

The Sphere Handbook Glossary (2011 edition)

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Access

The word 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.

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

Accountability

There is no one sector-wide definition of accountability. The Sphere Project understands accountability as the responsible use by humanitarian agencies of the resources at their disposal. To achieve this, agencies need to

- explain how their programmes conform with best practice and commonly agreed commitments (for example, evidence-based standards accepted across the sector) 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). It 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.

Elderly people are people over 60 years.

Armed Conflict

See Conflict.

Assessment

Assessment is 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. (See also Core Standard 3: Assessment.)

Initial assessment is a preliminary enquiry following a sudden disaster or report of a new crisis. Its purpose is to determine whether there is, or could be, a problem that merits an immediate life-saving response and/or an assessment of the situation, and to provide preliminary indications of the type and scale of external assistance, if any, that might be needed. It relies primarily on secondary data, i.e., existing reports and contacts with observers in the area, possibly together with a few rapid field visits.

Rapid assessment is conducted through a visit to a number of sites to collect primary (new) data through key informant and group interviews and, sometimes, through questionnaires to a limited number of households. Its purpose is to gain a sufficient understanding of the situation to decide on the type, scale and timing of response needed, if any. A rapid assessment would normally produce a report within a week (when the area is small and/or the population homogeneous) and up to 6 weeks (when the area or population affected is large or heterogeneous).

In-depth assessment is undertaken using either: (i) a combination of rapid appraisal methods and a household survey based on probability sampling; or (ii) rapid appraisal methods including multiple in-depth interviews with small groups of people representing distinct subgroups within the affected population. The aim in both cases is to generate a relevant household profile for each distinct subgroup within the population; a detailed understanding of the current situation; and the prospects for recovery for each subgroup. In-depth assessments take a substantial investment in time and resources, often adopt representative cross-sectional random sampling, and have the objective of giving a better understanding of the situation in all sectors.

Capacity-building

Capacity-building is 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.

Child-friendly spaces and schools

These are 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.

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.

Complex emergency

A complex emergency is 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

Conflict refers to 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

Conflict sensitivity entails 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 Standard 4: Design and response).

Core Standards

The Core Standards describe processes that are essential to achieving all the Sphere Minimum Standards. They are a practical expression of the Principles of the Sphere Humanitarian Charter, and are fundamental to the right of people affected by conflict or disaster to assistance that supports life with dignity.

Crisis

See Disaster.

Cross-cutting themes

Cross-cutting themes focus on particular areas of concern in humanitarian response and address individual, group or general vulnerability issues (see also Vulnerability).

Dignity

Dignity entails more than physical well-being. It implies 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 (see Core Standard 4: Design and response, Guidance note 3).

Disability

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. People with disabilities are diverse; in any humanitarian response, their unique capacities, socio-economic, educational, family and other background and resources need to be considered.

Disaggregated data

These are statistics separated according to particular criteria, most commonly sex and age. Sex-disaggregated data means separate population statistics for males and females. Age-disaggregated data separates population statistics by age groups.

Disaster

A disaster is 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. In the *Handbook*, we use the word "disaster" to refer to natural disasters as well as to conflict, slow- and rapid-onset situations, rural and urban environments and complex political emergencies in all countries. The term thus covers

natural and man-made disasters and conflicts and encompasses related terms such as “crisis” and “emergency”.

Disaster preparedness

Disaster-preparedness refers to activities and measures taken in advance of a disaster 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 is often called simply “preparedness” and can also apply to the state of readiness to respond as demonstrated by organizations, NGOs or government departments.

Disaster risk reduction

This refers to the concept and practice of reducing the risk of disaster through systematic efforts to analyze 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.

Do No Harm

Originally, the injunction “Do no harm” was developed to make aid agencies aware of the fact that their humanitarian actions may aggravate (violent) conflict. It underscores unintended impacts of humanitarian interventions, and is considered an essential basis for the work of organizations 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).

Early recovery

Early recovery is a multi-faceted process of recovery that begins in a humanitarian response setting. It is guided by development principles that seek to 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).

Emergency

See Disaster.

Endemic

In the Sphere Handbook, “endemic” refers to the habitual presence of a disease or infectious agent within a given geographic area.

Environment

The term “environment” encompasses all natural and human-made conditions and processes that surround and influence living things through physical, chemical and biological factors. These factors determine the life, development and survival of all organisms. The environment includes natural resources that play an essential role in support of human life. Examples are clean water, food, and materials for shelter and livelihood generation. A healthy environment contributes to disaster response. On the other hand, the term “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 (see also Climate change).

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”.

Food security

Food security exists when all people have physical, social and economic access at all times to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Food security has three main attributes:

- **Availability:** this refers to the quantity, quality and seasonality of the food supply in the disaster-affected area.
- **Access:** this refers to the capacity of a household to safely procure sufficient food to satisfy the nutritional needs of all its members.
- **Utilization:** this refers to a household’s use of the food to which it has access, including storage, processing and preparation, and distribution within the household. It is also an individual’s ability to absorb and metabolize nutrients that can be affected by disease and malnutrition.

In the 2011 Handbook edition, food aid is mostly treated in the section “Food security - food transfers”. The term “Food aid” has been replaced by “food transfers”.

People can gain access to food by receiving either an in-kind food transfer, a cash transfer or a voucher transfer. The term “food assistance” covers all three types of transfer.

Gender

“Gender” refers to 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 Sex).

Gender-based violence (GBV)

This is 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 the following:

- sexual violence: sexual exploitation/abuse, forced prostitution, forced/child marriage;
- domestic/family violence: physical, emotional/psychological and sexual violence within the family/home; and
- harmful cultural/traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, honour killings, widow inheritance, and others. (IASC GBV Guidelines, 2005:7-8)

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.

Hazard

A hazard is 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

Human rights are 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.

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 response

Humanitarian response is one dimension of humanitarian action (see Humanitarian action, above). It focuses on the provision of assistance in a given emergency situation.

Humanitarian civil-military coordination

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. Basic strategies range from coexistence to cooperation. Coordination is a shared responsibility facilitated by liaison and common training.

Impartiality

This refers to the principle that humanitarian assistance is provided solely on the basis of need and in proportion to need without discrimination. (See also Non-discrimination and Non-partisan.)

Internally displaced persons

Internally displaced persons are "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.)

International human rights law

This is contained in the body of international treaties and established legal rules that govern states' obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights (see the 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 (IHL) 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

International refugee law is a set of rules and procedures that aims to protect, firstly, persons seeking asylum from persecution and, secondly, those recognized 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 (IHL). The specific provisions that apply depend on whether the conflict is international or non-international (i.e., civil) in character. The various instruments of IHL, 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).

Key Actions

These are suggested activities and inputs to help meet the Minimum Standards.

Key Indicators

These are “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.

Livelihood

This refers to 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 (see also the introduction to the Food security and nutrition chapter for a chapter-specific definition of Livelihood). 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).

Mitigation

This refers to 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.

Malnutrition

The term malnutrition technically includes under- and over-nutrition. People are malnourished if their diet does not provide adequate nutrients for growth and maintenance, often due to economic, political and socio-cultural factors, or they are unable to fully utilize the food they eat due to illness. Under-nutrition encompasses a range of conditions, including acute malnutrition, chronic malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. Acute malnutrition refers to wasting (thinness), and/or nutritional oedema, while chronic malnutrition refers to stunting (shortness). Stunting and wasting are two forms of growth failure. In the Food security and nutrition chapter, under-nutrition and malnutrition are used interchangeably, but particularly revert to “malnutrition” when referring to acute malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies.

Minimum Standards

These are qualitative in nature and specify the minimum levels to be attained in humanitarian response regarding the provision of food and nutrition.

Morbidity Rate

This term refers to 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)

This term refers to 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.

Non-discrimination

This refers to 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.

Non-partisan

This refers to actions that are not intended to favour or to imply support for any party or parties to a conflict.

Participation

Participation refers to the processes and activities that allow intended beneficiaries to be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of projects. 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.

Population

In the *Sphere Handbook*, depending on context, this term refers to individuals and groups such as families and communities. It is often expressed as the “disaster-affected population”.

Preparedness

See under Disaster preparedness.

Prevalence

This term refers to 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

This refers to actions taken to avoid the adverse impacts of hazards and related disasters upon people, property, livelihoods and the environment (see also Preparedness and Risk reduction).

Protection

The terms refers to all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of the relevant bodies of law, namely Human rights law, International humanitarian law and Refugee law (IASC, 1999). Protection therefore aims to ensure 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.

Psychosocial support

This term refers to 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.

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). 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 recognized mechanisms and/or standards. (See also Accountability.)

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

Resilience

This refers to the ability of individuals, communities or countries 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

The term refers to 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 and meet the basic subsistence needs of the people affected. Sometimes referred to in the *Handbook* as “intervention”.

Risk

“Risk” refers to the likelihood that a hazard will happen, its magnitude and its consequences. It relates to 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 response-preparedness, and resilience and coping skills (see also Risk assessment).

Risk assessment

This is 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).

Safety

This is the state of being safe and 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

Security refers to a general environment of law and order; freedom from physical threats.

Sex

This word refers to the biological attributes of women and men. It is natural, determined by birth and, therefore, generally unchanging and universal (see also Gender).

Sustainable

If something is sustainable, it is likely to be economically viable, environmentally sound and socially just over the long term.

Sustainable development

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

Targeting

This refers to the act of attempting the direct transfer (e.g., of food assistance) to one or more specific group(s) at a specific time or place or in a specific form.

Under-nutrition

See Malnutrition.

Vulnerability

This term refers to physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes that increase the susceptibility of a community or individuals to difficulties and hazards and put them at risk as a result of loss, damage, insecurity, suffering and death. Some people may be disproportionately affected by disruption of their physical environment and social support mechanisms in disaster or conflict because of discrimination or neglect in their society. 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 the section on Vulnerabilities and capacities of disaster-affected populations, found in the introduction to each technical chapter).