The Sphere Project

Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response

Annual Report 2015

This report covers activities carried out by the Sphere Project between 1 January and 31 December 2015 and includes related governance, financial and administrative summaries. It also includes highlights of the important work being done by the global community of humanitarian practitioners using Sphere to expand commitments and capacities to deliver quality and accountability in humanitarian response.

Executive Summary

In early 2015, the Sphere Board adopted a new strategic plan — **Sphere 2020** — which provides the structure for this Annual Report. With four operational priority areas and two supporting components, the report reflects the dynamic work of a growing community of practitioners and advocates who are laying the groundwork for a coherent and holistic approach to quality and accountability.

Throughout the year, the Sphere community took steps to establish a vigorous and diverse network of humanitarian actors with deep field reach. Highlights include two regional workshops of Sphere practitioners in Amman and Dakar and a growing number of Sphere country focal points. More than 900 practitioners directly contributed to a process to review the network, ways of working, scope and governance of Sphere, with this work bearing fruit in 2016.

To support practitioners and field operations, the Sphere office developed and made available a number of tools and resources, including a comprehensive set of new training modules, making them freely available to enable capacity-building across humanitarian organisations and responses from the earthquake in Nepal to the Syria emergency to the refugee crisis in Europe. Advocacy continued to be a key focus for Sphere at all levels, including promotion of a holistic approach to quality and accountability as a contribution to the World Humanitarian Summit.

The relevance of the Sphere Handbook was confirmed by the publication of three new language versions of its latest edition and three more in the making. More than four years after its publication, the demand for the Handbook in different electronic formats grew or remained stable. A number of tools to help unpack and adapt the Sphere standards throughout the humanitarian project cycle were also developed and well received by practitioners. With Sphere's strong contribution and investment in developing the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) indicators and guidance notes, tools to support its full integration into the Sphere Handbook were introduced throughout the year.

Welcoming the Cash Learning Partnership to the growing family of Sphere Companion Standards in 2015, the Global Humanitarian Standards Partnership also made strides as stakeholders and involved partners mobilised resources and clarified value in its implementation. The Partnership is working to respond to the findings of a study which highlighted users' requests for more systematic and united support across sectors and quality approaches, greater complementarity and coherence and support for country-level advocacy across organisations and sectors.

The growing reach of Sphere communication work as well as the continued and generous support of funding partners confirmed the consistent value added by Sphere to the humanitarian sector, while a responsive Board set a clear course towards Sphere's strategic priorities.

Sphere is establishing a vigorous and diverse network of practitioners and advocates committed to achieving greater humanitarian quality and accountability.

Photo: Risk Reduction Capacity Building Workshop in Chile, June 2015. © Almudena Montoliú García

Introduction

In 2015, Sphere began to consolidate its long experience in enabling and advocating for humanitarian action which promotes the right to assistance with dignity for each person affected by crisis.

A leading promoter of humanitarian standards grounded in evidence, collaboration and best practice since its establishment in 1997, Sphere's holistic approach to principles, protection, operational and technical standards has evolved into a common language across the humanitarian sector and a force for collaboration among quality and accountability initiatives.

Sphere's holistic approach has evolved into a common language across the humanitarian sector and a force for collaboration among quality and accountability initiatives. *Photo: Sphere training of trainers course in the Philippines, November 2015. © Subhashis Roy / LWR Philippines*

Building on this experience and as the previous strategic plan drew to an end, the Sphere Project Board devised a new strategy to leverage Sphere's organic growth, respond to the priorities of the community of Sphere practitioners and advocates and establish an ambitious agenda to continue fulfilling its unique role within the humanitarian sector.

Endorsed in January, the **Sphere 2020** strategic plan seeks to transform Sphere from a project into a vigorous, deeply connected network of practitioners and organisations which will act as a global catalyst for humanitarian quality and accountability.

Four strategic priorities enable realisation of this ambitious goal:

1. The establishment of a robust, inclusive network of Sphere practitioners will allow humanitarian actors and first responders to develop greater capacity to put humanitarian principles and standards into practice.

2. The collective ability of the Sphere network to carry out training and advocacy will be strengthened, targeting first responders, traditional and new humanitarian actors, international systems as well as local and national authorities.

3. A revision of the Sphere Handbook will offer the opportunity to sharpen the relevance and usability of Sphere standards by consolidating the evidence base and aligning them with innovative best practice in the sector.

4. The progressive formalisation of a global standards alliance will improve coordinated action, allowing humanitarian standards to better influence humanitarian response, building greater ownership by individuals, communities and organisations.

Consistent fundraising and communication strategies, along with adaptive finance and management commitments, sustain the achievement of Sphere 2020's strategic priorities.

This Annual Report covers the work done during the first year of implementation of Sphere 2020, and is structured in line with these strategic priorities. The Sphere Board and staff are pleased to share it with the humanitarian community.

Strategic Priority 1 · **Sphere network**

The establishment of a robust, inclusive network of Sphere practitioners will allow humanitarian actors and first responders to develop greater capacity to put humanitarian principles and standards into practice.

With the aim of supporting practitioners in applying a strong approach to quality and accountability, Sphere has supported regional and country focal points over the last 15 years. While there is a far-reaching community of practitioners in southern and southeast Asia and a vibrant group of practitioners in Latin America, Sphere has historically been under-represented in both the Middle East and West African regions. To strengthen the network further, Sphere organised its first-ever **Middle East and North Africa Regional Sphere Practitioners Workshop** in May to exchange experience and support nascent focal point organizations. The Jordan Hashemite Charity Organisation (JHCO) hosted this two-day workshop in Amman. It was attended by 25 participants from NGOs, the UN and independent experts working in nine countries (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates).

The aim was to better understand the experience of practitioners using the Standards in the region, explore ways to respond to specific requests and needs in the Middle East and for Sphere practitioners from this region to meet and identify ways in which they could work together better in order to strengthen the application of standards at organisational, national and regional levels.

The workshop not only confirmed the relevance of Sphere for the region but also highlighted practitioners' interest in learning from other regions. It clearly pointed to the need for more sustained training, contextualisation, targeted support and broader advocacy efforts. Participants voiced a need for more concerted joint regional advocacy and guidance on how to approach national disaster management authorities (NDMAs) of affected countries.

As an immediate outcome of the event, three organisations applied to become Sphere focal points in their country, with several others expressing interest in playing a role nationally or regionally.

The second targeted workshop for **West and Central Africa Regional Sphere Practitioners** took place in October in Dakar, Senegal. Twenty participants from eight West African countries came together to explore ways to strengthen the way they work with humanitarian standards both at country level and regionally, contributing to and linking with the global Sphere network.

Particular focus was given to institutionalising and operationalising standards, as well as to how to use standards for advocacy and coordination.

These themes were chosen by the participants themselves, based on the challenges they identified for working with humanitarian standards in their own operating contexts. The countries represented were Chad, DRC, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal, with the

Sphere practitioners in the MENA region seek to strengthen the application of standards at organisational, national and regional levels. *Photo © B. Jarekji / Sphere*

Central Africa Republic participants having to cancel their participation at the last minute due to response needs.

Several activities were planned to follow on from this regional outreach, including a mission to Niger in November to discuss collective accountability *(see page 8)* and a mission to Kuwait, Istanbul and Gaziantep in December to discuss the use of Sphere standards with potential partners or focal points and to support Sphere training in the context of the Syria crisis *(see page 9)*.

Sphere practitioners in West and Central Africa explored how to use standards for humanitarian advocacy and coordination. *Photo @ Richard Mané / Sphere*

The lessons from both regional workshops will feed into the 2016 activities of the Sphere office as well as into separate ongoing work on the evolving structure and scope of the Sphere network.

The following organisations became **Sphere focal points** in 2015: United Nations Development Programme (Chile); Lebanese Organisation for Studies and Training; Egyptian Red Crescent. In discussion: Libya, Yemen. At the end of the year, there were 38 Sphere country focal points in 34 countries and three regional focal points (one in Asia and two in the Middle East and Northern Africa region).

During Q4, the Sphere office launched a broad consultation on the **Sphere network's scope and concept**. Key stakeholders were involved through interviews and an online survey to which more than 900 humanitarian practitioners responded (in Arabic, English, French and Spanish). The Sphere Board will discuss the findings of the study and review the network structure and governance model at an extraordinary meeting in March 2016.

Countries with Sphere Focal Points

Asia	**Africa**	**The Americas**
Afghanistan	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Argentina
Bangladesh	Kenya	Bolivia
Cambodia	Zimbabwe	Chile
China (Hong Kong)		Colombia
India	**Europe**	Ecuador
Indonesia	France	El Salvador
Iran	Italy	Guatemala
Japan		Honduras
South Korea	**Middle East and North Africa**	United States of America
Kyrgyzstan	Egypt	
Myanmar	Lebanon	
Nepal	Libya	
Pakistan	Turkey	
Philippines		
Sri Lanka		
Vietnam		

Strategic Priority 2 · **Training and advocacy**

The collective ability of the Sphere network to carry out training and advocacy will be strengthened, targeting first responders, traditional and new humanitarian actors, international systems as well as local and national authorities.

Training

The **Sphere Project Training Package 2015** was published in English, French and Spanish in February and in Arabic in August. The English and Arabic versions consist of thirty 90-minute training sessions and a facilitator's guide; the French and Spanish are made up of six sessions each; priority sessions were identified to make best use of available resources with more translations to follow in 2016. The facilitator's guide presents each training module and gives practical guidance on their use as well as insights into adult learning methodologies.

The package covers three broad subjects: *Sphere essentials* such as application of the Humanitarian Charter and technical standards; *Mainstreaming Sphere* including how to bring Sphere into disaster risk reduction and resilience approaches; and *Sphere and the wider community*, on the use of Sphere with stakeholders such as national authorities or directly with affected populations.

An advisory group made of learning specialists and humanitarian practitioners supported the development of the modules. The testing of a limited number of sessions (chosen among the three themes of the package) was carried out in collaboration with Bioforce in Lyon, the Centre for Education and Research in Humanitarian Action (CERAH) and UNOCHA in Geneva.

Providing the humanitarian community with a comprehensive and flexible training package, the new resource supports capacity-building efforts on the ground. It offers in-depth content as well as a wide range of training methodologies to cater for different facilitation and learning styles and covers a wide range of topics. Trainers are able to build their own training programmes through this modular approach according to assessed needs and the context.

By the end of the year, the training package had been downloaded nearly 5,400 times from the Sphere website (all languages considered).

A permanent online evaluation survey collects feedback in English, French and Spanish. During the reported period, nearly 150 respondents took the survey, of which 92% rated the package as 'excellent' or 'above average'.
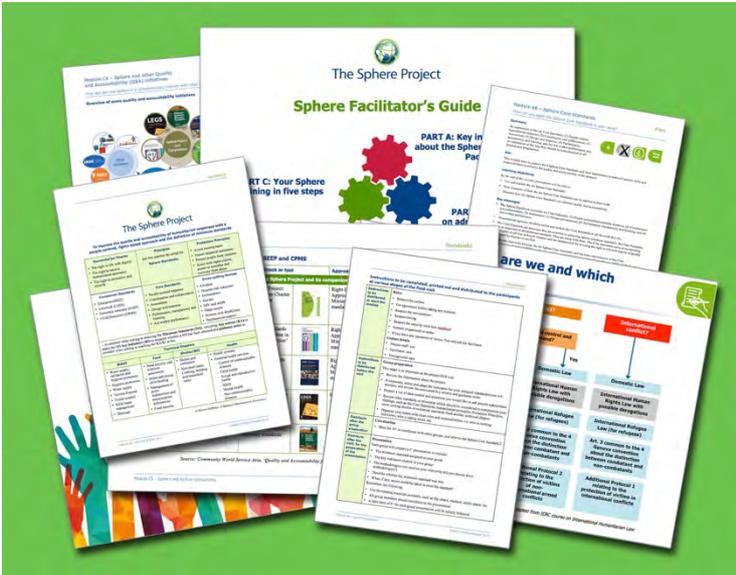
The new training package, available in four languages, was downloaded nearly 5,400 times from the Sphere website.

Eight training of trainers courses and 26 workshops in 21 countries were reported to the Sphere office in 2015. In the picture, a Sphere training of trainers course held in Turkey in December. The course was for professionals with capacity-building responsibilities in organisations working in the humanitarian response to the Syria crisis.

As the **Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS)** was completed with the publication of its indicators and guidance notes in the last quarter of the year, an additional 90-minute training session on the use of the CHS in conjunction with the Sphere sectoral standards, Humanitarian Charter and Protection Principles was developed. After review by a group of training experts, the session was finalised and translated into Arabic, French and Spanish and published in January 2016.

The **Sphere Handbook in Action e-learning course** continued to be highly successful. During 2015, some 8,000 people enrolled in the course, which is incorporated into the learning platforms of 10 humanitarian organisations in addition to that of the Sphere Project. Work was done on the latter to improve user registration and follow-up as well as the collection of feedback about the quality of the course.

In partnership with DisasterReady.org, the Sphere office conducted a two-week **tutor-led learning programme** to introduce the Sphere Handbook. The programme included two webinars, self-study and practical assignments. 28 practitioners from 13 countries took part in it. Nearly half of the participants responded to an evaluation survey, of whom 91% rated the programme as 'excellent' or 'above average'.

The Sphere office continued to maintain the online **Sphere trainer database**. By the end of the year, the database included 70 trainers.

The worldwide Sphere community continued to actively conduct **capacity-building activities.** In 2015, 26 workshops and eight training of trainers courses in 21 countries were reported to the Sphere office. An average of 20 participants were trained in each, making a total of approximately 680 participants.

During the initial stages of the response to the **earthquake emergency in Nepal**, a Sphere trainer already deployed to the country organised a quick Sphere training course. The German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) provided the venue for the course and printed 300 "emergency" copies of the Sphere Handbook within three days. Nearly 80 humanitarian practitioners attended the condensed training. Participants came from UN agencies, the Red Cross, international and national NGOs and students.

In support of humanitarian practitioners involved in the **Syrian response**, UNOCHA Turkey also organised an expert workshop to customise the Sphere training package to the Syrian and cross-border context. The workshop was followed by other Sphere training courses in Arabic and a training of trainers course for some 25 Syrian professionals working in the response, with the aim that they will train their own organisations and in-country networks.

"Having this kind of training on the spot in the aftermath of a disaster is a great idea as it makes our work so much easier and more efficient," says Francesca Schraffl, one of the participants in a Sphere workshop held in Nepal soon after an earthquake hit the country in April.

Sphere in practice workshops:

Bangladesh
Bolivia
Chile
France
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Indonesia
Jordan
Lebanon
Nepal
Panama
Philippines
Paraguay
Pakistan
Saudi Arabia
Spain
Sudan
Trinidad and Tobago
Turkey

Training of trainers courses:

Bangladesh
Bolivia
India
Indonesia
Philippines
Saudi Arabia
Turkey

Within the framework of the response to the **refugee crisis in Europe**, Sphere Board organisation RedR delivered three workshops on humanitarian principles and Sphere standards to a total of 56 volunteers from grassroots organisations working in Calais (France).

The Sphere office gave presentations on the Sphere Handbook to the following **academic institutions**: Antwerp University, CERAH, Deakin University, Duke University, University of Virginia and the NOHA Programme.

Advocacy

The Sphere Project office continued its involvement in the IASC Task Team for Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). Sphere contributed to further consolidating the **AAP/PSEA Helpdesk**. It was decided in late 2015 to extend the mandate of the AAP/PSEA Task Team into 2016. This will allow for continued engagement, with increased focus on joint in-country accountability.

In November, a Sphere staff member participated in a **three-day mission to Niger** led by the IASC Task Team on AAP and PSEA to discuss collective accountability with the Humanitarian Country Team. Sphere highlighted the role of humanitarian standards as a common language to improve collective accountability at a one-day workshop for cluster coordinators and facilitators as well as government counterparts and local NGOs.

Sphere staff participated in the first **IASC Indicators Registry** meeting of the year. Discussion points were roll-out, improved support materials and further consolidation between the indicators and Sphere where possible.

Following her engagement with the **World Humanitarian Summit** during Q4 2014, Sphere Project Director Christine Knudsen facilitated an online consultation in advance of the regional meeting for the Europe and Others Group in Budapest, Hungary in early 2015

and was tapped as a facilitator for several sessions around the thematic debates on site.

In March, two staff of the Sphere Project office attended the **ALNAP Annual Meeting** in Berlin, whose theme was "Working together in the field for effective humanitarian response". Sphere and HAP International (which later became the CHS Alliance) were responsible for a joint information booth at the event.

In June, Sphere staff participated at the **InterAction Forum** in Washington, D.C. and in September at the **International Humanitarian Conference** in Manchester, UK.

In Manchester, Sphere staff engaged in discussions with a number of research institutions (such as the London School of Economics, Enhancing Learning and Research for Humanitarian Assistance, the Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute and the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies). These partners have agreed to collaborate with Sphere to develop research agendas on Sphere standards and indicators in the run-up to the next Sphere Handbook revision (2016-2018).

"Sphere standards are amazing! They basically bring cohesion to chaos," says Dan Teuma, one of the founders of CalAid and a participant at a Sphere workshop for volunteers working in the "Calais Jungle". The workshop was held in London in September.

In December, the Sphere Director visited **Kuwait, Istanbul and Gaziantep** to discuss the use of Sphere standards, in particular in the context of the Syria crisis. In Kuwait, the Director participated in the Annual Conference for Effective Partnership and information-sharing for better humanitarian action and was able to follow up on proposals generated at the Amman regional workshop, identify potential focal points and promote the range of Arabic-language resources which had been developed in the course of the year. The Istanbul leg of her visit focused primarily on meeting with the Kadikoy municipality, which has been exploring the use of Sphere standards in their planning and urban preparedness and has volunteered to test the Sphere in Urban Response guide in 2016. The Gaziantep training was a unique opportunity to meet with 25 Syrian professionals working on principled and effective humanitarian action and to discuss with them the challenges of building capacity and monitoring programmes for quality in that context.

The Sphere Project participated in two meetings held by the **"Q&A Group".** Those meetings are highly valued as important informal networking opportunities for quality and accountability initiatives. In particular, the Group discussed its engagement with the World Humanitarian Summit and ways to make accountability and advocacy messages heard. It is also important that Q&A initiatives keep each other informed of their activities to identify potential areas of overlap as well as opportunities to collaborate. Approximately 10-12 initiatives participate regularly.

Strategic Priority 3 · **Sphere standards**

A revision of the Sphere Handbook will offer the opportunity to sharpen the relevance and usability of Sphere standards by consolidating the evidence base and aligning them with innovative best practice in the sector.

	CS1 People-centred	CS2 Coordination and collaboration	CS3 Assessment	CS4 Design and response	CS5 Performance, transparency, learning	CS6 Aid worker performance	Protection Principles *
CHS 1 – Assessment Appropriate and relevant response			■	■	■		
CHS 2 – Design, implementation Effective and timely response	■		■	■			■
CHS 3 – Local capacities Strengthened local capacities and avoidance of negative effects			■	■			■
CHS 4 – Communication Communication, participation, feedback	■				■		
CHS 5 – Complaints mechanisms Complaints welcomed and addressed	■				■		
CHS 6 – Coordination Coordinated and complementary response		■					
CHS 7 – Learning Continuous learning and improvement					■		
CHS 8 – Staff performance Supported, effective, fairly treated staff						■	
CHS 9 – Resources Responsibly used for intended purposes					■	■	

A comparative analysis of the Core Humanitarian Standard and the Sphere Handbook's Core Standards helps practitioners and trainers make the transition from one to the other.
Photo: Correspondences between the CHS and Sphere Core Standards.

The two "Sphere Unpacked" guides were downloaded nearly 7,300 times from the Sphere website.
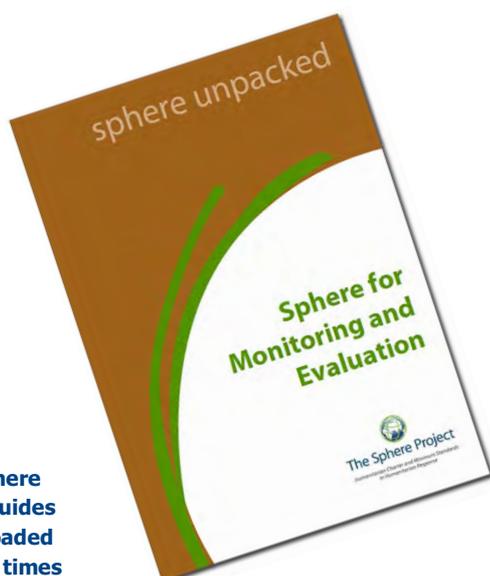
With the **integration of the CHS into the Sphere Handbook** to replace the Core Standards, endorsed by the Sphere Board in November 2014, Sphere published a short comparative analysis of the two documents to support practitioners and trainers during the transition. The publication was made available in English, French and Spanish.

The Sphere Project hired a consultant to manage the development of the **CHS guidance notes and indicators**, needed to complete the original nine commitments, while Sphere staff also contributed to the process. The CHS guidance notes and indicators were published in November, paving the way for more tools to support integration with the Sphere Handbook in 2016 and beyond.

The second title of the **"Sphere Unpacked"** guides series, *Sphere for Monitoring and Evaluation*, was published online in English in early 2015 and translated and published in Arabic, French and Spanish. The first title of the series, *Sphere for Assessments*, which had been published in English the previous year, was published in Arabic, French and Spanish. Both guides (all languages considered) were downloaded nearly 7,300 times from the Sphere website in 2015.

The series' third and fourth titles, *Sphere for National Disaster Management Authorities (NDMAs)* and *Sphere for Urban Response*, began to be developed with the support of expert advisory groups. The "NDMA guide" includes a review of how governments include standards in their national disaster management policies and guidelines, as well as guidance for Sphere advocates on how best to engage with NDMAs.

"Sphere Unpacked" guides explain how to integrate key elements of Sphere's people-centred approach into the humanitarian programme cycle.

The study *Sphere for Urban Response* looks at ways in which current standards and indicators can be applied in urban contexts. Both documents will directly inform the upcoming Sphere Handbook revision process, as they are being field tested in 2016.

The Sphere Project office continued to ensure availability of the **Sphere Handbook** to the wider humanitarian sector. Some 4,800 copies of the handbook (both as hard copies and in eBook format) were sold in 2015 while its PDF versions (all 25 language versions included) were downloaded nearly 15,700 times from the website. The Arabic-language version of the Sphere Handbook in **eBook** format was published during the first quarter of 2015.

The Sphere community translated the Handbook into three new languages in 2015. A **Myanmar** language version was published in August, bringing the total number of language versions available on the Sphere website to 25 by the end of the year. The translation was led by the Myanmar Red Cross Society with support from the American Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and Myanmar's National Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group (DRRWG). A translation into **Swahili** by Translators Without Borders and a translation into **Turkish** led by the Turkish Red Crescent Society were also finalised in 2015 and will be published in 2016.

Some 88,000 users accessed the **online version of the handbook** (SphereHandbook.org), an increase of 19,6% compared to the previous year.

Users per year - SphereHandbook.org
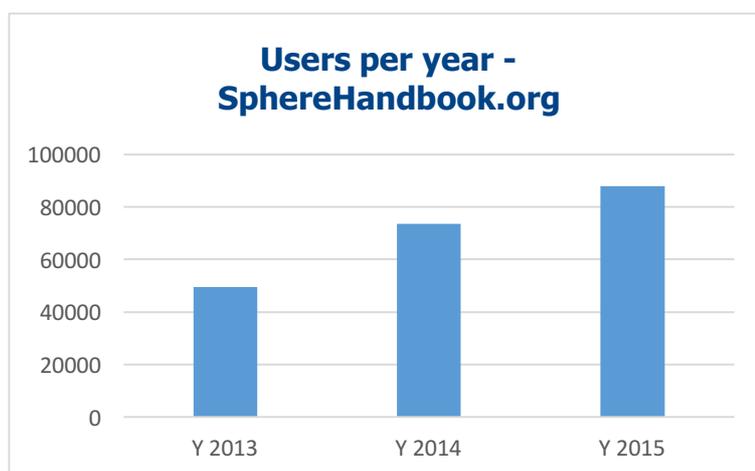
By the end of 2015, the Handbook was available in the following languages

Arabic	French	Kyrgyz	Tajik
Armenian	German	Myanmar	Tamil
Bangla	Haitian Creole	Nepali	Urdu
Braille (English)	Indonesian	Russian	Vietnamese
Chinese	Japanese	Sinhala	
English	Khmer	Slovenian	
Farsi	Korean	Spanish	

Strategic Priority 4 · **Global standards partnership**

The progressive formalisation of a global standards partnership will improve coordinated action, allowing humanitarian standards to better influence humanitarian response, building greater ownership by individuals, communities and organisations.

During Q3, the Sphere Project commissioned a **scoping study** to explore ways for Sphere and its Companion Standards — as well as other standards-setting initiatives — to create a partnership which would allow for more coherence, collaboration and coordination among humanitarian standards. For the study, 36 key informant interviews were carried out and 463 people responded to an online survey in three languages (English, French, Spanish). The study showed widespread support for the proposed partnership among humanitarian practitioners and the Sphere Board **endorsed the creation** of a Global Humanitarian Standards Partnership in November.

The purpose of the partnership will be to strengthen the promotion of principled, evidence-based humanitarian response. The scoping study pointed to the great majority of standards users wanting greater and more united support for advocacy at the country level as well as more systematic support across sectors that will build greater ownership by individuals, communities and organisations. The partnership will also improve and further develop consistent standards models and approaches to build greater coherence and compatibility amongst humanitarian standards.

The decision to move ahead was based on the recommendation made by the current Sphere Companion Standards and the support of other partners, including the Gender-based Violence Area of Responsibility of the Global Protection Cluster (which has recently published a revised version of the *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action*) and the Age and Disability Capacity-Building Programme (ADCAP) led by HelpAge International (which has recently launched the *Minimum Standards for Age and Disability Inclusion in Humanitarian Action*).

In its initial phase, a part-time coordinator will be hired to develop and clarify the vision and objectives of the partnership. The position will be hosted by Sphere but funded collectively by the founding partners.

The Sphere Board awarded companion status to the **Minimum Requirements for Market Analysis in Emergencies** developed by the Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP). As the fifth initiative to join the Sphere companion family, CaLP's minimum requirements cut across the existing sectors and provide clear technical guidance for baseline analysis. CaLP gathers humanitarian actors engaged in policy, practice and research within cash transfer programming. Its community of practice includes over 150 organisations and more than 5,000 individuals in the humanitarian sector.

In the future, CaLP and the Sphere Project will work on a second, revised version of the minimum requirements with a broader multi-sectoral technical scope. The goal will be to develop a set of standards on emergency markets and cash transfer programming across the project cycle that would fit better into the current Sphere standards structure.

Sphere staff provided comments on an early draft of the **Minimum Standards for Age and Disability Inclusion in Humanitarian Action**. Sphere staff was also a key informant during a round of interviews preceding the drafting process. Sphere Director Christine Knudsen authored the foreword for the publication.

Sphere Companion Standards

Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery (Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies);

Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS Network);

**Minimum Economic Recovery Standards** (SEEP Network);

Child Protection Minimum Standards (Child Protection Working Group, Global Protection Cluster);

Minimum Requirements for Market Analysis in Emergencies (Cash Learning Partnership).

Supporting Priority · **Communication**

Sphere develops and deepens trustful relationships with key constituencies through fresh and innovative communications in support of its strategic priorities and resource mobilisation.

During 2015, the audience reached through the Sphere Project **website** grew in line with the NGO sector. The website was visited by 148,682 users, an increase of 8.9% compared to 2014 (slightly under the 11% benchmarked for NGOs of a similar size by the *2015 M+R Benchmarks Study*). Other audience indicators (such as number of sessions, session average duration, page views and bounce rate variation) showed positive variations. The website continued to be the centrepiece of the online communications work and was maintained in four languages (English, French, Spanish and to a lesser extent Arabic).

Users per year - SphereProject.org
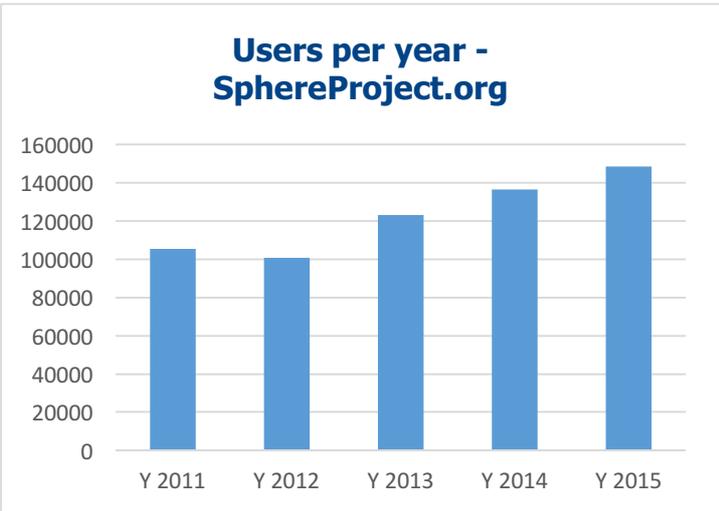
The audience reached by the **monthly electronic newsletter** continued to grow steadily. By the end of the year, its three language versions combined (English, French and Spanish) reached 37,794 subscribers, a 34% increase compared with December 2014. The average open and click rates (15.7% and 5.2% respectively) continue to be well above the NGO average (11% and 1% respectively, according to the *2015 M+R Benchmarks Study*). A loyalty campaign run during Q3 prompted 25.5% of the subscribers to confirm their subscription while only 0.7% unsubscribed.

Two **direct email campaigns** were run in April and December. Targeted at Sphere supporters who are not yet newsletter subscribers, the first reached over 23,400 people and the second over 29,200. This way to engage Sphere audiences proved to be quite successful as the average open and click rates show (21% and 4% respectively).

Sphere's **social media** presence grew steadily: an increase of 40% on Facebook (nearly 10,500+ followers by the end of the year) and by 36% on Twitter (over 3,500 followers by the end of the year). Sphere's YouTube channel increased its number of subscribers by about 80% (more than 670 by the end of the year); all of its videos considered, the channel got some 27,600 views (an increase of about 70% compared to the previous year).

The comparative increase in video views can be attributed to the publication of "The Sphere Story," a **video documentary** on the origins, dissemination and impact of Sphere principles and standards that was

Newsletter subscribers

released in Arabic, English, French and Spanish in June. Composed of three 10-minute chapters, the documentary complements other Sphere films and looks at the challenges and opportunities for improving the quality and accountability of humanitarian response today. All chapters and languages combined, "The Sphere Story" was viewed 5,823 times in 2015. Its trailer, released in English, French and Spanish was viewed 3,022 times.

A **campaign to promote both the CHS** and "The Core Humanitarian Standard and the Sphere Core Standards: Analysis and Comparison" succeeded in reaching a broad audience; more than 1,500 humanitarians in nearly 140 countries requested hard copies of both documents. The documents were shipped in April and September.

Some 1,500 humanitarian professionals in 140 countries received a hard copy of the Core Humanitarian Standard and guidance about how it compares to the Sphere Core Standards.

The Sphere office was an exhibitor at the **InterAction Forum** in Washington, D.C., in June; at the **International Humanitarian Conference** in Manchester, UK in September; at the international trade fair **AidEx** in Brussels in November; and at the **International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement** in Geneva in December.

An effective **new display system** focused on the Humanitarian Charter was created to support the Sphere presence at exhibitions, attracting visitors and provoking a range of engagement with participants.

Two pieces of **research** were undertaken on Sphere's social media presence and website analytics in December. The first study showed that Facebook is being used very effectively, with substantial room for improvement when it comes to Twitter. The second study showed that due to the

The Right to Life with Dignity highlighted in the Sphere Project stand at the international trade fair AidEx (Brussels, November).

growing obsolescence of its content management system, the Sphere website is in need of an urgent overhaul in order to continue supporting the organisation's mission. Recommendations from both studies will be implemented in 2016.

Supporting Priority · **Fundraising & management**

Sphere's funding base is broad and diverse, allowing for the mobilisation of the financial resources required to achieve its strategic priorities.

In 2015, Sphere produced a **comprehensive budget and work plan** aligned with the *Sphere 2020* strategy and the Board-endorsed priorities as outlined above. The total expenditures of the year were CHF 1,177,745 with a small carry-over to support the development of operational reserves in 2016 (audited financial statements are available upon request from the Sphere office).

This budget was supported by **generous donors**, the majority of whom demonstrated strong commitment to Sphere through increased contributions and multi-year funding. Both the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) of the U.S. Department of State provided a 50% increase against previous funding. The German Humanitarian Assistance provided substantial multi-year funding as the lead contributor to Sphere via Board member Aktion Deutschland Hilft / Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe.

As part of strengthened management oversight, the Sphere office initiated quarterly meetings of the **Board Finance Committee** to review financial documents and updates provided by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) as the hosting organisation, allowing for more reliable predictions of expenditure and fundraising requirements.

Completing the **transition from IFRC to ICVA hosting**, the final OFDA funding extended to Sphere while at the IFRC was completed and reported with success in the Arabic-language outreach which it supported.

At the end of 2015, the Sphere Project office counted **six staff members**:

- **Christine Knudsen**, Director;
- **Cecilia Furtade**, Training and Promotion Officer;
- **Wassila Mansouri**, Programme Support (temporary contract);
- **Juan Michel**, Communications Management Senior Officer;
- **Aninia Nadig**, Advocacy and Networking Management Senior Officer (70%);
- **Loredana Serban**, Finance and Administration Senior Assistant (80%) replacing **Colette Menoud** who resigned her position in November.

Funding partners

Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) of the U.S. Department of State

German Humanitarian Assistance, Federal Foreign Office, Germany

Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

International Development Cooperation (DANIDA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark

Governance · **Sphere Project Board**

Sphere 2020, the Sphere Project strategic plan for the 2015-2020 period, was approved by the Board in January. The plan defines an ambitious agenda for Sphere to continue fulfilling its unique role within the humanitarian sector as a leading standards-setting initiative. Its four strategic priorities as well as two supporting priorities structured the programmatic work carried out by the Sphere office in 2015, as reflected in this report.

The Sphere Project Board **met in Rome on 27-28 May.** Hosted by Caritas Internationalis, the meeting endorsed concrete steps to implement Sphere 2020. Representatives of companion standards joined the partnership session.

At a side event to their first meeting of the year, Sphere Board members and representatives of companion standards met with officials from the World Food Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the Food Security Global Cluster. *Photo (from left to right): Sphere Board Chair **Unni Krishnan**; FAO's Emergency and Rehabilitation Division Director **Dominique Burgeon**; Minimum Economic Recovery Standards Board Chair **Tom Shaw**.*

A side event was organised with the **World Food Programme**, the **Food and Agriculture Organisation** and the **Food Security Global Cluster**. Participants discussed the concept of collective accountability and shared experiences from the field. They highlighted the role of Sphere and its companion standards in bringing the concept to life by grounding it in a common standards framework. Future areas of collaboration at organisational and cluster levels were identified.

Hosted by World Vision International and CARE International, the Board **met in Geneva on 17-19 November**. The Board welcomed the recently released set of guidance notes and indicators that completed the CHS. Having already endorsed the CHS Nine Commitments, Quality Criteria, Key Actions and Organisational Responsibilities at its November 2014 meeting in New Delhi, the Board considered that with its indicators and guidance notes, the CHS now meets the requirements to definitively replace the Core Standards chapter of the Sphere Handbook. Representatives of companion standards and of other standards-setting initiatives joined the partnership session. New officers were elected, with Martin McCann taking up the role of Chair and Julien Schopp that of Vice-Chair. Board members expressed heartfelt thanks to Unni Krishnan and Carsten Völz who served as Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively, as well as to Ian Ridley who served as interim Vice-Chair.

As a side event to the meeting, Board members participated in a **roundtable on Humanitarian Principles and Aid Effectiveness** on 18 November. Jointly hosted by the Swiss Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office and the Sphere Project, the roundtable was part of the cycle of conferences on principles guiding humanitarian action initiated by the International Committee of the Red Cross. The presentations (including those of two Sphere Board members on the panel) and discussion focused on how humanitarian practitioners and organisations use the principles and standards to guide decisions in some of the most difficult operating environments.

A "Roundtable on humanitarian principles and aid effectiveness" was held as a side event to the Sphere Board second meeting of the year. *Panellists (from left to right): Ambassador* **Manuel Bessler**, *Head of the Humanitarian Aid Department of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (Moderator);* **Terry Morel**, *Director of the Division of Emergency, Security and Supply at the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR);* **Barbara Mineo**, *Humanitarian Director, Oxfam Intermón;* **Sophie Orr**, *Strategic Adviser to the ICRC Director of Operations; and* **Vikrant Mahajan**, *CEO, Sphere India. © Louis Brisset / Sphere*

The Board and the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) decided to extend the agreement by which the latter hosts the **Sphere Project office** until the end of 2016.

At the end of the year the **Sphere Project Board** was composed of

- **Nan Buzard**, International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA);
- **Simon Eccleshall**, International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC);
- **Damaris Frick**, The Salvation Army;
- **Erik Johnson**, Lutheran World Federation / DanChurchAid;
- **Unni Krishnan**, Plan International;
- **Vikrant Mahajan**, Sphere India;
- **Martin McCann** (Chair), RedR International;
- **Barbara Mineo**, Oxfam International;
- **Mamadou Ndiaye**, ICVA / African Office for Development and Cooperation (OFADEC);
- **Mary Pack**, InterAction / International Medical Corps;
- **Pauliina Parhiala**, ACT Alliance;
- **John Plastow**, CARE International;
- **Greg Ramm**, Save the Children;
- **Ian Ridley**, World Vision International;
- **Julien Schopp** (Vice Chair), InterAction;
- **Karin Settele**, Aktion Deutschland Hilft / Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe (HELP);
- **Jan Weuts**, Caritas Internationalis;
- **Bart Witteveen**, Humanitarian Response Network of Canada.

The Sphere Board expresses its gratitude to **Hana Crowe**, **Gaim Kebreab** and **Carsten Völz**, who stepped down from the Board at various moments during the year.

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Should you have questions or feedback,
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