### The Sphere Project: a brief tour

The Sphere Project is a voluntary initiative encompassing a broad range of humanitarian actors. Its aim is to help improve the quality of assistance to people affected by disaster or conflict, as well as the accountability of humanitarian agencies and states towards their constituents, donors and affected populations.

The Sphere Project determines and promotes minimum standards by which the global humanitarian community responds to the plight of people affected by disaster or conflict. These standards, covering life-saving humanitarian sectors, as well as the common principles on which they are grounded are set out in the Sphere Handbook: ‘Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response’.

### The Sphere Handbook

The Sphere Handbook is the most widely known and recognised set of common principles and universal minimum standards for humanitarian assistance, enabling humanitarian actors to ensure quality and accountability in their work. The Handbook is developed through a broad and consensus-based consultative process within the humanitarian sector. Because it reflects the collective effort of a wide range of humanitarian actors, it is not owned by any one organisation but provides a common language across agencies. The Handbook collects evidence-based universal minimum standards in four life-saving sectors: water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion; food security and nutrition; shelter, settlement and non-food items; and health action. Based on moral and legal principles spelled out in the Humanitarian Charter, it also defines Protection Principles and now includes the Core Humanitarian Standard (which replaces Sphere Core Standards’ Chapter), which all inform any humanitarian response in a spirit of quality and accountability to the affected populations.

### Identity and governance

Initiated in 1997 by a group of humanitarian NGOs and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the Sphere Project now gathers a large community of practice around the world, including UN agencies, donor and affected governments and academic institutions.

Organisations willing to have their policies and operational strategies conform to Sphere principles and standards do so on a voluntary basis. There is no sign-up mechanism to the Sphere Project. Since its inception, the Sphere process has endeavoured to be inclusive, transparent and globally representative.

The Sphere Project is overseen by a Board representing global NGO networks. A small Geneva-based team rolls out the Sphere Strategy as developed by the Board, and ensures the production of the Sphere Handbook and other services. Funding to support the work of the project team is made available by Board member organisations and donors.

### Guiding principles and values

The Sphere Project aims to anchor humanitarian response in a rights-based and participatory approach. The Humanitarian Charter places the rights of disaster-affected populations to life with dignity, to receive humanitarian assistance and to protection and security at the centre of humanitarian response.

The Sphere Project promotes the active participation of affected populations as well as of local and national authorities at all stages of the response. it strongly encourages international humanitarian actors to build their response on local and national capacities.

### Companions, partners and focal points

Some humanitarian sectors not covered in the Sphere Handbook have developed their own standards through a rights-based consultative process inspired by Sphere. The Sphere Project recognises the following standards as companions to the Sphere Handbook: the ‘Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery’ by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE); the ‘Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards’ by the LEGS Project; the ‘Minimum Economic Recovery Standards’ by the SEEP Network, Minimum requirements for market analysis of CaLP;

the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian action by the Child Protection Working Group (CPWG). In numerous disaster- and conflict-affected countries, the humanitarian community has set up Sphere focal points (Sphere partners are regional focal points) who actively promote Sphere with practitioners as well as national and local governments.

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### To improve the quality and accountability of humanitarian responses with a people‑centred, rights-based approach and the definition of minimum standards

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Humanitarian Charter   * The right to life with dignity * The right to receive humanitarian assistance * The right to protection and security | | Principles  put into practice by using the  Sphere Standards: | | Protection Principles   * Avoid causing harm * Ensure impartial assistance * Protect people from violence * Assist with rights claims, access to remedies and recovery from abuse | |
| Companion Standards   * Education (INEE) * Livestock (LEGS) * Economic recovery (SEEP) * Child Protection (CPMS) | | The Core Humanitarian Standard Nine Commitments  (now replacing Sphere Core Standards ‘Chapter) | | Cross-cutting themes   * Children * Disaster risk reduction * Environment * Gender * HIV and AIDS * Older people * Persons with disabilities * Psychosocial support | |
| …to consider when aiming at attaining the **Minimum Standards (MS)**. including: **key actions** **(KA)** to attain the MS **key indicators** **(KI)** to measure whether a MS has been attained and **guidance notes** to consider when aiming at reaching the KA/KI in the: | | | | | |
| Technical Chapters | | | | | |
| WASH | Food | | Shelter/NFI | | Health |
| * Water supply, sanitation and hygiene promotion * Hygiene promotion * Water supply * Excreta disposal * Vector control * Solid waste management * Drainage | * Food security and nutrition assessment * Infant and young child feeding * Management of acute malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies * Food security | | * Shelter and settlement * Non-food items: Clothing, bedding and household items | | * Health systems * Essential health services * Control of communicable diseases * Child health * Sexual and reproductive health * Injury * Mental health * Non-communicable diseases |

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