

# Mid-Term Strategic Review

January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The focus on quality and accountability in humanitarian assistance is floundering against an ever-rising tide of pessimism and resignation in the face of so many challenges when trying to address the needs of crisis affected people. Aid agencies which face an existential funding crisis are disinclined to collaborate but adapt a survival of the fittest department. Both dynamics are happening at a time when humanitarian standards are needed now, more than ever, and when the ability to work together is fundamental to achieving collective outcomes.

There are many millions of people in dire need of humanitarian support and who rely on civil society, NGOs and multi-lateral agencies for life and livelihoods assistance. Failed States, populist and isolationist governments, climate chaos, protracted conflict with multiple proxy actors and health pandemics are ever increasingly the reality for many millions around the world. Humanitarian standards provide a baseline for effective, efficient, and ethical response in these crisis situations, and should be our starting point for engagement.

Since its inception in 1997, Sphere continues to be a learning network sustaining essential resources such as the Handbook, a broad process of collaboration and an expression of commitment to quality and accountability. Sphere is the leading global network on humanitarian principles and technical standards and as such hosts the Humanitarian Standards Partnership (HSP) as well as most recently the Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (MERS). The transition from Project to Association, with legal registration in Switzerland, is now fully established with a small Secretariat team based in Geneva. It is through the network of Focal Points, Trainers, Members and other Champions that ensures Sphere is not a book gathering dust on a shelf, but a living, practical, go-to guide and principled approach to humanitarian response.

After three years of the strategic period, and with two still to go, Sphere has achieved notable success in working towards the stated ambition of providing an “accountable and quality framework for preparedness, resource allocation, response, monitoring and advocacy, before, during and after disasters and crises.” Sphere’s commitment to making the Minimum Standards accessible and locally relevant by working closely with a global Sphere community of purpose and practice has resulted in an enviable network of committed Sphere ‘Champions,’ who are amplifying Sphere’s impact in many contexts around the world.

The Strategy has proved a useful guiding document for the Secretariat team in Geneva. It captures Sphere’s broad areas of potential intervention, without strictly defining the ways in which Sphere should achieve the strategic objectives identified. However, while this flexibility has been useful, it has also created an unmanageable number of priorities for the Sphere secretariat – thereby pulling Sphere’s work in multiple directions, where the organisation may not have always had the resources (human or financial) to fully engage. For example, there are eighteen objectives in the Five-Year plan and although they are not quantitative do present a challenge of strategic prioritisation. In the Theory of Change, Sphere has reduced the eighteen strategic objectives to four Objectives with seven targeted outcomes across four workstreams. Going into 2024/5, there are twelve Key Results associated with the four objectives to motivate and monitor progress. That said, it cannot be understated that Sphere has had substantial success with limited resources in the first three years of the strategic period.

Moving forward, Sphere will be able to build on this success most effectively by narrowing its focus, choosing a more limited number of strategic objectives and investing in the Sphere Network in order to achieve them. Sphere should aim to systematically monitor, evaluate and improve on its work, and will only be able to do that with outcomes and activities that are designed to be measured. Furthermore, Sphere will need to work to reinforce visibility of the standards as a foundational

element to humanitarian response, such that the organisation is able to fulfil its role as a thought leader and global resource for improved quality in humanitarian action.

In a period marked by escalating needs amid dwindling funding, the capacity to provide quality assistance is being strained. Difficult, sometimes life-threatening, decisions are also increasing, particularly when balancing quantity vs. quality assistance. There is therefore a clear role for Sphere to be promoting both the visibility and knowledge of the minimum standards so that humanitarian actors are making the right contextual decisions and able to advocate for quality and accountable assistance to all people in need.

Of particular concern is the financial viability of the Association which has suffered in the first three years, with long-term donors ending partnerships and some missed opportunities due to internal staff turn-over challenges as well as the wider sector having to adjust to the global economic downturn and reduced institutional donors available to enabling humanitarian networks.

## METHODOLOGY

A mixed method qualitative approach was adopted for the Review, using a combination of one-to-one interviews, group discussions and secondary data review. In total, a sampled range of around sixty key informants were reached, across the Sphere Secretariat, Board, Members, NGOs, UN agencies, donors, networks, quality and accountability initiatives, consultants and academia.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

*What did Sphere intend to ultimately achieve with the Five-Year Strategy and is this still suitable, acceptable and feasible?*

The Sphere Strategy 2021 – 2025 is titled ‘Global humanitarian standards for local action and preparedness’, with the strapline ‘Humanitarian standards matter’. There are four strategic priority areas: Sphere Standards; Sphere Community and Membership; Humanitarian standards and Accountability, Evidence, Impact and Learning. Within these priority areas there are a total of eighteen statements of intent as qualitative objectives (see Annex 1). The Vision statement reflects the Humanitarian Charter and is a statement of belief. The Mission statement is a concise description of what Sphere does with standards and the expected output. Both these statements are succinct, broad in scope and open-ended.

The positive attributes of the Strategy are that it is both concise (three pages) and yet also encompasses a wide range of proposed activities. It has proved useful as a guide for the Secretariat team with annual team plans, personal objectives and engagement with external stakeholders. Where it has been less valuable is in providing focus for Sphere’s activities. Of the eighteen intentions listed in the strategy, ten have been addressed and likely to be fully or partially achieved. The other eight intentions have not started mainly due to resource constraints or to deliberate postponement. To date, none have been fully achieved and completed, primarily because many of the statements of intent reflect core, ongoing activities of the Secretariat.

### **Has the work and achievements of the Sphere Secretariat under the strategic objectives addressed the key opportunities and threats the organisation faces?**

Regarding suitability and the mission statement: Sphere has not established new standards nor reviewed existing standards in the first three years of the Strategic plan time-frame – a core element of the mission statement. Based on feedback from its network, there is a recognition that ownership and implementation of new and updated standards by local actors takes time (translation, training, updating policies and practice). As such, the periodicity of the Handbook revision needs to be carefully

considered. Activities have focused on promotion of the use of standards both based on the Sphere Handbook and on other humanitarian standards initiatives (primarily of the HSP). This work has been carried out through existing structures of membership, focal points and partnerships as well as with stakeholders including State line ministries, UN agencies, coordination groups and bilateral engagement. These activities have provided Sphere with an ever-growing network of supporters and enabled active use of the sphere standards to continue 'before, during and after disasters and crises.' Additionally, Sphere has worked to cultivate new members, focal points and trainers in crisis-affected countries across the world, through which ownership and application of the standards can be more localised. However, Sphere has had difficulty tracking the ways in which this localisation of standards has actually happened. This is inherent to the Sphere model: Free and open-source access to resources allows the broadest dissemination of standards but makes tracking and evaluation more challenging.

Regarding suitability and the statements of intent for the four strategic objectives: The statements of intent do address key identified opportunities for Sphere. They are ambitious and as far as they require leadership and influence over the broader humanitarian community, they assume a level of visibility that Sphere has struggled to achieve during the first three years of the strategic period. To date, the Secretariat has focused on support to Focal Points and Trainers, as well as communication with the wider network including through newsletters and regular updates on the website. This was a major request from the network when the current strategy was developed. Sphere has also fundraised to support the development Sphere local capacities in several countries or contexts. Notably, Sphere was responsive to the war in Ukraine and successfully raised funds to support a regional programme in 2022. This was a good example of how the organisation is agile enough to take advantage of strategic opportunities, providing external support is secured.

#### **Have the strategic objectives met stakeholders' expectations?**

The strategic objectives themselves have largely met stakeholders' expectations. As noted previously, they cover an extremely wide range of activities and in general allows Sphere to offer something for everyone. Moreover, they are very closely aligned to Sphere's workstreams and are therefore easy to digest as representing the services that Sphere can provide. The limitation of the eighteen strategic objectives is that they are difficult to quantify and measure. They are generally worded in terms of values, and thus implicitly set a high bar for success. However, this also means that it is complicated or, in some cases, impossible to know when and how the objective has been achieved.

#### **Have the strategic objectives been sufficiently financed? Have capable people been recruited and retained? Has the planning been agile and flexible to support the strategy? Has the structure of the organisation and network been a good fit for the strategic objectives?**

Sphere has had enough funding to support a basic workplan but has had little room to address wish list activities. Again, because the strategic objectives have been phrased in broad terms, we can say that any activities completed against the objectives are *sufficient* to achieve those objectives. However, the Secretariat has identified a number of activities that they would ideally like to complete under all the strategic objectives and have largely been unable to engage in those activities due to lack of funding. That said, the Secretariat has been agile and successfully pivoted towards unexpected opportunities for funding, as well as working towards the achievement of certain objectives through strategic collaboration with partners (instead of relying on additional funding). Additionally, the flat structure of the Secretariat has enabled the secretariat team to maintain a strong collaborative spirit, and individual staff, particularly in 2023, have been able to contribute to the team's work beyond what is defined in specific job descriptions.

Maintaining a small Secretariat has several advantages for the achievement of the strategic objectives. Specifically, the objective is for the secretariat to function as a global convenor and facilitator and to support as much as possible, including financially, local ownership of standards through its network of members and focal points. However, the ambition to maintain and grow the global relevance of Sphere – a point made in all four of the statements of intent – does require some reflection. There are a number of staffing models to consider such that the broader Sphere network is able to fully contribute to the achievement of the strategic objectives. Choices about what structure to pursue will have differing implications in terms of costs and expected results, but having a structure which allows for further decentralisation of Sphere’s activities may be advisable. Additionally, within the central Secretariat, perhaps the most notable gaps in human resources relative to the achievement of the strategic objectives are (1) a grant management focused role, and (2) a coordinator for the HSP. For the time being, substantial time and effort are being diverted from several members of the team to cover these responsibilities and leaving those team members with less time for their core work.

To what extent are the Strategic Objectives informed by Sphere’s Vision, Mission & Values (formal or otherwise)?

While there is clearly a flow from the 2021-5 Strategy vision and mission to the strategic priorities and strategic objectives, it is, in some cases, difficult to draw direct causal linkages between the two. For example, the Vision refers to the importance of putting affected people at the centre of decision-making, but the strategic priorities and objectives include little about crisis-affected populations. Instead, most references to localisation and contextualisation refer to Sphere’s network of focal points and trainers. While these two things are not always mutually exclusive, it is not immediately clear that support for the Sphere network is putting crisis affected people at the centre of decision-making.

The strategic priorities and objectives cover Sphere’s core workstreams. The objectives place heavy emphasis on Sphere supporting and improving the humanitarian sector, and one can infer that such improvements in the sector will contribute to fulfilling the value statements in the vision and mission.

The existing Sphere values of Dignity, Evidence, Collaboration were not immediately known to the Secretariat Team when questioned in early 2023, and it was decided to review them with the intent of having motivational values that are foundational to everyone’s work. In 2023, revised values were discussed at three team meetings and progress made in ensuring that Sphere will be able to announce new values in 2024.

Are the Strategic Objectives still relevant, and which existing or new Objectives should be prioritised in the second phase?

While the strategic objectives remain relevant going into the second half of the strategic period, they need to benefit from a sharper focus. As noted above, it is extraordinarily ambitious to offer eighteen strategic objectives to be fulfilled by only seven staff. Even where it is possible, having Sphere pulled between so many competing priorities is likely to water down successes, as staff will be forced to do less concentrated work on any one objective to try to cover some work on all eighteen objectives. It is therefore necessary for the Sphere team to reexamine the organisation’s vision and mission, ensure that it properly captures Sphere’s goals for the strategic period, and then link and narrow down the objectives accordingly. An Objectives-Key Results framework alongside a new Theory of Change has been produced as a result of this finding.

Regarding advocacy and visibility, Sphere intends to bring back both an urgency and a focus on dignity and quality of aid. It is not a stretch to argue that the quality of humanitarian assistance has peaked and will be in decline for the foreseeable future. With increased needs and decreased

funding, aid workers are forced to make decisions which goes against their very motivation to support crisis-affected communities. ALNAP’s State of the Humanitarian System 2022 reported that aid recipients were 2.7 times more likely to say that the aid they received was of good quality than in 2018. However, this statistic came from only 33% of the 4,000+ people surveyed and does not reflect the complexity of obtaining an objectively representative number, given that in 2022 there were 216 million aid recipients. And a stark contrast to last year with 128 million aid recipients, a decrease due mainly to funding shortfall. The SOHS also stated that *“the majority of aid recipients and humanitarian practitioners interviewed in our field studies felt that humanitarian needs assessments largely failed to consult communities sufficiently or effectively”* and that agencies were often forced to *“compromise on the quantity or quality of assistance.”* (ALNAP (2022) The State of the Humanitarian System. ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI.)

In WFP’s own words: *“With 333 million people around the world facing acute hunger, we were forced to cut rations outright for millions of people in countries such as Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, and Yemen, pushing families deeper into hunger. We are in danger of entering a humanitarian doom loop, where WFP saves the starving at the cost of allowing millions of other hungry people to sink deeper into hunger and move closer to the edge of starvation.”*

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|  <p><b>Cuts in food assistance have left people at risk of starvation:</b><br/>In Afghanistan, the number of people receiving food assistance drastically decreased from 13 million people in May, to 3 million in November. In Syria, the World Food Programme \(WFP\) had to halve food rations to many people and decreased the number of people receiving assistance from 5.5 million in the first half of the year, to 3.3 million by November. WFP estimates that every one per cent cut in food assistance risks pushing more than 400,000 people towards the brink of starvation.</p> |  <p><b>A lack of funding for shelter has caused people to live in inadequate and undignified conditions:</b><br/>In Haiti, over 300,000 people have been forced to live in undignified conditions or remained exposed to natural disasters. In Myanmar, over half a million people are facing inadequate living conditions due to 90 per cent of required shelter activities \(construction, reconstruction and repair\) not being implemented as a result of resource and access constraints.</p> |  <p><b>Under-resourcing of water, sanitation and healthcare have exposed people to a heightened risk of disease and death:</b><br/>In Mali, over 1 million people are expected to face increased epidemics and water-borne diseases without WASH assistance at scale. And in Yemen, over 80 per cent of people targeted for humanitarian response had to go without improved water and sanitation in 2023, as estimated by UN Habitat.</p> |
|  <p><b>Lack of investment in protection, including preventing and responding to gender-based violence, has left survivors of violence and violations, as well as those at greatest risk, without access to vital services.</b><br/>In Nigeria, only 2 per cent of the people targeted by UNFPA received sexual and reproductive health services and GBV prevention. Globally, only 53 per cent of targeted women and girls were able to access comprehensive GBV services through UN Women.</p>   |  <p><b>Lack of access to critical support and services has fuelled protection risks.</b><br/>In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, only 7.2 million people \(or 72 per cent of the projected target\) were reached with one form of aid. Cuts to food aid and other assistance have been linked to increased gender-based violence.</p>   |   |](https://www.wfp.org/stories/2023-pictures-ration-cuts-threaten-catastrophe-millions-facing-hunger#:~:text=WFP%20cut%20general%20food%20assistance,already%20on%20half%2Drations))</a>)</p>
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Source: *Global Humanitarian Overview 2024, humanitarianaction.info*

## Is Sphere succeeding in impact and how can Sphere better demonstrate and measure impact?

The widespread confidence in the Sphere standards – and particularly in its technical chapters – across the humanitarian community is strongly suggestive of Sphere having a positive impact on humanitarian response. In addition, the recently implemented project in Ukraine and neighbouring countries has also demonstrated that standards were relevant and helpful for non-traditional humanitarian actors involved in the response. However, the Secretariat and Sphere network has continued to struggle to capture impact in a way that goes beyond anecdotal evidence. There are a number of complicating factors to determining Sphere’s impact. First, the fact that Sphere ensures all its materials are open source and freely available makes tracking the use and impact of those resources nearly impossible. Secondly, the contextualised nature of every humanitarian crisis makes it difficult to aggregate experiences to express any type of global impact of the standards. Finally, the ultimate impact Sphere aims to achieve is that people affected by crisis are able to live with dignity. Proving that people did not die and are living a dignified life due to Sphere is understandably complicated.

That said, there are steps that can be taken for Sphere to better demonstrate and measure impact going forward. First, Sphere must be much more intentional about the impact that it intends to have, and the path through which that identified impact will be achieved. In 2023, the Secretariat has put significant work into developing a clear Theory of Change, which does exactly this. By identifying intended impact at the outset, Sphere will be better placed as we move into the second half of the strategic period, to establish baselines, and monitor and evaluate any change that occurs due to its intervention. It is also recommended that Sphere explores the potential for a self-assessment of Sphere implementation.

According to the Strategy, Sphere’s ambition for change focuses on

- Three major external facing areas of change
  - Awareness and use of standards
  - Accessibility – including through digital channels and expansion of language of translated standards.
  - Localization and contextualization (including development of tailored technical guidance) and ownership.
- Two internal or institutional areas of change
  - Expansion and diversity of sphere’s network and influence
  - Collaboration and support for the broader community of practice/standard setting architecture

In brief, if Sphere can achieve results in these five areas, it will have the impact defined in its vision and mission of the current strategy. Each of these five areas can be measured through quantitative and qualitative means. They can be measured in aggregate – meaning looking at all relevant initiatives over a given period – but can also be viewed through a more focused lens of measuring specific outcomes of individual initiatives (example: Sphere’s thematic sheets, or a particular training initiative)

A significant portion of what needs to be measured could come from surveys or interviews of Sphere’s network and/or the broader humanitarian community (particularly as it relates to the “internal or institutional areas of change”). In mid-2023, a broad survey of this nature was conducted in order for

the Secretariat to better understand how, and by whom, the Sphere standards are being used, such that Sphere's targets for impact can be more clearly defined. Additionally, the Secretariat has committed to carrying out two targeted evaluations in the next two years as well as a broader impact study by 2025. If these types of evaluations are made, and Sphere can tie them to a clear and easily communicated Theory of Change, the organisation will effectively be able to capture evidence of systematic impact.

## IMPLEMENTATION

*What results have been achieved at the interim stage in each of the key areas of activity: Partnerships & Fundraising, Members, Champions (Focal Points & Trainers), Communications, Learning, Events, Policy, and Operations (HR, Finance, Administration)?*

### Sphere Standards

Sphere has provided a wide range of new training and learning events including: the Sphere in Practice self-paced 10-hour online course in French, Arabic and Spanish; the Sphere in Practice Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) in English (2021) and French (2022); a new online Sphere training package was developed and released in English, French, Spanish and Arabic; Sphere ToT events in South-Eastern Europe, the Republic of Ireland, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Hong Kong and Venezuela, and Mozambique; a new training package for working with NDMAs. This was developed in Spanish and subsequently translated into English, French and Arabic (abridged versions); and launched a new Sphere for Urban Settings training package; Sphere updated and restocked its Handbook activity cards, releasing a new training package to support this innovative product, including guidance for in-person and online workshops. Finally, Sphere offered training in online teaching methods for 72 trainers in three workshops (two in English and one in Spanish) during the first half of the strategic period.

Sphere has specifically targeted the accessibility of its products, with the aim of ensuring the greatest number of users for its products. A web content accessibility audit was completed, paving the way for more accessible products and services, following which Sphere resolved hundreds of issues on the Sphere website, Interactive Handbook and Learning Management System (LMS) resulting in more accessible platforms. Additionally, Sphere made its e-learning courses more accessible by adding a 'skip log-in' feature to its learning management system, allowing learners to access Sphere courses without or before creating a user account. The new HSP website was audited for accessibility during development and 49 of 51 issues identified were fixed before release.

Handbook translations initiated by the Sphere global community are an indicator of the continued relevance and demand for Sphere standards. European Portuguese, Turkish, Urdu, Bahasa Indonesia, Lingala, Congo Swahili, Tshiluba, Kikongo, Hungarian, Dari and Traditional Chinese Handbooks were completed, further supporting local uptake of the standards and bringing the total number of 2018 Sphere Handbook translations to 24 (including English). There are forty-nine languages across all Handbook editions (including English Braille). In response to the conflict in Ukraine, Sphere implemented a programme for Eastern Europe, including translating the Handbook into Ukrainian, Polish, Slovak and Romanian; and disseminating the minimum standards in Ukraine and neighbouring countries. A further ten new language translations are in progress.

Having first hosted online meetings to better understand the needs of its network, Sphere developed in collaboration with its members and focal points a new Thematic sheet: Engaging National Disaster Management Authorities (NDMAs). This guide presents best practices on how to engage with government agencies and local authorities to promote the institutionalisation and local adaptation of



the Sphere standards. Working with local and national authorities is seen by Sphere's local partners as a strategic avenue to increase the uptake of standards and deliver on Sphere's mission.

Sphere supported and contributed as much as possible to the CHS Revision in 2022 and 2023 through participation by the Executive Director, supported by Partnerships Director and Head of Policy on the CHS Revision Steering Committee, Management Working Group and Writing Group with War Child UK and Fraternity International Humanitarian Missions representation. Sphere staff also spent a lot of time supporting CHS Alliance colleagues in Communications and event planning.

### Sphere Network

Sphere reviewed its governance and membership model in consultation with its stakeholders. The General Assembly in April 2021 approved a new membership structure and lower membership fees. The objectives are to increase engagement of national and local organisations and to diversify Sphere's governance and membership to better reflect the Sphere network. Members elected a new Governing Board which will serve for three years from December 2021. The new Board is more representative of the Sphere network, with better gender balance and representation from regional and national organisations. Following elections in late 2021, Sphere co-opted four additional members into its Governing Board to increase diversity of experience and expertise.

Sphere has been able to expand its network of members, focal points, and trainers during the first half of the strategic period. Membership of Sphere was expanded with new members including: PALPER asbl (Democratic Republic of the Congo), International Blue Crescent (Turkey), *Solidarite des Femmes pour le Bien-être et le Progrès* (Burundi), SHIFA Welfare Association (Pakistan) and DPNet-Nepal. Sphere welcomed ten additional focal points to its global network: in The Netherlands (KUNO), the Republic of Ireland (CONCERN Worldwide), Guatemala (Red Esfera Guatemala), Portugal (FIHM), Haiti (Christian Aid), Moldova (Caritas), Slovak Republic (Samaritans), Taiwan (Taiwan Aid), Philippines, and Ukraine (Opora). Finally, twenty new trainers were welcomed to the community of listed Sphere trainers, increasing the number of trainers available in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Canada, France, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkey and Venezuela. Sphere supported its network to establish regional Sphere platforms for sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. The Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Initiative for South-Eastern Europe (DPPI-SEE) became Sphere's third regional partner (following CWSA and AHSN) in early 2023. Sphere continued to support local ownership of standards by providing grants, guidance, and technical assistance to focal point activities locally.

In total, the Sphere network participated in over 300 Sphere-related events which are in the Sphere Calendar on the Sphere website (<https://spherestandards.org/events/>), demonstrating the power of the network – notably focal points, trainers and members – to disseminate Sphere standards around the world. The total number of training interventions including Sphere content globally is likely to be several times higher than reported, as only a relatively small number of people and organisations engage directly with the crowd-sourced Sphere Calendar. For example, there are known to be pools of active trainers managed by focal points acting autonomously from the Sphere secretariat, Sphere is taught in many undergraduate and postgraduate courses, and training interventions organised by any of the other eight HSP partners should cover at least the shared foundation chapters that are an integral part of the Sphere Handbook.

### Humanitarian Standards

Sphere continued to lead the Humanitarian Standards Partnership (HSP), convening regular meetings with partners, and promoting collaboration. The HSP gained three new HSP partners in 2021 and 2022:

the CHS Alliance (associate member), the Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster, and SEADS (standards for supporting crop-related livelihoods in emergencies). In order to facilitate collaboration among the HSP membership, Sphere launched the first HSP website (<https://hspstandards.org/>), available in four languages, and continued to develop the functionality of the HSP Interactive Handbook. This online resource was consulted over 150,000 times during 2021 and 2022. With thirteen additions during 2022 alone, the platform now hosts 35 documents: Sphere in 11 languages; Minimum Standards for Camp Management (MSCM) in 6; Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (MERS), Child Protection Minimum Standards (CPMS), and Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for Older People and People with Disabilities (HIS) in 4 each; and Minimum Standard for Market Analysis (MISMA), Livestock Emergency Guidelines (LEGS), Minimum Standards for Education (INEE), Standards for Crop-related Livelihoods in Emergencies (SEADS).

The Handbook Digital Platform is the HSP's end-to-end digital publishing system, of which the Interactive Handbook is the front end. Sphere worked with a prospective HSP member to successfully develop the back-end *Editor Suite* interface so that a team of authors and experts can efficiently manage thousands of user comments received during public consultations. Additionally, the HSP launched the HSP Navigation tool. Integrated into the Interactive Handbook, the tool provides thematic entry points into the portfolio of HSP minimum standards. The usage dashboard on the Interactive Handbook was also enhanced for a better interface and visualisations, including a heat map which shows the global distribution of users, and further enhanced to provide usage data disaggregated by language to help HSP partners better understand usage and demand.

As one of the three copyright holders of the Core Humanitarian Standard, Sphere worked closely with the CHS Alliance as the lead agency, and Groupe-URD, to plan and manage the CHS revision process. Additionally, Sphere engaged with several initiatives which are currently developing and testing new humanitarian standards. Specifically, Sphere worked with a cross-networking group consisting of the IFRC, the Partnership for Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction (PEDRR), Friends of Ecosystem-based Adaptation (FEBA) and the Environment and Humanitarian Action (EHA) Network on "Nature-based solutions (NbS) for climate-based resilience in humanitarian action: a Sphere Unpacked Guide." The new guide was launched during the Humanitarian Network and Partnerships Week (HNPW) 2023. Sphere advocated with various other standards and guidance setting organisations, including the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and Clusters, to promote coherence, discourage duplication, and enhance access to and use of standards and guidance.

#### Accountability, Evidence, Impact

Sphere supported the collection of best/promising practice in the form of case studies. Specifically, Sphere released two case-study videos in its Sphere in Action series: 1) *Applying Sphere standards in Brazil*: filmed on location in Roraima, it demonstrates how Sphere's focal point, Fraternidade – International Humanitarian Federation, applies Sphere standards in their camps for refugees and migrants from Venezuela. In 2021, Brazil was struggling with one of the highest COVID-19 death rates in Latin America. 2) *Applying Sphere standards in Haiti*: filmed partly on location in Haiti by Sphere's focal point in Germany. Additionally, Sphere practitioners shared their success stories, including from Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Zimbabwe, Ukraine, Burkina Faso, Venezuela, and Nepal. Following the popular series of COVID-19 webinars in 2020, Sphere released a corresponding series of COVID-19 case studies in 2021. Each case study is written by practitioners in the field, and includes lessons learned and good practice for applying humanitarian standards in contexts which were further complicated by the virus. Finally, Sphere collated case studies illustrating how focal points worked with governments to ensure that Sphere is referenced in local, departmental or national disaster management authority policies and guidelines.

Sphere released a major new unpacked guide, Sphere in Context and for Assessment, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (CAMEL), which describes how to work with standards, how to contextualise indicators and the advantages of including Sphere indicators throughout the humanitarian programme cycle. The new guide is an evolution of two earlier ones: Sphere for Assessments (2014) and Sphere for Monitoring and Evaluation (2015).

Through consultations with its network and desk research, Sphere started to gather and compile country-level information on where Sphere is embedded in the policy document of national, including disaster management authorities and other line ministries, and sub-national/local government actors.

Sphere’s Head of Policy and Practice was replaced with a *Head of Policy and Impact* and Sphere secured earmarked funding for Impact Evaluation and Monitoring & Evaluation. These deliberate actions set the stage for advances in Sphere’s ability to define, measure and provide evidence of impact from 2023 forwards.

### Communication and Representation

Sphere continued to disseminate information, resources, and materials on humanitarian standards and to advocate for their application globally. Sphere remains committed to producing most of its content in at least English, French, Spanish and Arabic, and encouraging and supporting the Sphere network to produce further translations and localised materials. During 2021 and 2022, the Sphere website was visited over 500,000 times by around 340,000 unique users. The HSP website, launched during the fourth quarter, made a positive start, attracting 2,664 unique visitors by the end of the year. During 2021 and 2022, Sphere added 36 articles to its news feed and continued to engage with its global community through social media platforms, reaching, as at the end of 2022, 19,221 followers on Facebook (9.1% growth during 2022), 10,203 on Twitter (5.0%), 6,772 on LinkedIn (38.3%) and 4,650 on YouTube (15.1%). Sphere ran sixteen mail campaigns during the 2021 and 2022 and continues to reach around 100,000 subscribers. Sphere updated its social media strategy, to focus on collaboration with its network of focal points, members, and trainers to co-create and cross-post content to reach new audiences across the globe in multiple languages. Sphere added over 30 videos to YouTube during 2021 and 2022 – including interviews, animations, webinar recordings and other content.

Representation: Sphere staff and Governing Board members were invited to present, join panel discussions and facilitate workshops on Sphere and the HSP, including for University of Colombo (Sri Lanka), World Food Programme, KUNO (Netherlands), Arbeiter Samariter-Bund Haiti, USU F. Herbert School of Medicine (USA) and GCHS (Switzerland), OCHA, ICVA, CHA (Centre for Humanitarian Action) and the IFRC, among others.

### Funding - CHF

<b>Supporting Partners</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)	150,000	150,000	150,000	150,000
The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), United States State Department	247,559	220,810	288,743	294,104

Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	406,028	375,700	120,196	258,314
German Federal Foreign Office (AA)	190,456	369,218	248,522	0
Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA)	153,219	70,156	0	0
Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC, UK)	0	0	188,197	128,550
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,147,262</b>	<b>1,185,884</b>	<b>995,658</b>	<b>830,968</b>

During the first half of the strategic period, Sphere has been able to rely on continued support from a few key donors including BPRM, BHA and SDC. However, with a few exceptions, notably funding for Sphere’s work in the Ukraine response from the Disasters Emergency Committee in 2022j Sphere has struggled to secure funding from new donors and has had to manage a gap in funding from the German and the Danish Foreign Ministries. Recognising the need to diversify its income streams and to continue to develop as an organisation, Sphere is actively working to grow, maintain and restart partnerships with the donors listed above, as well as seek out new funding from institutional donors and foundations.

#### Membership and Governance

The Secretariat team were widely praised for being responsive and supportive to members, especially given the limited resources. Some felt that even more could be done in terms of being visible at members headquarters and giving presentations on Sphere to senior leadership. Peer support between members – more could be done by the Secretariat to broker relationships and connections between members for practical advice on implementation, to share guidelines and to pull together good practice from members.

Membership fees represent approx. 15% of the total income for Sphere. Collecting fees from members allows Sphere to maintain its independent voice and reach, as well as encouraging a sense of ownership from its members. The April 2021 decision to decrease membership fees was taken, in part, to further attract membership from the global south. It is difficult to assess at this stage, whether the decrease in fees has achieved this outcome though it has certainly helped with membership retention in a difficult financial context for many organisations. However, as Sphere and its membership model continues to evolve, the goal of maintaining a balance between northern and southern voices in its governance structures will remain a priority.

Member Quote: Johanniter

*“The Sphere Handbook is a voluntary code, and organisations cannot sign up to it. Committing to its use in the strategy of an organisation is a good way of endorsing its principles and standards and implementing programmes accordingly”.* Dr. Oliver Hoffmann, Strategy & Learning Team, Johanniter International Assistance and joint Sphere Focal Point Germany

Maintaining a fee-based membership model – while also remaining committed to providing all content as open-source – is an ongoing challenge for Sphere. NGOs are increasingly tired of paying (and in some cases, increasingly unable to pay) multiple fees to a plethora of networks and quality and accountability initiatives. While Sphere relies on the membership fees currently and will continue to

do so through the remainder of the strategic period, the organization must consider taking steps to move away from the fee-based membership model as it moves towards 2026 and beyond.

#### **Operations (HR, Finance, Administration)**

In 2022 there was significant staff turnover in the Sphere secretariat, which included the departure of the Executive Director. Of the seven-person team, all but three changed between February and December of 2022. The Head of Finance and Administration turned over twice in the span of three months. Additionally, of the three staff who had been with the team in 2021, one had only started with the organisation in September of that year. That said, the team has been stable since the beginning of 2023, and is motivated to work and progress collectively.

The Sphere team has a flat structure, which has contributed to an environment of collaboration. While each team member has her/his area of expertise, the fact that it is a small group requires that individuals be willing to support in activities that may sometimes be technically outside the strict confines of a particular job description.

As mentioned earlier in the report, the most noticeable current gaps in staffing are that of a grants/fundraising-focused role, and a dedicated HSP coordinator. The latter has existed in the past, but funding is not currently available for that role. While the responsibilities that would foreseeably fall under these two positions are, at present, being covered by current staff, that coverage comes at a cost to the work that they are able to do within their assigned portfolios.

Sphere is grateful to the CHS Alliance for reaching out and offering to share their office space in the Humanitarian Hub. This is a clear demonstration of the intent by both agencies to work together even more and to consider other ways to collaborate and share resources which will be realised in the coming two years.

#### **Risks**

Sphere's existence is predicated on the confidence that quality remains a focus for the humanitarian community and that it has in the necessity of minimum standards, and the high-quality tools that Sphere provides to meet that need. Any loss of this confidence, whether due simply to lack of visibility in an increasingly crowded field, or to actual difficulty in the use of the standards, is problematic, and a substantial loss of confidence could be catastrophic for the organisation. Additionally, there is a risk that the perceived number of standards initiatives and their hosts, could drive donors and others to force mergers of various initiatives (including Sphere) before due process including feasibility scoping can be carried out in overly hasty efforts to consolidate and streamline work in this area.

Sphere has managed the first risk by being extremely inclusive in the creation and revision of its flagship product: the Sphere Handbook. The humanitarian community has confidence in the handbook because it is based on widespread consensus of current and past practitioners. In the past few years, the visibility of Sphere has waned among certain segments of the sector particularly in the global North as well as a lack of presence of tables of influence at the highest level, and the Secretariat is committed to reviving its presence and visibility in the appropriate forums, such that Sphere remains a foundation for quality in humanitarian work. There is also some confusion in the sector between the CHS Alliance and Sphere Association as entities, and between the Core Humanitarian Standards (wrongly pluralised) and the Sphere Minimum Standards. However, there is no question that Sphere reaches and continues to reach front-line aid workers for Sphere continues to have a dedicated and growing community of practitioners among international, national, local and grassroots organisations. Sphere is taught in many universities around the world ensuring the next generation of humanitarian professionals are aware of Sphere and its essential and ubiquitous position in the sector. However,

with ubiquity comes a risk of complacency, which has been particularly noticeable in the last few years among the technocrats in Geneva, the large INGOs, UN agencies, and some donors, who may have lost sight of the importance of Sphere. Sphere is, and always has been, a common language and powerful force for levelling up, for reducing power imbalances, for giving smaller local and national organisations a voice. Sphere is passionate about accessibility and reaching people and organisations that are hard to reach - in keeping with the humanitarian objective of providing assistance to those that need it most. The downside of this approach is that Sphere has not focused as much attention as perhaps it should at senior level on the powerful and influential organisations in the sector, which has limited our visibility on the international stage especially over the last five years, and which may have contributed to a reduced capacity to attract funding for the Sphere Association.

Sphere has managed the second risk, in part, by actively seeking closer collaboration with the CHS Alliance and other partners, and dialogue with other standards initiatives, both through the HSP and through work on Unpacked Guides (which address how Sphere standards can be used for new or emerging issues/contexts). This approach helps to streamline the various standards, highlight their complementarities, and avoid duplication. That said, the risk of limited funding forcing mergers is reasonably strong – and has already been seen with other smaller standards initiatives. It is therefore essential for Sphere to be able to consistently demonstrate its ongoing added value (in some cases, over and above other standards initiatives) to the humanitarian community.

For further information on risks that Sphere faces, and mitigation strategies being employed to minimize the threat that these risks pose to the organisation, please see Annex 4 – Risk Register.

#### 2024/25 High-Level Plan

#### SWOT Analysis, March 2023:

<p><u>Strengths:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustained strong relevance and reputation of the Humanitarian Charter and awareness of the Sphere Handbook across the sector.</li> <li>• Legitimately localised: passion and ownership of Focal Points and Membership all around the world.</li> <li>• Significant reach.</li> <li>• Hosting of the HSP.</li> <li>• Close collaboration with the CHS Alliance.</li> <li>• Sphere is the repository of commonly agreed best practice – especially from the HSP.</li> <li>• Multi-lingual Handbook available in forty-nine languages.</li> <li>• Motivated, small Secretariat team with agile approach and mindset and no bureaucracy.</li> <li>• Footprint relative to team/budget size.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Weaknesses:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial sustainability due to general decrease in available funding but also narrow donor base in last decade.</li> <li>• Secretariat capacity to write detailed proposals is stretched for large grant opportunities.</li> <li>• Sphere’s network, though global, lacks the resources to consistently and timely disseminate, promote and train standards in all contexts.</li> <li>• Secretariat team is small with 6.2FTE, which although agile is stretched.</li> <li>• Relatively little concrete value-add for membership of Sphere, other than Board Governance representation and affiliated reputation.</li> <li>• Although they are dedicated, Board members are full time staff in IFRC / NGOs and have little spare time.</li> <li>• Knowledge of Sphere (and in relation to CHS Alliance) among younger generation aid workers, particularly in the global North, has appeared to diminish based on numerous conversations at Geneva-Europe/USA level.</li> <li>• Secretariat is vulnerable to bank de-risking with International Board of the CH Association.</li> <li>• Lack of understanding both in the sector and beyond on who is Sphere.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Opportunities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sphere has a role to advocate for humanitarians to positively impact the environment through protection and restoration.</li> <li>• The HSP platform has a massive potential to manage many of the threats, including through advocacy.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Threats:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Credibility of the Standards, if perceived as Geneva-based and not ‘local.’</li> <li>• New / existing actor may render Sphere obsolete, e.g. IASC or OCHA - many membership organisations in the sector, and a dilution of Sphere Handbook.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rapid tech advances (e.g., AI, smart phones) can be a game-changer for the Handbook dissemination.</li> <li>• Vast majority of Sphere-related activities are and can be more locally led, with support from the secretariat when required.</li> <li>• Humanitarian actors are willing to learn from each other and are more likely to do this if the learning content is easily accessible.</li> <li>• The rights-based framework continues to be fundamental to tackle humanitarian crises.</li> <li>• Case Study database Application of Standards</li> <li>• Many opportunities to work closer with similar humanitarian enablers, especially the CHS Alliance.</li> <li>• Thought leadership from Sphere. Need to focus and decide on what are the issues we should take a lead on, especially principled humanitarian action and the contextualisation of minimum standards.</li> <li>• Potential to be more involved in global, regional, and national policy debates.</li> <li>• Better connect with standards implementation at field level to better evaluate impact of standards.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apathy towards humanitarian standards in the face of huge and increasing needs and decreased funding and access challenges.</li> <li>• Change in Government / AOG Policy(s) regulations (which disallow Sphere Handbook)</li> <li>• Cyber-security (breach takes down all Sphere's &amp; HSP online presence)</li> <li>• Reputational risk of close association with other HSP agencies where Sphere does not have control over public communication.</li> <li>• HSP ambition from other members out of step with Sphere vision for the partnership.</li> <li>• Donors recalibrating their portfolio to focus on larger consortium grants and direct aid implementation.</li> </ul>
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Looking forward, the Sphere Secretariat has defined a Theory of Change to guide the organisation's work. Through this process, the strategic objectives of the 2021-2025 strategy have been refocused under four workstreams: the Sphere Handbook, Strategic Partnerships, Policy & Advocacy, and Champions Network. While these areas broadly align with the strategy's "strategic priorities," they have been structured within the Theory of Change to allow for more focused, and measurable progress towards specific objectives during the remainder of the strategic period. In the Theory of Change, Sphere has reduced the eighteen strategic objectives to four Objectives with seven targeted outcomes across four workstreams. There are twelve Key Results associated with the four objectives to motivate and monitor progress. By narrowing the strategy in this way, Sphere aims to become a more focused and impactful organization.

Several key factors are likely to influence Sphere's ability to fulfil its revised mission to "define, promote and apply humanitarian principles and minimum standards to ensure lifesaving, protective and accountable response to crisis." First, the degree to which Sphere minimum standards are seen as foundational to humanitarian response will determine the ways in which Sphere is able to engage with the humanitarian community. To the extent that the Sphere minimum standards are seen as *the* framework for humanitarian response, Sphere will be able to set the agenda towards achieving higher quality and accountability in humanitarian assistance. This will allow Sphere to lead the charge in ensuring complementarity and consistency across humanitarian standards initiatives and that minimum standards are accessible and fit for purpose in humanitarian response.

Secondly, funding will determine the scope of activities that Sphere can undertake, and therefore will also determine the impact that Sphere can have and how much can be done at the local level in collaboration with focal points. Institutional funding for the sector has been declining, forcing humanitarian actors to do more with less. If this trend continues, Sphere will need to continue to look towards creative solutions for increasing the knowledge and use of Sphere minimum standards. This could include investment in high tech approaches, greater focus on strategic partnerships and/or more targeting of the work towards specific crises.

Finally, as Sphere approaches the next revision of the handbook, key contextual shifts since the last handbook was published could take a more leading role in steering Sphere's priorities. One could imagine a need for Sphere to think more critically about how humanitarian minimum standards should connect with the climate crisis; what decolonization of aid and anti-racism means for standards that are seen as northern driven; how the 'nexus' should be approached; or how anticipatory action can be better integrated in standards.

Depending on how these dynamics evolve, Sphere could be faced with the following scenarios:

Best case scenario: Sphere is viewed as crucial by the sector; all humanitarian actors actively engage with the Charter and Handbook in substantial numbers and donors fulfil all needs - meaning that the quality (and accountability) of assistance is reaching, and in most actions exceeds, minimum standards.

Likely scenario: Sphere accesses sufficient funding to sustain current size and scope of Secretariat; the Handbook is set up for revision in 2026/7 for 2028 publication, the Handbook online is user friendly and accessible around the world online with AI, and interaction and use of the online tools are significantly enhanced. The HSP becomes increasingly known in the sector. Aid quality does not decline, and Sphere is one of the go-to voices of authority in the sector for quality and ethical decision making.

Knowing this, in the next two years Sphere will deliberately place itself at the heart of debate within the humanitarian sector, to be vocal and present in advocating for the right to life with dignity for all. Specifically, Sphere will prioritise pulling attention back to concerns around the quality of aid and unimpeded humanitarian access.

Additionally, Sphere will focus on bolstering its network's capacity and influence not only to support an ongoing mutually beneficial relationship between the Sphere Secretariat and the network of focal points, trainers, and members, but also to ensure that Sphere minimum standards are being effectively used wherever there is humanitarian need across the globe. As work with the network grows, Sphere may need to consider alternative management models to capture the full benefits that the network can bring to the sector. However, any major restructuring in the way that the Secretariat relates to the broader network, will necessarily require a phased approach that will extend beyond the second phase of this strategic period.

Based on this Review and concurrent discussions Sphere has a new 2024-5 Plan, with accompanying Work Plan, Budget, and Objectives Key Results Tracker. This Plan will remain under the overall 2021-2025 Strategy and provides focus for the final two years of the framework period.

### **Acknowledgements**

*Sincere appreciation to all those who supported Sphere in the last three years, and all who participated in interviews and group discussions for the 2024/5 Plan and this Review report which has incorporated thoughtful and honest input. Sphere is particularly grateful for the sustaining partnerships with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) & US State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM).*



## ANNEXES

### Annex 1 – Mid-Term Strategic Review ToR

#### **Terms of Reference: Sphere Mid-Term Strategic Review**

##### **1. Summary**

At this halfway point in the five-year strategy, Sphere is taking the opportunity to reflect with key stakeholders on progress against the Strategic Plan 2021-2025, document lessons and learnings and decide what or how we may want to adapt objectives, ways of working and approach to improve impact in the second half of this strategic period.

##### **2. Objective**

Assess the overall performance of Sphere, in line with the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan and identify opportunities to deepen impact in the last two years of strategic plan. To listen, learn and act from how we are doing as an Alliance, from key external stakeholders (members, partners, donors and other).

##### **3. Framework**

The overall focus will be to establish specific, actionable objectives and key results for 2024-2025.

This will include a review of successes, challenges, sustained and new focus as well as challenges and threats within the strategic goals to help inform planning for 2024 and 2025. This will not be revising overall direction, mission and purpose but take the opportunity to show evidence of where and what contributions are to the outcomes and impact of work. Hopefully, the review will find new insights from external stakeholders as well as draw on existing internal and external reflection processes such as internal communication, Personal Objectives reviews, key meetings minutes and Annual Reports to gather perspectives.

The following questions will guide the review: to what extent have the strategic objectives been achieved to date? What have been the successes, challenges, constraints and missed opportunities? What is Sphere's visibility and public perception of mission, purpose, and values? To what extent has the strategy enabled Governance and Management to fulfil the mission? What can Sphere celebrate most from the last 2.5 years? What have been the unexpected results of Sphere's work, both positive and negative? What have been the key changes to the external and internal context that have impacted (both positively and negatively) on ability to achieve objectives? What should be the focus for the organisation in both short and long term?

##### **4. Methodology**

- The review will be led by William Anderson and the Secretariat team, reporting to the Board President and Strategy & Advocacy Committee.
- The review will primarily involve Secretariat staff, Board Members, Alliance Members, core donors and key HSP and sector partners. A condensed version will be made available on the website and social media.
- Short desk review of existing reflection documentation from the past 30 months.
- Conduct and document surveys, discussions, and interviews with key informants as well as all Sphere 'Ambassadors.'
- Facilitated Joint Member/Board/Staff AGM Discussion.

## **5. Outcome**

Final full and light reports, which include an action plan recommendation for final two years.

- Assumptions tested and recommendations provided for strategic decision-making on the implementation of the final two years of Sphere's Strategic Plan.
- Accountability provided to key stakeholders of progress against the Strategic Plan.
- Ongoing learning and development of the Alliance supported.



## Strategy 2021 – 2025

Global humanitarian standards for local action and preparedness

### 1. Background

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

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

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

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

Key achievements in the last five years include:

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

Sphere | Route de Ferney 150 | Geneva | Switzerland

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

#### D. Accountability, Evidence, Impact and Learning

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

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

#### 5. How we work

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

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

#### 6. Reviewing Progress

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

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

The Sphere community sets standards for humanitarian action and promotes quality and accountability

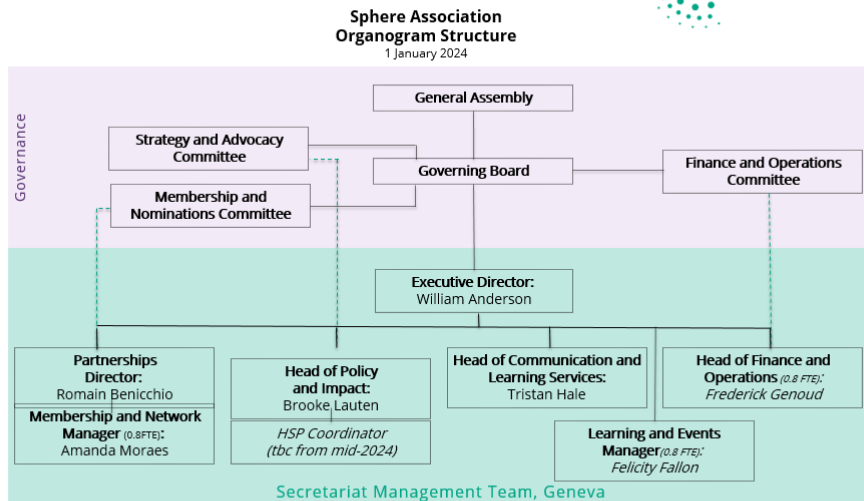
### Annex 3 – Key Informants

- Sphere Association: Secretariat (past and present), Board Members\*, Members, Focal Points & Trainers.
- Members of the Humanitarian Standards Partnership.
- Supporting financial partners: Switzerland, SDC, US State, PRM & USAID, BHA, DEC, ADH.
- International Missions in Geneva: Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom.
- Organisations: Groupe URD, SCHR, Oxfam, INTERSOS, H2H, ICRC, ICVA, IUCN, LWF, NRC, Impact Initiatives, Humanitarian Outcomes, ALNAP, Ground Truth Solutions, CDAC, HQAI, Humanitarian Leadership Academy, IASC Task Team, IOM, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNOCHA, WHO, The New Humanitarian, IHEI, UNIGE, IHEID, UALG.
- State: Danida, Geneva Canton, German FFO, Jersey Overseas Aid.
- Consultants: Tanya Murphy, Rob Schofield, Philip Tamminga.

#### \*Sphere Board 2022-2024:

Act Alliance	Niall O'Rourke
Caritas Internationalis	Rita Rhayem (President to end July 2023) / TBC
CBM Global Disability Inclusion	Christian Modino Hok (to end 2023)
CWSA	Ayesha Hassan
Elrha	Jessica Camburn (Acting Vice-President from August 2023)
FDRP	Fozia Rajput (Treasurer)
FIHF	Friar Luciano
IFRC	Nelson Castano
Mercy Malaysia	Normaliza Mohd Nasir
Plan International	Vanda Lengkong
RedR International	Kirsten Sayers / Natascha Hryckow
Save the Children	Cat Carter
Turkish Red Crescent	Alper Küçük (Acting President from August 2023)
World Vision International	Daniel Wanganga

#### Sphere Association:



Sphere defines, promotes and applies humanitarian principles and minimum standards to ensure lifesaving, protective and accountable response to crisis.

## Annex 4 – Theory of Change

**Policy and Vision:** Crisis-affected people actively participate in decisions and actions which impact them; have what they need to survive and recover with dignity; and are resilient to future crises.

**Mission:** Sphere defines, promotes and applies humanitarian principles and minimum standards to ensure lifesaving, protective and accountable response to crisis.

<b>Impact</b>	The widespread knowledge, integration and application of minimum standards in humanitarian policy and practice strengthens the capacities of people affected by crisis to survive and recover with dignity.			
	<b>The Sphere Handbook</b>	<b>Strategic Partnerships</b>	<b>Policy &amp; Advocacy</b>	<b>Champions Network</b>
<b>Outcomes</b>	<p>People responding to crisis decrease morbidity and mortality by basing decisions and actions on the principles and minimum standards in the Sphere Handbook.</p> <p>The Sphere Handbook provides a 'common language' which enables greater accountability, efficiency and coordination.</p>	<p>People responding to crisis have streamlined access to all humanitarian standards appropriate to their context and stage of response.</p> <p>The Humanitarian Standards Partnership (HSP) is a leading authority on humanitarian standards.</p>	<p>Humanitarian principles and quality and accountability standards are embedded in the policies and practices of organisations and authorities at all levels, from local to international.</p>	<p>Sphere standards are locally driven, ensuring their application supports sustainable humanitarian outcomes.</p> <p>Local and national actors are strengthened through their ownership and use of globally recognised humanitarian standards.</p>
<b>Activities</b>	<p>Sphere coordinates with technical specialists to review and update the Sphere Handbook ensuring it is appropriate, accessible and available in multiple languages and formats.</p> <p>Sphere trains people how to use the Sphere Handbook to improve humanitarian outcomes.</p>	<p>Sphere works in partnership with other standard-setting initiatives and actors to ensure harmonized, simplified standards are the foundation of humanitarian response.</p> <p>Sphere hosts the HSP and supports new and established providers of standards and guidance.</p>	<p>Sphere engages with influential groups and forums to shape humanitarian policy and practice.</p> <p>Sphere promotes minimum standards as well as the principles and foundations which underpin them.</p>	<p>Sphere supports and grows a community of practice consisting of all humanitarian standards users, including Sphere members, focal points, trainers, and other partners. This community leads local implementation, advocacy, training, and networking initiatives.</p>

<b>Challenges</b>	<p>Knowledge and application of minimum standards is variable across regions.</p> <p>Organisations compete instead of cooperating.</p> <p>Lessons learned are not sufficiently captured and applied.</p>	<p>People responding to crisis need easy access to cross-sectoral standards and guidance to ensure quality and accountability.</p> <p>Providers of standards and guidance need to learn from one another and pool resources.</p>	<p>Diverse stakeholders in crisis response do not always know or respect humanitarian principles; standards; or international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law.</p>	<p>Power imbalances and inequitable partnerships hinder national and local organisations in delivering sustainable, locally led humanitarian response.</p>
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**Context:** All those who engage in humanitarian action are not able to continuously uphold the humanitarian imperative due to the increasingly challenging context: complex emergencies; protracted crises; deadly disasters; rising geopolitical competition; violent conflicts and proxy warfare; forced displacement; political, social and economic instability; climate crisis; power imbalances; corruption; national agendas prioritised over international aid; limited funding; rapid technological advances including cyber threats; restricted humanitarian access; diversity of actors in humanitarian space; competition rather than collaboration; and lack of learning put into practice across the sector.