



The Sphere Project

*Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards
in Humanitarian Response*

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 establishes and promotes minimum standards by which the global humanitarian community responds to the plight of people affected by disaster or conflict. These standards, which cover life-saving areas of humanitarian response, 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 Core Standards which 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 endeavored 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 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 communities 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 aspects of humanitarian response not covered in the Sphere Handbook have seen their own standards developed by other initiatives through a rights-based consultative process inspired by the Sphere approach.

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; and the *Minimum Economic Recovery Standards* by the SEEP Network.

In numerous disaster- and conflict-affected countries, the humanitarian community has set up Sphere focal points that actively promote Sphere principles and standards with practitioners as well as national and local governments. Some Sphere partners play the focal point role at a regional level.