



The Sphere Project

What is new in the 2011 edition of the Sphere Handbook

A. Background

The purpose of the revision process was not to change the qualitative standards, nor to overhaul the Handbook, but to update the qualitative and quantitative indicators and guidance notes as needed, and to improve the overall structure and consistency of the text.

However, the revision process revealed that a number of issues needed particular attention and significant changes. Consequently, the Humanitarian Charter was completely re-written, the common standards significantly changed, and a stronger focus on protection was introduced. The four technical chapters are all to some extent re-structured. The specific changes will be identified by the end of August 2010, based on the final focal point reports.

Like earlier revisions, this process was broadly consultative, and based on establishing consensus for the changes that were made. Besides producing an updated manual, the revision process also provided invaluable opportunities for discussion and consultation within each sector. It thus made an important contribution to the overall coherence of the humanitarian sector. A large number of individuals and organisations have contributed to the 2009-2010 revision process, be that by providing the capacity of a revision focal point, by organising a consultation meeting, or by providing substantive input.

B. Overall changes:

1. Emerging issues

A number of emerging issues are now cross-referenced in the Handbook:

- the impact of climate change
- disaster risk reduction
- cash transfer
- conflict-sensitivity
- civil-military relations
- preparedness
- early recovery

Furthermore, the humanitarian reform process has been taken into account, particularly by stressing the importance of collaboration.

2. Strengthened cross-cutting issues

The cross-cutting issues have remained the same as for the 2004 edition. There are seven such issues: children, elderly, gender, HIV and AIDS, people with disabilities, protection and environment. They were all strengthened, in particular protection and environment. In addition, education in emergencies is now more solidly cross-referenced, as are psycho-social issues.

C. Specific changes:

1. What is Sphere

This important introduction to the Handbook is being re-written so as to communicate the key messages around Sphere more clearly.

2. The Humanitarian Charter

The Humanitarian Charter has changed significantly. It is now easier and more coherent to read, and structured more coherently around three principles which are all based on the fundamental moral principle of humanity: that human suffering should be prevented or alleviated wherever it may be found.

These three core principles are:

- The right to life with dignity;
- The right to protection and security;
- The right to receive humanitarian assistance

3. Protection

Protection has received a specific space at the beginning of the Handbook. The aim of the protection text is to provide a general protection-sensitive framework for non-protection specialist.

4. Minimum standards common to all sectors

This chapter is still very much in a draft version and the content, as well as the title may still change (core standards?). As of the end of July, it was structured around six core standards that are seen as indispensable to attain the Sphere minimum standards in each of the four technical chapters.

The core standards are

1. Community-centred humanitarian response
2. Coordination and partnership
3. Assessment
4. Analysis and design
5. Performance, transparency and learning
6. Aid worker performance

With this structure, the common standards now focus more specifically on community-centred response; give more visibility to coordination and to assessment, analysis and evaluation. The two “people standards” (standards 5 and 6) are maintained.

D. Structural changes:

1. The overall Handbook structure

The overall Handbook structure remains unchanged, except for the new protection text at the beginning of the Handbook.

2. The minimum standards

In order to make the Handbook more action-oriented, a new structure was introduced, essentially dividing the current list of key indicators belonging to each minimum standard into key actions and key indicators.

- **Minimum standards** are qualitative in nature and specify the minimum levels to be attained in humanitarian response;
- **Key actions** are necessary activities and inputs to be taken in order to meet the minimum standards;
- **Key indicators** are 'signals' that show whether a standard has been attained. They are used to measure quantity and/or quality, and provide a way of measuring and communicating the results of key actions; They relate to the minimum standard, not the key action;
- **Guidance notes** include specific points to consider when applying the minimum standards, indicators and key actions 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, indicators or actions, and describe dilemmas, controversies or gaps in current knowledge.