



# Sphere Glossary

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## A

### **Access**

The term is used, firstly, in relation to the proportion of the population that can use a service or facility. Unrestricted access means that there are no practical, financial, physical, security-related, structural, institutional or cultural barriers to accessing services or facilities. "Access" can refer to the general population (universal access), or to equitable access of people with specific needs.

The term may also be used to refer to the ability of aid agencies to gain secure access to populations in need.

### **Accountability**

the process of using power responsibly, taking account of, and being held accountable by, different stakeholders, and primarily those who are affected by the exercise of such power. For Sphere users, this means in particular:

- explain how their programmes conform with best practice and commonly agreed commitments (for example, evidence-based standards like Sphere) by sharing results and reasons for action and non-action in a particular context in a transparent way.
- involve stakeholders in their work. With regard to affected populations, this means taking into account their needs, concerns and capacities at all stages of humanitarian response, respecting their right to be heard and to be involved in decisions affecting their lives, and providing them with the means to challenge agencies' decisions.

(See also [Quality](#).)

### **Age**

**Children** are people between 0 and 18 years of age. This category includes infants (up to 1 year old) and most adolescents (10-19 years). This age category overlaps with that of youth (15-24 years).

**Adolescents** are people between the ages of 10 and 19.

**Youths** are people between 15 and 24 years. The end of adolescence and the beginning of adulthood vary in different societies. In emergency situations, adolescents have needs that are different from those of younger children and adults.

**Adults** are people from 25 to 60 years.

**Older people** are people over 60 years.

**Armed Conflict:** see [Conflict](#).

**Assessment:**

The process of establishing (i) the impact of a disaster or conflict on a society; (ii) the priority needs and risks faced by those affected by disaster; (iii) the available capacity to respond, including coping mechanisms of the affected population; (iv) the most appropriate forms of response given the needs, risks and capacities; and (v) the possibilities for facilitating and expediting recovery and development. An appropriate response depends on an understanding of the political, social and economic context within which aid is to be provided. It also depends on adequate evidence of needs and risk factors, including information derived from consultation with those affected by disaster.

The Sphere Minimum Standards – with assessment checklists for each chapter – provide a basis for context analysis, initial, rapid and in-depth assessments as well as joint needs assessments. They help to identify immediate needs and prioritise activities that will address these needs. Planning figures and minimum assistance levels are outlined globally to help formulate minimum response-wide outcomes. The standards therefore also serve to improve coordination across organisations and sectors.

**At-risk groups:** see [Risk](#).

## B

**Barrier**

In the Sphere Handbook, barrier mostly refers to factors that help prevent the further spreading of a disease, for example related to the management of human excreta and waste.

## C

**Capacity-building**

The strengthening of knowledge, ability, skills and resources to help individuals, communities or organizations to achieve agreed goals. In the context of this Handbook, capacity-building refers in particular to disaster-affected populations. "Capacity" is the combination of all those attributes available to achieve agreed goals.

## **Cash-based assistance (CBA)**

All programmes where cash (or vouchers for goods or services) is provided directly to beneficiaries. CBA can be delivered through electronic or direct cash, or via paper or e-vouchers. In the context of humanitarian assistance, CBA refers to the provision of cash or vouchers to individuals, households, or community recipients. It does not refer to cash or vouchers given to governments or other state actors. "Pre-requisite or qualifying conditions" are activities or obligations that must be met before receiving CBA. "Restrictions" are limitations on what a transfer can be spent on once received. CBA is one form of market-based programming.

## **Child-friendly spaces and schools**

Safe spaces and schools where communities create nurturing environments for children to access free and structured play, recreation, leisure and learning activities. Child-friendly spaces may provide health, nutrition and psychosocial support and other activities that restore a sense of normality and continuity. They are designed and operated in a participatory manner and may serve a specific age group of children or a variety of age ranges. Child-friendly spaces and schools are important throughout crises, from emergencies to recovery.

## **Civil-military coordination**

Engagement strategies range from coexistence to cooperation. Where possible, dialogue and interaction between civilian and military actors in humanitarian emergencies is essential to help protect and promote humanitarian principles, avoid competition, minimize inconsistency and, when appropriate, pursue common goals. Key elements are information-sharing, task division and planning. Coordination is a shared responsibility facilitated by liaison and common training.

The spectrum of civil-military engagement:

**Coexistence:** active engagement between humanitarian and military actors is either inappropriate or impossible, but interaction is unavoidable.

**Coordination:** dialogue between humanitarian and military actors is appropriate when it is possible to promote humanitarian principles, avoid competition, and minimise inconsistency in a relief operation.

**Cooperation:** generally, occurs only when military involvement in a traditionally humanitarian activity is required in order to save lives and alleviate suffering.

## **Civil Society**

Citizens who are linked by common interests and collective activity but excluding for-profit, private sector organisations. Civil society can be informal, or organised into NGOs or other associations.

## **Climate change**

This is a change of climate patterns that can be attributed directly or indirectly to human activity, that alters the composition of the global atmosphere, and that is not due to the natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.

## **Climate change adaptation**

Climate change pushes at-risk people beyond their capacity to cope and makes more people vulnerable to the effects of disasters. Climate change adaptation relates to interventions that seek to identify, reduce and manage risks associated with more frequent, severe and unpredictable weather events.

## **Code of Conduct**

A statement of principles and values that establishes a set of expectations and standards for how an organisation, government body or partner will behave, including minimum levels of behaviour expected and any disciplinary action that could follow in cases of non-compliance.

The Humanitarian Charter is largely based on the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) in Disaster Relief. For the full text of this fundamental Code of Conduct, see [Sphere Handbook Annex 2](#).

## **Communities and people affected by crisis**

The totality of women, men, girls and boys who are affected by disasters, conflict, poverty or other crises at a specific location – regardless of their vulnerabilities and capacities, their age, disability, nationality, race, ethnicity, health status, political affiliation, sexual orientation, gender identity or any other characteristic that they may use to define themselves.

## **Community engagement**

A dynamic process connecting the community and other stakeholders so that crisis-affected people have more control over the response and its impact on them. In public health crises, effective engagement links communities and response teams to maximise community influence to reduce public health risks, provide appropriate, accessible services, improve programme quality and establish accountability.

## **Competencies**

The knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes that staff need in order to be effective in their roles, and that ultimately determine an organisation's success.

## **Complaint**

A specific grievance of anyone who has been negatively affected by an organisation's action or who believes that an organisation has failed to meet a stated commitment.

## **Complex emergency**

A humanitarian crisis in a country or region in which authority has totally or substantially broken down due to multiple causes and where people's lives, wellbeing and dignity are affected. The crisis may have been caused by human activity (i.e., conflict or civil unrest) and/or by natural factors (e.g., drought, flood, hurricanes).

## **Conflict**

Violent fighting between two or more parties that threatens the safety and security of communities or of the general population. This includes situations of repression through coercion or fear backed by the threat of violence, as well as acts of violence up to and including the level of armed conflict.

According to international humanitarian law, the term "armed conflict" is used to refer to situations where hostilities reach a threshold synonymous with war. Although rarely

questioned when applied to conflicts between states, the term often comes under debate when used in relation to internal conflict. In essence, it involves armed parties at a higher and more sustained level of violence than "situations of internal disturbances and tensions, such as riots, isolated and sporadic acts of violence or other acts of a similar nature" ([Article 8.2\(d\), Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court](#)). The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has a special mandate in International Humanitarian Law and provides technical guidance on this question.

### **Conflict sensitivity**

Acknowledgement that humanitarian work could unintentionally increase existing conflicts or create new ones. Careful context analysis and programme design can reduce the potential for assistance to increase conflict and insecurity (including during natural disasters). "Do No Harm" is one of a range of methodologies for conflict sensitivity (see also [Protection Principle 1: Do-no-harm](#) and [Core Humanitarian Standard Commitment 3](#)).

### **Context**

Understanding context is central to working with the Sphere standards. Contextualisation is the process of interpreting the indicator baselines and targets according to context. A number of Sphere's cross-cutting themes help understanding context (see also [Cross-cutting themes](#)).

### **Coping mechanisms**

Some coping mechanisms are sustainable and helpful, while others may be negative, with potentially long-term harmful consequences, such as the sale of assets, reducing expenditure on medical care or education, consuming less food, or heavy alcohol consumption.

### **Corruption**

Abuse of entrusted power for private gain. This includes financial corruption such as fraud, bribery, extortion and receiving kickbacks (illicit payments in return for facilitating transactions or contacts with influential people). Exchanging relief goods in return for sexual favours, preferential treatment of friends or relatives when recruiting or providing assistance, and the manipulation of distribution lists and diversion of resources are also forms of corruption.

### **Crisis**

A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts that exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources and therefore requires urgent action. terms can refer to slow- and rapid-onset situations, rural and urban environments and complex political emergencies in all countries. Related terms are "disaster", mostly referring to natural disasters, conflict, and emergency.

### **Cross-cutting themes**

Cross-cutting themes focus on particular areas of concern in humanitarian response and address individual, group or general vulnerability issues. The at-risk groups included in the 2018 Sphere Handbook are: Children and child protection; Older people; Gender; Gender-based violence; Persons with disabilities; People living with and affected by HIV; Mental health and psychosocial support. The themes related to context are: Protracted crises; Urban settings; Civil-military coordination: Environment; Disaster risk reduction; Cash-based

assistance and markets; Supply-chain management and logistics; MEAL (see also [Context](#), [Inclusion](#), [Risk](#)).

## D

### **Data disaggregation**

Statistics separated according to particular criteria. For the humanitarian sector this is most commonly sex and age. As a minimum level of data disaggregation, Sphere proposes sex, age and disability data disaggregation (SADDD). Sex disaggregated data means separate population statistics for males and females, with the understanding that “gender” implies a more nuanced disaggregation. Age-disaggregated data separates population statistics by age groups. Disability disaggregated data follows the Washington Group questions.

### **Dignity**

The capacity to make one's own deliberate choices and consequently to be acknowledged as a free subject. It reflects the integrity of the person and is seen as the source from which all human rights derive (see also [The right to life with dignity, Humanitarian Charter point 5](#)).

The foundation of life with dignity is the assurance of access to basic services, security and respect for human rights. Equally, the way in which humanitarian response is implemented strongly affects the dignity and well-being of disaster-affected populations. The Humanitarian Charter and Protection Principles make particularly strong reference to dignity.

### **Disability**

Results from the interaction between persons with physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments and barriers of attitude and the environment that prevent their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. Persons with disabilities are diverse; in any humanitarian response, their unique capacities, socio-economic, educational, family and other background and resources need to be considered.

**Disaster:** see [Crisis](#).

**Disaster preparedness:** see [Preparedness](#).

### **Disaster risk reduction (DRR)**

The concept and practice of reducing the risk of disaster through systematic efforts to analyse and manage causal factors. It includes reducing exposure to hazards, lessening the vulnerability of people and property, wise management of land and the environment, and improving preparedness for adverse events. Risks can be caused by both climate (e.g. drought, floods and landslides) and non-climate related disasters (e.g. earthquakes, volcanoes and tsunamis). DRR contributes to strengthening resilience and therefore to the achievement of sustainable development (see also [Disaster preparedness](#)).

### **Do No Harm**

Underscores unintended impacts of humanitarian interventions and is an essential basis for the work of organisations in conflict situations. The concept has acquired a broader meaning that warns humanitarian agencies to avoid unintended negative consequences in any situation in which they operate in order that the humanitarian response might not further

endanger affected persons and might not undermine communities' capacities for peace-building and reconstruction. In its broader sense, it stipulates that humanitarian agencies should have policies in place to guide them during planning, monitoring and evaluation on how to handle sensitive information that can directly harm people's safety or dignity (see also [Protection Principle 1](#) and [Core Humanitarian Standard Commitment 3](#)).

**CHS: Duty of care**

A moral or legal obligation to ensure the safety of others. It entails meeting recognised minimum standards for the well-being of crisis-affected people and paying proper attention to their safety and the safety of staff.

**DRR:** see [Disaster risk reduction](#).

## E

**Early recovery**

A multi-faceted process of recovery in a humanitarian response setting. It is guided by development principles that build on humanitarian programmes and encourages sustainable development opportunities. It aims to generate self-sustaining, nationally owned, resilient processes for post-crisis recovery. It encompasses the restoration of basic services, livelihoods, shelter, governance, security and rule of law, environment and social dimensions, including the reintegration of displaced populations.

**Education in emergencies**

This refers to quality learning opportunities for all ages (including adults) in situations of crisis. Education in emergencies provides physical, psychosocial and cognitive protection that can sustain and save lives (see also [ineesite.org](http://ineesite.org)).

**Effectiveness**

The extent to which an aid activity attains its objectives. The effectiveness of humanitarian response is a responsibility that is shared between responders and outcomes should be assessed in conjunction with crisis-affected communities.

**Efficiency**

The extent to which the outputs of humanitarian programmes, both qualitative and quantitative, are achieved as a result of inputs.

**Emergency:** see [Crisis](#).

**Engagement**

The processes by which organisations communicate, consult and/or provide for the participation of interested and/or affected stakeholders, ensuring that their concerns, desires, expectations, needs, rights and opportunities are considered in the establishment, implementation and review of the programmes assisting them.

**Entitlement**

Refers to a right to benefits (goods or services) specified especially by law or contract. People affected by crisis have a right to protection and security and these and other rights are

enshrined in international humanitarian law and human rights declarations, which most countries have signed up to.

### **Environment**

The physical, chemical, and biological surroundings in which disaster-affected and local communities live and develop their livelihoods. It provides the natural resources that sustain individuals and determines the quality of the surroundings in which they live. It needs protection if these essential functions are to be maintained. A healthy environment contributes to disaster response.

### **Environmental degradation**

Refers to unsustainable natural resource exploitation and pollution that can further threaten disaster-affected populations and ecosystems. Some examples include land degradation, deforestation, desertification, wild-land fires and loss of biodiversity.

### **Environmental sustainability**

Refers to meeting present needs while not compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (see Shelter and Settlements standard 7: environmental sustainability).

### **Epidemic**

This refers to the occurrence of a number of cases of a disease that is unusually large for a given place and time. Synonym: "Outbreak".

### **Evaluation**

Usually an episodic assessment of performance, focused on results (outcomes and impacts) that can be internal or external. Evaluations can provide assessments of what works and why, and highlight intended and unintended results for accountability and learning purposes.

### **Evidence**

Information on which a judgment or conclusion can be based. In humanitarian work, many different sorts of evidence are used including subjective and qualitative information. Qualitative information is not necessarily information of a lower quality than quantitative information. ALNAP uses six criteria to judge the quality of evidence used in humanitarian action: "accuracy; representativeness; relevance; generalisability; attribution; and clarity around context and methods".

## **F**

### **Faith**

Spiritual or religious identity which may associate individuals or group with a faith community (see also Self-help and Psycho-social support).

### **Feedback mechanism**

A formal system established and used to allow recipients of humanitarian action (and in some cases, other crisis-affected populations) to provide information on their experience with a humanitarian agency or the wider humanitarian system. Such information is then used



for different purposes, in expectation of a variety of benefits, including taking corrective action to improve some element of the response. Feedback can also be provided informally.

### **Fraud**

The act of intentionally deceiving someone in order to gain an unfair or illegal advantage (financial, political or otherwise). This is usually considered as a violation of civil law.

## **G**

### **Gender**

The roles, responsibilities and identities of women and men and how these are valued in society. These vary in different cultures and change over time. Gender identities define how society expects women and men to think and act. Gender roles, responsibilities and identities can be changed because they are socially learned (see also [Gender-based violence \(GBV\)](#) and [Sex](#)).

### **Gender-based violence (GBV)**

An umbrella term for any harmful act perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences. The term GBV highlights the gender dimension of these types of acts; for example, the relationship between females' subordinate status in society and their increased vulnerability. Men and boys are also victims of GBV, especially sexual violence. The nature and extent of specific types of GBV vary across cultures, countries and regions. Examples include sexual exploitation and abuse, forced prostitution, forced/child marriage, domestic/family violence and harmful cultural/traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, honour killings, widow inheritance, and others (see also [Gender](#), [Sexual abuse](#), [Sexual exploitation](#), [Sexual harassment](#)).

### **Gifts-in-kind**

Any goods and services (other than money) received by an organisation as a donation. The purpose of gifts-in-kind is to assist an organisation in carrying out the purpose for which it was organised.

### **Guidance notes**

These include specific points to consider when applying the Minimum Standards, Key Actions and Key Indicators in different situations. They provide guidance on tackling practical difficulties, benchmarks or advice on priority issues. They may also include critical issues relating to the standards, actions or indicators, and describe dilemmas, controversies or gaps in current knowledge.

## **H**

### **Hazard**

A potentially damaging physical event, natural phenomenon or human activity that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, social and economic disruption or environmental damage.

## **Human rights**

Rights that every human being is entitled to enjoy simply by virtue of being human. They identify the minimum conditions for living with dignity that apply to all of us. They are universal and inalienable: they cannot be taken away. In an emergency context, certain human rights may be temporarily suspended, but only in exceptional circumstances and under strict conditions. Rights such as those concerning life, health and physical security are likely to be a priority for action in emergencies, governed by the principle of non-discrimination. Human rights are codified in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (1948) and in various international legal conventions concerning human rights (see also [Handbook annex 1: Legal foundation to Sphere](#)).

## **Humanitarian action**

The objectives of humanitarian action are to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations. Humanitarian action has two inextricably linked dimensions: protecting people and providing assistance (see [Humanitarian response](#)). Humanitarian action is rooted in humanitarian principles - humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

**Humanitarian assistance:** see [Humanitarian response](#).

## **Humanitarian response**

One dimension of humanitarian action. It focuses on the provision of assistance in a given emergency situation. The provision of emergency services and public assistance during or immediately after a disaster in order to save lives, reduce health impacts, ensure public safety, maintain human dignity and meet the basic subsistence needs of the people affected. Humanitarian response should be governed by the key humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Can be used interchangeably with Humanitarian assistance and Intervention.

**Humanitarian intervention:** see [Humanitarian response](#).

**Humanitarian civil-military coordination:** see [Civil-military coordination](#).



## **Impartiality**

The principle that humanitarian assistance is provided solely on the basis of, and in proportion to, need, without discrimination. Impartiality is objective and does not discriminate because of someone's nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class, tribal allegiances, political opinion or other such factors (see also [Inclusion](#)).

## **Inclusion**

A rights-based approach to community programming, aiming to ensure all people who may be at risk of being excluded have equal access to basic services and a voice in the development and implementation of those services. At the same time, it requires that organisations make dedicated efforts to address and remove barriers to access services.

Including diverse groups in programme design makes humanitarian response more comprehensive, inclusive and sustainable. Inclusion of, and participation by, the affected population is fundamental to life with dignity (see [Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for Older People and People with Disabilities](#)).

### **Non-discrimination**

The principle that unfair distinctions should not be made between people or communities on any grounds of status, including age, gender, race, colour, ethnicity, national or social origin, sexual orientation, HIV status, language, religion, disability, health status, political or other opinion, or other status. It does not mean that everyone should be treated in the same way, but is about equality of access and outcomes, allowing different types of assistance and support based on actual needs and capacities.

### **Informed consent**

Agreeing to an action based on a clear understanding of the facts, implications and consequences of the action.

### **Input**

The provision of small quantities of critical support that is part and parcel of the emergency response to crisis-affected countries in order to expedite a community's or country's recovery and avoid a continuing dependence on outside assistance. This is particularly important in the Food Security sector where agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizers and farming implements can be provided for reconstruction and recovery of the agriculture sector.

### **Integrity**

Involves behaviours and actions consistent with a set of moral or ethical principles and standards.

### **Internally displaced persons (IDPs)**

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border ([Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, Introduction, para. 2.](#)). (see also [Refugees](#)).

### **International human rights law**

The body of international treaties and established legal rules that govern states' obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights (see [UN Charter](#) of 1945 and the various human rights conventions listed under [Key Documents related to the Humanitarian Charter](#)). While some civil and political rights may legitimately be suspended (through derogation) at times of public emergency and in the interests of national security, this is permitted only in extreme circumstances and within the strict limits of necessity (see [Article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966](#)). The right to life, the prohibition of torture and certain other core rights can never be suspended, even temporarily; and neither can the principle of non-discrimination. During international or non-international armed conflict, international humanitarian law also applies (see: [International humanitarian law](#)). In

addition, international criminal law establishes certain acts as universal crimes, including war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.

### **International refugee law**

A set of rules and procedures that aims to protect, firstly, persons seeking asylum from persecution and, secondly, those recognised as refugees under the relevant instruments (see [Annex 1: Key documents that inform the Humanitarian Charter](#)).

### **International humanitarian law (IHL)**

Besides the provisions of human rights law, situations of armed conflict are also governed by international humanitarian law. The specific provisions that apply depend on whether the conflict is international or non-international (civil) in character. Various instruments, including the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 1977 Additional Protocols, regulate the conduct of hostilities and place duties on both state and non-state armed actors (See [Annex 1: Key documents that inform the Humanitarian Charter](#)).

## **K**

### **Key actions**

Suggested activities and inputs to help meet the Minimum Standards.

### **Key indicators**

"Signals" that show whether a standard has been attained. They provide a way of measuring and communicating the processes and results of Key Actions; they relate to the Minimum Standard, not to the Key Action.

## **L**

### **Livelihood**

The capabilities, assets, opportunities and activities required to be able to make one's living. Assets include financial, natural, physical, social and human resources, for example: stores, land and access to markets or transport systems. A household's livelihood is sustainable or secure when it can cope with and recover from shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and productive assets (see [Introduction to the Food Security and Nutrition chapter](#)).

## M

### **Market-based programming (MBP)**

(also called market-based interventions) – Projects that work through, or support, local markets. The term covers all types of engagement with market systems, ranging from actions that deliver immediate relief to those that proactively strengthen and catalyse local market systems or market hubs. Cash-based assistance is one form of market-based programming.

### **Mitigation**

The lessening or limitation of the adverse impacts of disasters. It includes physical infrastructural measures as well as improvements to the environment, strengthening livelihoods or increasing public knowledge and awareness.

### **Minimum Standards**

Specify the minimum qualitative levels to be attained in humanitarian response regarding the provision of food and nutrition.

### **Monitoring**

An ongoing and usually internal process of data collection focused on inputs and outputs.

### **Morbidity Rate**

The number of non-fatal cases of illness or injury occurring in a given population at risk during a specified period of time.

### **Mortality Rate (MR)**

The number of deaths occurring in a given population at risk (e.g., an emergency-affected population living in district X) during a specified period of time. In emergencies, the MR is commonly expressed as deaths per 10,000 persons per day.

### **Multipurpose cash grants (MPGs)**

Grants that are explicitly designed to fully or partially cover a set of basic multi-sector and/or recovery needs simultaneously. They are a regular or one-off transfer corresponding to the amount of money a household needs to cover – fully or partially – a set of basic and/or recovery needs.

## N

**Natural disaster:** see [Crisis](#).

**Non-discrimination:** see [Inclusion](#).

## O

### **Organisational responsibilities**

The policies, processes and systems that organisations need to have in place to ensure their staff provide high-quality, accountable humanitarian assistance.

**Outbreak:** see [Epidemic](#).

## P

### **Participation**

The processes and activities that allow crisis-affected people to play an active role in all decision-making processes that affect them. Real participation includes all groups, including the most vulnerable and marginalized. It enables people and communities to take part in decision-making processes and to take action on certain issues that are of concern to them. It is a way of identifying and mobilizing community resources and building consensus and support. Participation is voluntary.

### **Partners**

Organisations working jointly within a formal arrangement to achieve a specific goal, with clear and agreed roles and responsibilities.

### **Policy**

A documented statement of intent and rules for decision-making.

### **Population**

Individuals and groups such as families and communities. It is often expressed as "affected population" or crisis-affected population.

### **Practice**

Established actions or ways of proceeding; is often guided by policies and procedures.

### **Preparedness**

Activities and measures taken in advance of a crisis to ensure an effective response to the impact of hazards, including issuing timely and effective early warnings and the temporary evacuation of people and property from threatened locations. It can also apply to the state of readiness to respond as demonstrated by organisations, NGOs or government departments (see [Disaster risk reduction](#), [Hazard](#), [Risk](#)).

### **Prevalence**

The number of affected persons present in a given population at a specific time. In the Sphere Handbook, "prevalence" is a measure of the proportion of individuals in a population who have a certain disease at a specific time.

## **Prevention**

Actions taken to avoid the adverse impacts of hazards and related disasters upon people, property, livelihoods and the environment (see also [Disaster risk reduction](#), [Preparedness](#), [Resilience](#)).

## **Private sector**

Primarily for-profit institutions (i.e. businesses) but includes social enterprises where the primary aim is not profit and where profits might be reinvested in social causes. Private sector engagement refers to all types of involvement, ranging from acting as a supplier, donor, advisor or innovator, to businesses carrying out humanitarian response.

## **Protection**

All activities aimed at ensuring the full and equal respect for the rights of all individuals, regardless of age, gender, ethnic, social, religious or other background. It goes beyond the immediate life-saving activities that are often the focus during an emergency. Protection is in accordance with the letter and spirit of the relevant bodies of law, namely Human rights law, International humanitarian law and Refugee law.

## **Psychosocial support**

Processes and actions that promote the holistic well-being of people in their social world. It includes support provided by family, friends as well as the wider community. Examples of family and community support during crises include efforts to reunite separated children and to organize education in an emergency setting. See also [Self-help](#) and [Faith](#).

# Q

## **Quality**

Quality has two meanings in the Sphere Handbook.

Quality is about doing work well. In the humanitarian sector, this means effectiveness (impact), efficiency (timeliness and cost of a response or service) and appropriateness (taking account of needs and context) of elements of a humanitarian response. It requires assessments and feedback from stakeholders on what an agency is doing well and how it can learn how to do better. It means measuring outcomes against recognised mechanisms and/or standards (see also [Accountability](#)).

The term Quality is also used to refer to goods provided to affected populations that suit their purpose and are appropriate (e.g., food quality).

# R

## **Referral**

The process of directing a client to another service provider because s/he requires help that is beyond the expertise or scope of work of the current service provider. A referral can be made to a variety of services, for example health, psychosocial activities, protection services,

nutrition, education, shelter, material or financial assistance, physical rehabilitation, community centre and/ or a social service agency.

### **Refugee**

A refugee is someone who has fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and has crossed an international border to find safety in another country. It is someone who "is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" ([1951 Refugee Convention](#)). See also [Internally Displaced Person](#).

### **Resilience**

The ability of an individual, community, society or country to anticipate, withstand and recover from adversity - be it a natural disaster or crisis. Resilience depends on the diversity of livelihoods, coping mechanisms and life skills such as problem-solving, the ability to seek support, motivation, optimism, faith, perseverance and resourcefulness.

**Response:** see [Humanitarian Response](#).

### **Risk**

A risk is the likelihood of harm occurring from a hazard and the potential losses to lives, livelihoods, assets and services. It is the probability of external and internal threats (such as natural hazards, HIV prevalence, gender-based violence, armed attacks etc.) occurring in combination with the existence of individual vulnerabilities (such as poverty, physical or mental disability or membership of a marginalized group). Risk is mitigated by protection against physical hazards, reduction of structural and non-structural risks, resources and skills for disaster-preparedness, and resilience and coping skills. At-risk groups are, for example, persons with disabilities, street children or people living in less accessible regions (see [Hazard](#)).

### **Risk assessment**

A methodology to determine the nature and extent of risk by taking into account potential hazards and existing conditions of vulnerability that together could harm people, property, services, livelihoods and the environment on which they depend. Risk assessment should also take account of community capacity to resist or recover from the hazard impact (see also [Risk](#)).

## **S**

### **Safety**

The state of being safe. Refers to people's physical and personal wellbeing and integrity as well as to their freedom from physical, environmental, social, spiritual, political, emotional or psychological harm.

### **Security**

A general environment of law and order; freedom from physical threats.



**Self-help**

Allows those affected to help each other towards social and emotional recovery. See also [Faith](#) and [Psycho-social support](#).

**Sex**

The biological attributes of a person. It is natural, determined by birth and, therefore, generally unchanging and universal (see also [Data disaggregation](#) and [Gender](#)).

**Sexual abuse**

Actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions ([UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse \(PSEA\) \(ST/SGB/2003/13\)](#)).

**Sexual exploitation**

Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another ([UN Secretary-General's Bulletin on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse \(PSEA\) \(ST/SGB/2003/13\)](#)).

**Sexual harassment**

Unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature in the workplace that can include indecent remarks or sexual demands.

**Staff**

Any designated representative of an organisation, including national, international, and permanent or short-term employees, as well as volunteers and consultants.

**Staff capacity**

Considers how individual staff competencies work together to achieve organisational objectives.

**Staff competencies**

The knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that individuals develop in the course of their working life.

**Stakeholder**

Anybody who can affect or is affected by an organisation, strategy or project.

**Surge capacity**

Relates to the ability of an agency to scale-up quickly and to respond to large-scale crises.

**Sustainable**

Economically viable, environmentally sound and socially just over the long term.

**Sustainable development**

Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

## T

### **Targeting**

The act of attempting the direct transfer of goods and services to one or more specific group(s) at a specific time or place or in a specific form.

### **Transparency**

Refers to openness, honesty and communication. An activity, project or organisation is transparent if information about it is open and freely available to the public.

## V

### **Vulnerability**

The extent to which some people may be disproportionately affected by the disruption of their physical environment and social support mechanisms following disaster or conflict, resulting in an increased risk of exploitation, illness or death. Vulnerability is specific to each person and each situation. However, some groups commonly liable to increased vulnerability include unaccompanied children, persons with disabilities, older people, single-headed households, children formerly associated with armed forces and armed groups, and people suffering from ill health (including HIV and AIDS). (See also [Risk](#)).

## W

### **Whistle-blowing**

Whistleblowing is when a member of staff reports suspected wrongdoing at work. This includes the suspicion of fraud or misuse of resources, neglect of duties or when someone's health and safety is in danger.