



Humanitarian standards matter



Strategy 2021 – 2025

Global humanitarian standards for local action and preparedness

1. Background

Sphere was established in 1997 as an inter-agency project in response to concerns about the performance, accountability and lack of co-ordination among humanitarian actors during the Great Lakes refugee crisis. Sphere developed standards for humanitarian response which have inspired generations of humanitarians, and transformed from a project to an independent non-profit membership organisation in 2016.

Sphere is now a diverse global community that brings together frontline practitioners, humanitarian agencies, community organisations, trainers, donors, policy makers, government agencies and affected communities, around a common goal – to improve the resilience of, and outcomes for, people affected by disaster and crisis.

We establish, promote and review standards for humanitarian action which provide an accountable framework for preparedness, resource allocation, response, monitoring and advocacy, before, during and after disasters and crises.

With this new strategy, Sphere aims to reinforce its leadership role in promoting the global relevance, importance and consistent application of humanitarian standards for accountability to affected communities, through a global Sphere community of purpose and practice. Extensive global consultations in 2020 with members, focal points, humanitarian experts, donors and other stakeholders informed the development of this strategy.

Key achievements in the last five years include:

- ✓ A **global network** of 100,000 subscribers, 44 organisational & 60 individual members, and 57 Focal Points, across 49 countries.
- ✓ An expanding global **community of trainers** and network of **practitioners** championing Sphere standards.
- ✓ Revised **Sphere Handbook 2018**, informed by the most inclusive and far-reaching consultation in its 23-year history with more than 1,400 participants, 500 experts and 450 organisations across 65 countries.
- ✓ Sphere standards are now available in **40 languages**.
- ✓ A range of **thematic guides, training packages, learning tools** and **online resources**.
- ✓ Sphere hosts and co-ordinates the Humanitarian Standards Partnership (HSP), which consists of Sphere and standards covering **Education, Child Protection, Older people and people with disabilities, Livestock, Economic Recovery and Market Analysis**.
- ✓ Requests for Sphere to advise on **technical, advisory and policy** matters related to humanitarian standards.
- ✓ Sphere standards are the **most commonly used and widely known set of humanitarian standards**.

2. Vision

Sphere believes that people affected by crises must be at the centre of decisions about humanitarian protection, assistance, recovery and resilience. They have the right to prompt, effective and quality humanitarian assistance which enables them to survive crises, rebuild their lives and recover their livelihoods with respect and dignity.

3. Mission

Sphere establishes, promotes and reviews standards for humanitarian action which provide an accountable and quality framework for preparedness, resource allocation, response, monitoring and advocacy, before, during and after disasters and crises.

Sphere is committed to supporting local ownership and application of humanitarian standards. Our standards and resources are open source and available free to everyone. We recognise the rights of all people affected by disaster and conflict – the rights to life with dignity, to receive humanitarian assistance, and to protection and security.

4. Strategic Priorities 2021-2025

The following are Sphere's strategic priorities for 2021-2025:

A. Sphere Standards

B. Sphere Community and Membership

C. Humanitarian standards

D. Accountability, Evidence, Impact and Learning

A. Sphere Standards

Our focus is to continue to promote awareness, understanding, accessibility, localisation, ownership, application and review of Sphere standards across diverse contexts globally. During this period, we will:

- **Awareness:** Widen global awareness and use of Sphere standards through promoting training, learning and other forms of knowledge sharing.
- **Accessibility:** Increase digital presence, translations, other accessibility options and promote the development of user guidance.
- **Localisation and Contextualisation:** Support nationally and locally-led adaptation to local circumstances, changing contexts and major crises, including the development of tailored technical guidance.
- **Ownership:** Promote institutional embedding of standards to increase uptake and consistent application.
- **Review:** Update standards periodically based on evidence and develop relevant guidance.

B. Sphere Community and Membership

We aim to enhance the ownership and application of Sphere standards by expanding, diversifying and strengthening our global Sphere community of purpose and practice, and deepen their engagement. The Sphere community includes members (institutional and individual), focal points, trainers, advocates, practitioners, government agencies and donors. During this period, we will:

- **Expansion and diversity:** Widen and diversify the Sphere community of members, focal points, trainers, advocates and practitioners especially in the global south and at regional, national, sub-national and local levels.
- **Membership:** Review the membership structure and phase in changes to membership arrangements to make these more inclusive of humanitarian actors, egalitarian and fit for purpose.
- **Focal Points:** Expand the network of Focal Points and deepen engagement with them to widen local awareness, application and ownership of Sphere standards.
- **Trainers:** Promote and expand training and learning networks and activities by supporting Sphere trainers and Focal Points.
- **Donors and NDMA:** Strengthen cooperation between Sphere and humanitarian donors and National Disaster Management Authorities to promote the institutionalisation and application of Sphere standards.

C. Humanitarian standards

Our role is to be a convener, thought leader and global resource on humanitarian standards. We will promote and facilitate collaboration and best practice across humanitarian standards to ensure quality and accountability in the sector and better respond to the needs of users and communities. We will seek to influence the inclusion of humanitarian standards in national, global and donor policies. During this period, we will:

- **Humanitarian Standards Partnership (HSP):** Promote, strengthen and facilitate collaboration, coordination and consistency across existing, new and potential HSP standards.
- **New and emerging standards:** Engage with relevant groups to support the development of new and emerging standards initiatives and promote collaboration and harmonisation with existing humanitarian standards.
- **Best Practice:** Serve as a strategic and technical resource for the advancement of best practice in establishing, developing, promoting and reviewing humanitarian standards.
- **Collaboration:** Engage with relevant sector and standards groups (e.g. CHS Alliance, IASC, UN Clusters, Humanitarian Coordinators and others) to promote coherence, discourage duplication, enhance user-friendliness of standards and guidance, and encourage consistent reference to the Core Humanitarian Standard, Sphere and HSP.

D. Accountability, Evidence, Impact and Learning

Whilst Sphere standards have global recognition and acceptance, we will promote accountability and learning, and better understand and articulate the evidence for and impact of Sphere standards. During this period, we will:

- **Accountability:** Encourage accountability in the consistent application of Sphere standards through members, focal points, trainers, practitioners, donors and NDMAs.
- **Evidence:** Support better understanding of the scientific and practitioner evidence underpinning standards, and expand the evidence base.
- **Impact:** Promote understanding, measurement and documentation of change and impact – anecdotal and empirical - and the sharing of good practice among the Sphere community.
- **Learning:** Strengthen learning and feedback on what works, what does not work and new developments relevant to Sphere and humanitarian standards.

5. How we work

Our work is guided by the Humanitarian Charter which provides the ethical and legal basis to the Protection Principles, the Core Humanitarian Standard and the Sphere Standards. We will support the delivery of our strategic priorities in the following ways:

- **Role:** Sphere will serve as an enabler, facilitator, convenor and advocate.
- **Values and Principles:** We will continue to be inclusive, consultative, accountable and respectful. Our work will be guided by openness, excellence, innovation, integrity, practicality and transparency. We place great importance on listening and learning.
- **Communications:** We will build on the global recognition of Sphere by promoting open, transparent and timely communications across the Sphere community and externally.
- **Secretariat:** The Secretariat will continue to offer leadership, coordination and technical expertise on humanitarian standards, and harness collaboration of the global Sphere community to engage with global and local humanitarian actors. We will consider expanding our capacity and/or establish partnerships with members, focal points, trainers and other organisations or groups to draw upon additional expertise.
- **Funding:** We will diversify and expand our funding sources, establish long term core funding and develop partnerships for special projects.
- **Governance:** We will review and enhance the governance of Sphere informed by changes we make to our membership structure. We will aim to make it more diverse, inclusive and representative of different types of humanitarian actors at global, national and local levels.

6. Reviewing Progress

The success of our strategy will be reflected in wider global awareness and use of Sphere standards, an expanded and more diverse Sphere community, improved collaboration across humanitarian standards and groups, and evidence of impact and change. We will measure and review progress against our strategic priorities as follows:

- **Annual plans** will be aligned to the Sphere 2025 strategic priorities and articulate the proposed contribution to the strategic priorities.
- **Establish baseline measures** and **track progress** against these in annual plans.
- **Annual reports** will specifically track contribution and progress in relation to the strategic priorities and baseline measures.
- **Annual collation of outcomes, narratives of change and evidence of impact** from members and the Sphere community, of the application of Sphere and humanitarian standards.
- A **mid-term strategy review** in 2023 to consider any adjustments to the strategic priorities and timeframe.