located.

Examples of globes for different continents are available in the UNHCR map templates both for ArcGIS and Adobe Illustrator.



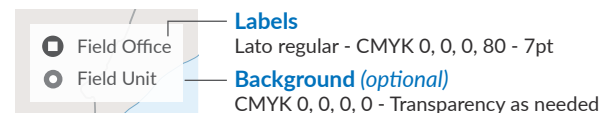
Scale

The map scale helps the reader understand the real-world distances represented on the map.



Legend

A legend is necessary for a reader to understand the thematic information on the map. It can be placed carefully so that it doesn't block important locations in the map. The items in the legend should have easy-to-understand names, and not file names. Also, items with a numerical scale should have appropriate and rounded numbers, not the default in ArcGIS. (i.e. 1-1,000 and not 16.4 - 893.6).



Color code conversion

Feature	CMYK	RGB	HEX
Black	0, 0, 0, 100	0, 0, 0	#000000
Grey 90	0, 0, 0, 90	26, 26, 26	#1A1A1A
Grey 80	0, 0, 0, 80	51, 51, 51	#333333
Grey 60	0, 0, 0, 60	102, 102, 102	#666666
Grey 40	0, 0, 0, 40	153, 153, 153	#999999
White	0, 0, 0, 0	255, 255, 255	#FFFFFF
Country	7, 7, 7, 0	234, 230, 228	#EAE6E4
Boundary	36, 28, 27, 0	168, 170, 173	#A8AAAD
Water	10, 2, 0, 0	225, 238, 249	#E1EEF9
River	53, 22, 11, 0	121, 170, 201	#79AAC9
Water label	50, 27, 13, 0	131, 164, 193	#83A4C1
Roads	0, 35, 21, 0	249, 181, 177	#F9B5B1
Refugees	99, 50, 0, 0	0, 114, 188	#0072BC
Asylum-seekers	99, 83, 36, 27	24, 55, 95	#18375F
IDPs	90, 0, 52, 0	0, 179, 152	#00B398
Returnees	51, 36, 12, 0	131, 149, 185	#8395B9
Stateless persons	15, 13, 100, 0	225, 204, 13	#E1CC0D
Crossing points	3, 1, 100, 0	255, 244, 131	#FF483
Globe land	11, 11, 11, 7	209, 204, 203	#D1CCCB
Globe feat.	0, 87, 52, 0	239, 74, 96	#EF4A60

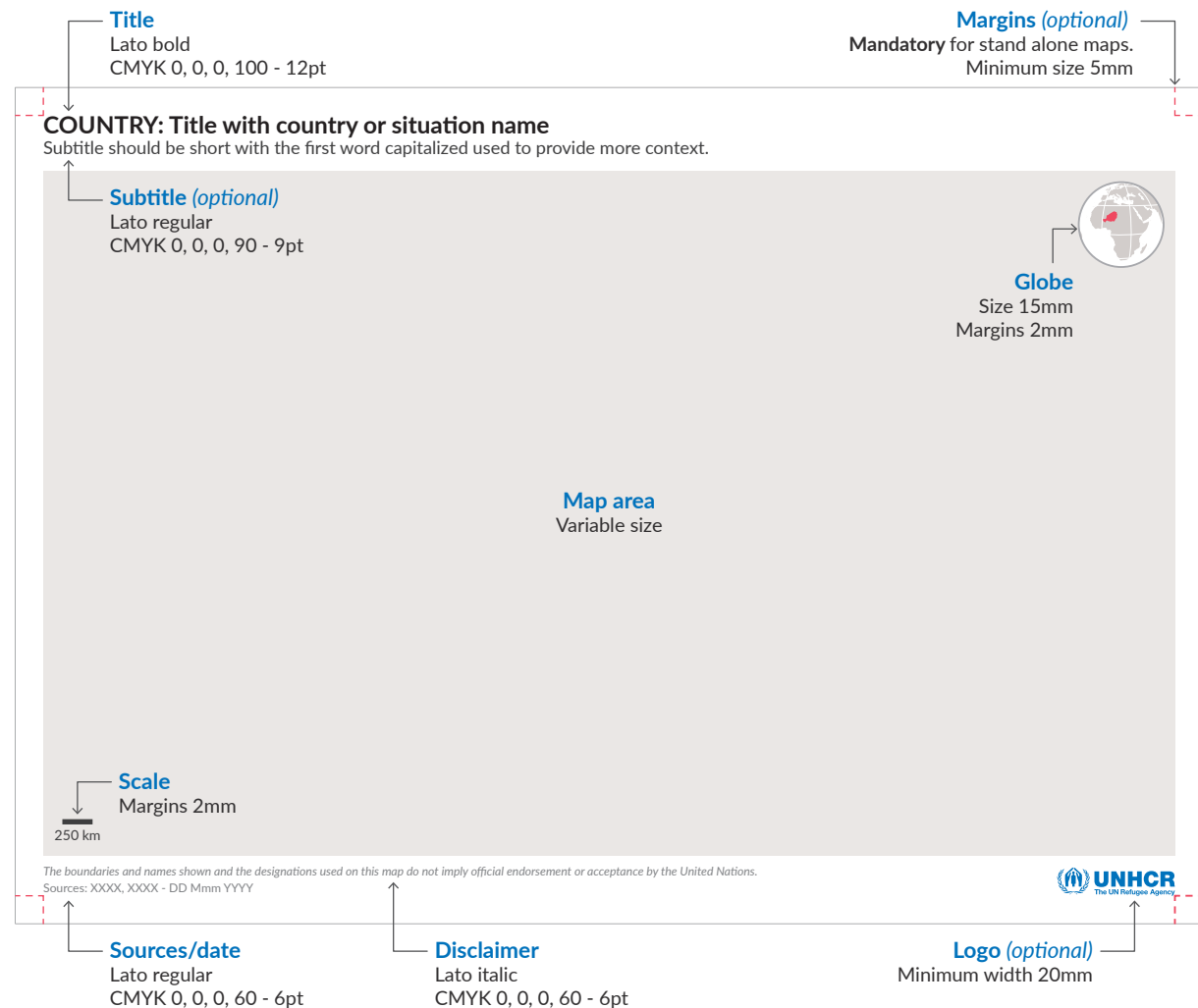
Layout

A5 and smaller

A5 (or smaller) maps are small-scale and provide an overview of a geographic area. It is often used in dashboards and reports to provide geographical context for data and analysis. This type of smaller map can provide general geographic information (e.g. the affected province in a country) or to highlight a specific location.

Since A5 maps are often integrated into reports or documents, certain layout elements described here are optional and should be used selectively based on the context.

All maps are different and must be tailored to your specific situation, but generally an A5 map of a country would not include all first level administrative boundaries. It is probably better to only include those affected.

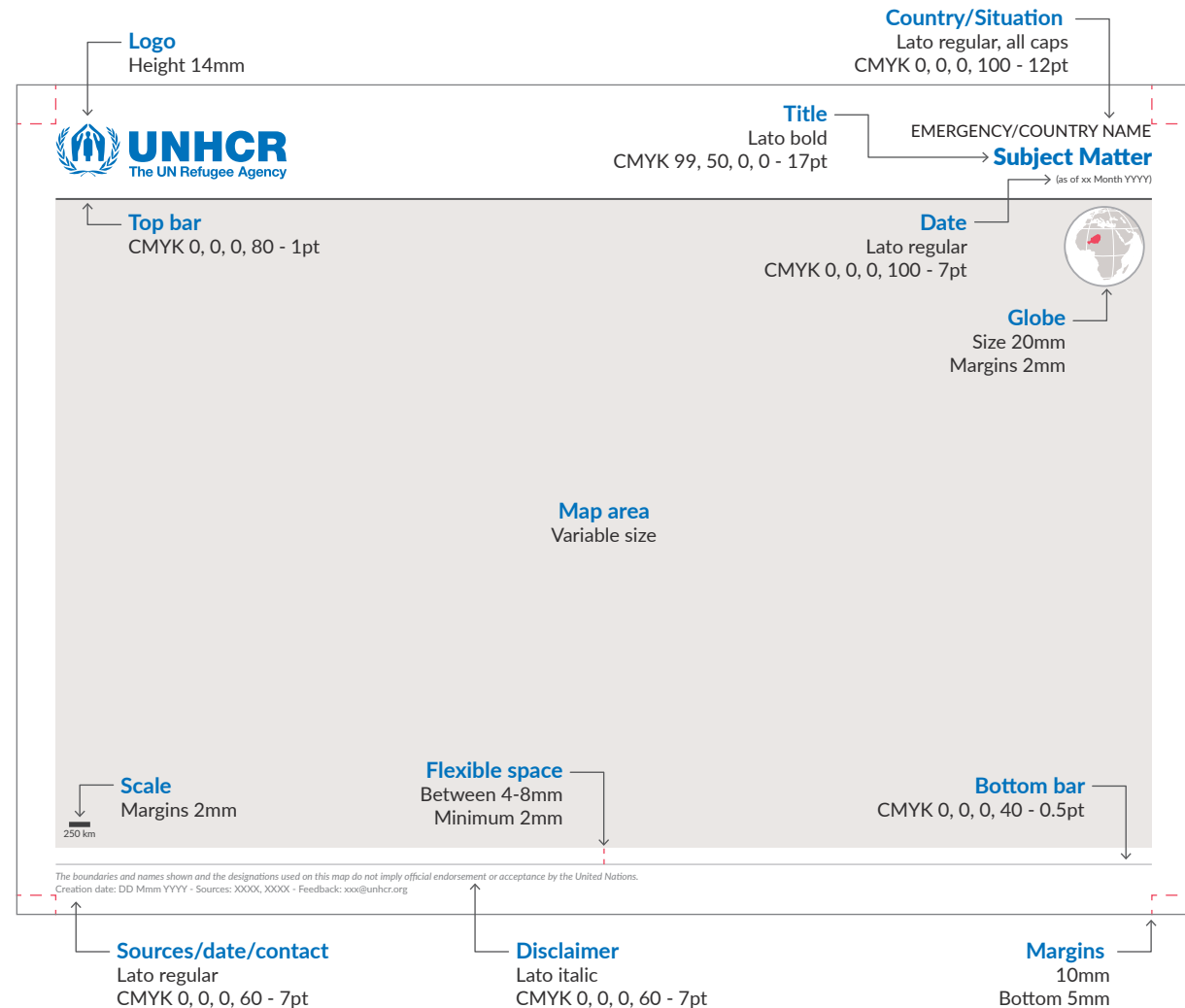


A4 and bigger

A4 maps are a commonly used and widely accepted format for printed maps, particularly in reports, presentations, and other printed materials. It provides enough space for a moderate level of detail, while also being portable and easy to handle. When creating an A4 map, it's important to consider the level of detail and amount of information that will be included. Maps with too much detail can be overwhelming and difficult to read, while maps with too little detail may not effectively communicate the necessary information.

A3 maps can be useful for including more detail and information, but they may not be as convenient for distribution and handling, as they are larger and less portable than A4 maps.

The choice of map size ultimately depends on the **specific needs of the project** and the **level of detail** and information that needs to be included. The important thing is to use good design principles and follow the guidelines in the mapping style guide to ensure that the map remains clear, legible, and easy to understand, regardless of the size.



Map disclaimers

All UNHCR maps must include a **disclaimer** as explained below.

- **Short form disclaimer:** for all maps where the main focus is not an area listed below.
- **Long form disclaimer:** for maps featuring Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. This disclaimer can also be used on large-format poster maps.

Maps showing the areas below must use the **Short form disclaimer** and an **additional special disclaimer**:

- **Jammu and Kashmir**
- **Sudan and South Sudan**
- **Abyei**

The table at right, shows the different disclaimers in English, French and Spanish.

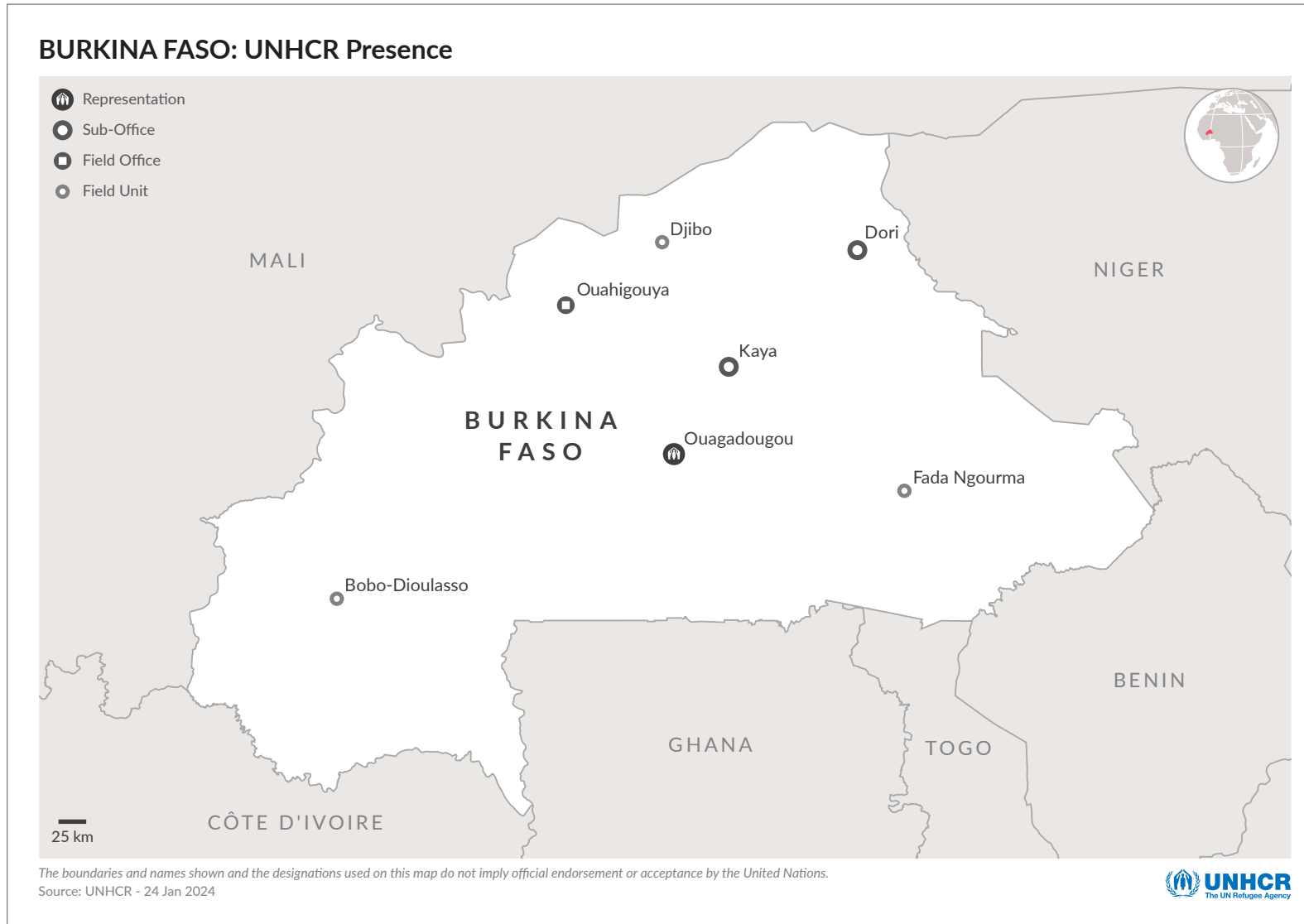
For other UN languages please contact the UNHCR GIS Support Unit at: hqmap@unhcr.org

Type	English	French	Spanish
Short form	The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.	Les frontières et les noms indiqués et les désignations employées sur cette carte n'impliquent pas reconnaissance ou acceptation officielle par l'Organisation des Nations Unies.	Los límites, nombres y designaciones que figuran en este mapa no implican su apoyo o aceptación oficial por las Naciones Unidas.
Long form	The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.	Les appellations utilisées sur cette carte et la présentation des données qui y figurent n'impliquent de la part du Secrétariat de l'Organisation des Nations Unies aucune prise de position quant au statut juridique des pays, territoires, villes ou zones, ou de leurs autorités, ni quant au tracé de leurs frontières ou limites.	Las denominaciones empleadas en este mapa y la forma en que aparecen presentados los datos que contiene no implican, de parte de la Secretaría de las Naciones Unidas, juicio alguno sobre la condición jurídica de países, territorios, ciudades o zonas, o de sus autoridades, ni respecto de la delimitación de sus fronteras o límites.
Jammu and Kashmir	Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.	La ligne en pointillé correspond approximativement à la Ligne de contrôle du Jammu et Cachemire dont ont convenu l'Inde et le Pakistan. Les parties n'ont pas encore convenu du statut définitif du Jammu et Cachemire.	La línea de puntos representa aproximadamente la Línea de Control de Jammu y Cachemira convenida por la India y Pakistán. Las partes no han llegado todavía a un acuerdo sobre el estatuto definitivo de Jammu y Cachemira.
Sudan and South Sudan	Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined.	La frontière entre la République du Soudan et la République du Soudan du Sud n'a pas été déterminée.	Las fronteras definitivas entre la República de Sudán y la República de Sudán del Sur no se han determinado todavía.
Abyei	Final status of the Abyei area is not yet determined.	Le statut définitif de la zone d'Abyei n'a pas encore été fixé.	La condición jurídica definitiva de la zona de Abyei aún no se ha determinado.

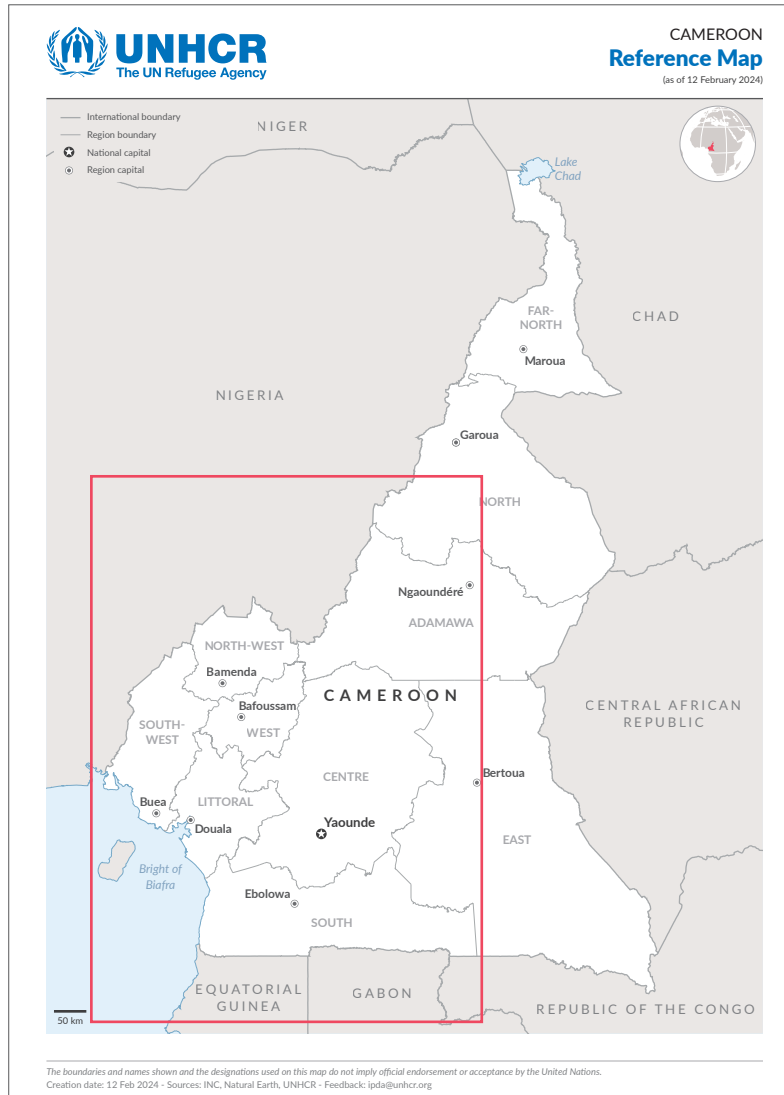
Annex

A5 map example

A5 map layout -
100% scale



A4 map example

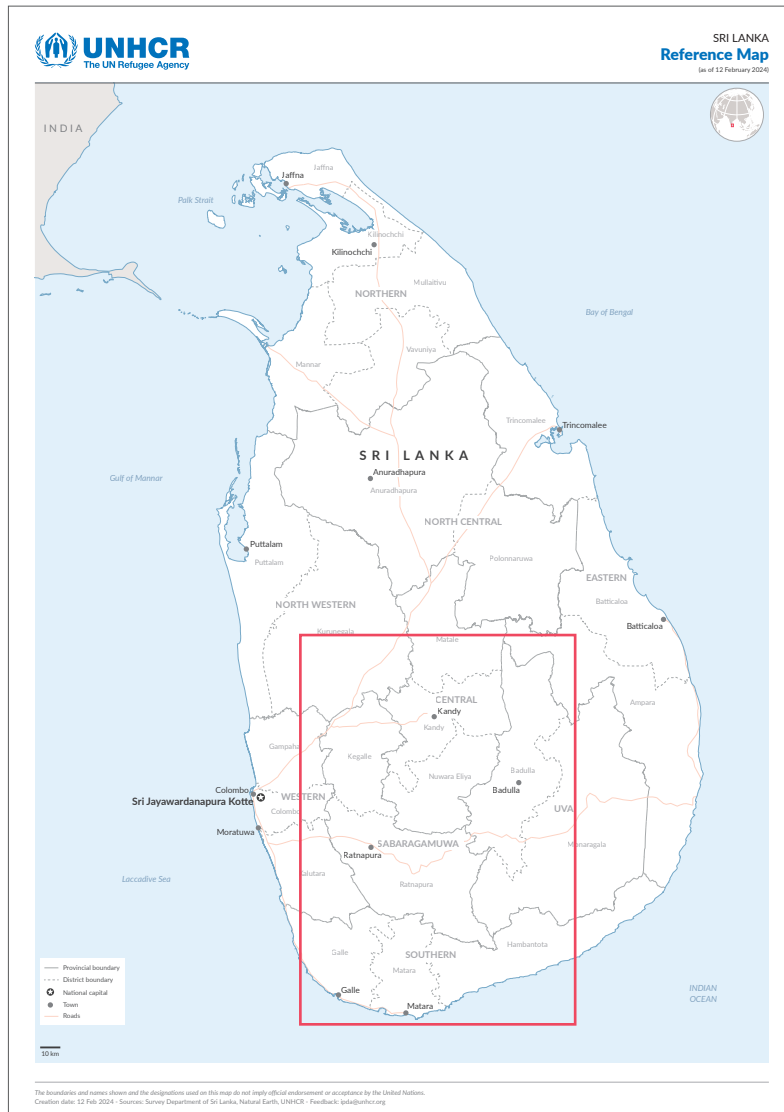


A4 map
layout

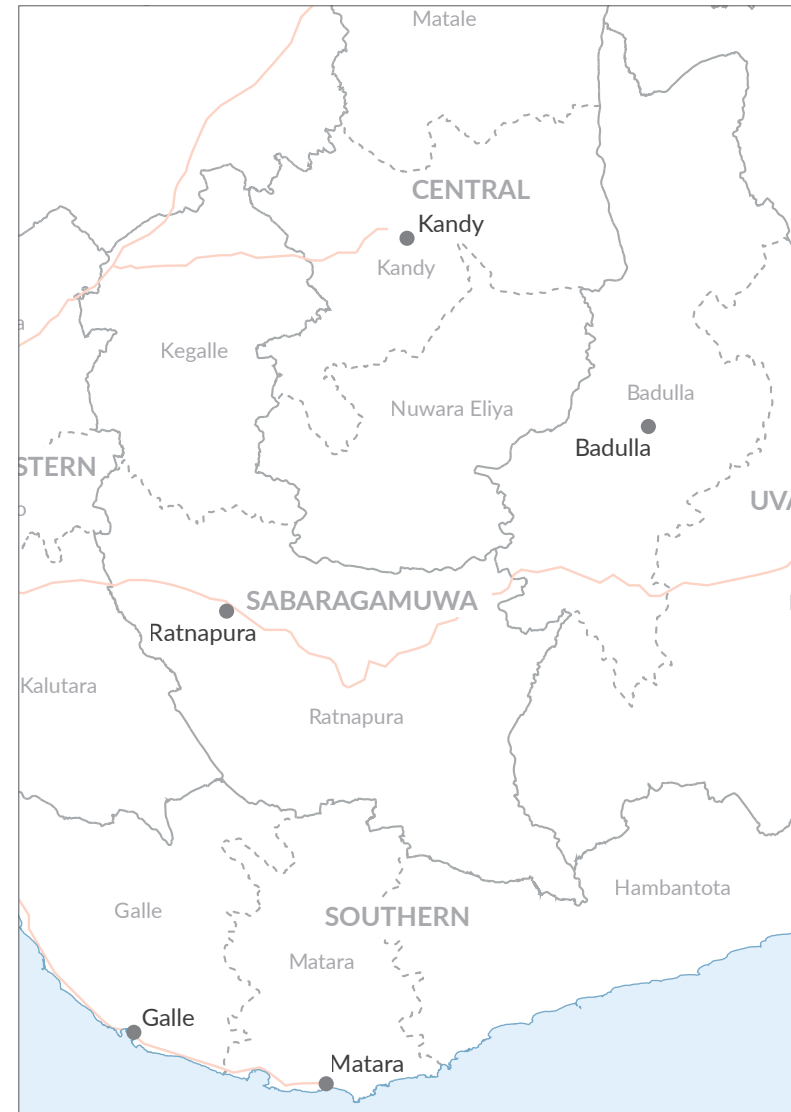


100%
scale

A3 map example



A3 map layout



100%
scale

