

The Core Standards



How to use this chapter

The Core Standards are essential process standards shared by all sectors. They provide a single reference point for approaches that underpin all the standards in the Handbook. Each chapter, therefore, requires the companion use of the Core Standards to help attain its own standards.

There are six Core Standards:

People-centred humanitarian response

Coordination and collaboration

Assessment

Design and response

Performance, transparency and learning

Aid worker performance

Each Core Standard is structured as follows:

- **The Core Standard:** It is qualitative in nature and specifies the level to be attained in humanitarian response.
- **Key actions:** These are suggested activities and inputs to help meet the 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.
- **Guidance notes:** These include specific points to consider when applying the Core Standard, 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.

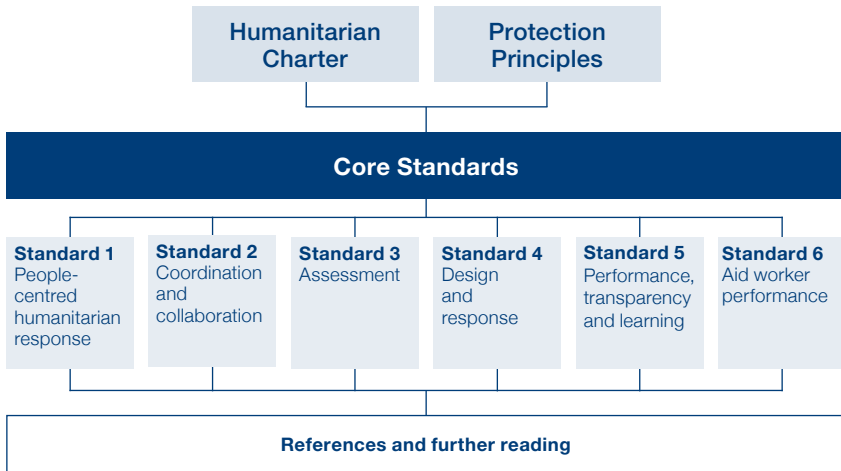
The key indicators of the Core Standards accommodate wide variations in a user's application and context. Measurable and time-bound specifications for each indicator are highly context- and sector-specific. Users should therefore adapt the key indicators to their particular situation, as appropriate.

A select list of references and further reading is included at the end of this chapter.

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Introduction

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 rights of people affected by conflict or disaster to assistance that supports life with dignity. The Core Standards define the minimum level of response to be attained (as signalled by the key indicators) by humanitarian agencies, be they community-based, local, national or international.

The Core Standards are also linked to other key accountability initiatives, promoting coherence and reinforcing a shared commitment to accountability. For example, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) 2010 Standard in Accountability and Quality Management benchmarks and the Core Standards contain complementary requirements. The aid worker performance standard is coherent with People In Aid's Code of Good Practice. *The Good Enough Guide* of the Emergency Capacity Building (ECB) Project, Groupe URD's *Quality Compas* and the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) inform Core Standards 1 and 5 in particular. The Core Standards are a companion to the Foundational Standards in the INEE (Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies) Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response, Recovery.



The importance of the Core Standards for all sectors

The first Core Standard recognises that the participation of disaster-affected people – women, men, girls and boys of all ages – and their capacity and strategies to survive with dignity are integral to humanitarian response. Core Standard 2 addresses the need for an effective response to be coordinated and implemented with other agencies and governmental authorities engaged in impartial humanitarian action.

Core Standard 3 describes the need for assessments systematically to understand the nature of the disaster, identify who has been affected and how, and assess people's vulnerability and capacities. It acknowledges the critical importance of understanding need in relation to the political, social, economic and environmental context and the wider population. Agencies meeting Core Standard 4

design their response based on an impartial assessment of needs, addressing unmet needs in relation to the context and capacity of affected people and states to meet their own needs.

Core Standard 5 is attained by agencies that continually examine the effectiveness, quality and appropriateness of their response. Agencies adapt their strategies in accordance with monitoring information and feedback from people affected by disaster, and share information about their performance. They invest in unbiased reviews and evaluations and use the findings to improve their policy and practice.

Core Standard 6 recognises that humanitarian agencies have an obligation to disaster-affected people to employ aid workers with the appropriate knowledge, skills, behaviour and attitudes to deliver an effective humanitarian response. Equally, agencies are responsible for enabling aid workers to perform satisfactorily through effective management and support for their emotional and physical well-being.

Vulnerability

Sphere's focus is on meeting the urgent survival needs of people affected by disaster or conflict. However, the Core Standards can also support disaster preparedness and approaches that reduce future risk and vulnerability, enhance capacity and promote early recovery. Such approaches take account of the impact of the response on the natural environment and broader context and are highly relevant to the needs of the host and wider population.

Throughout the Handbook, 'vulnerable' refers to people who are especially susceptible to the effects of natural or man-made disasters or of conflict. People are, or become, more vulnerable to disasters due to a combination of physical, social, environmental and political factors. They may be marginalised by their society due to their ethnicity, age, sex, disability, class or caste, political affiliations or religion. A combination of vulnerabilities and the effect of an often volatile context all contribute to people being vulnerable for different reasons and in different ways. Vulnerable people, like all those affected by disaster, have various capacities to manage and recover from disasters. A thorough understanding of vulnerable people's capacities and the barriers they may face in accessing humanitarian support is essential for a response that meets the needs of those who need it most.

The Core Standards

Core Standard 1: People-centred humanitarian response

People's capacity and strategies to survive with dignity are integral to the design and approach of humanitarian response.

Key actions (to be read in conjunction with the guidance notes)

- ▶ Support local capacity by identifying community groups and social networks at the earliest opportunity and build on community-based and self-help initiatives (see guidance note 1).
- ▶ Establish systematic and transparent mechanisms through which people affected by disaster or conflict can provide regular feedback and influence programmes (see guidance note 2).
- ▶ Ensure a balanced representation of vulnerable people in discussions with the disaster-affected population (see guidance note 3).
- ▶ Provide information to the affected population about the humanitarian agency, its project(s) and people's entitlements in an accessible format and language (see guidance note 4).
- ▶ Provide the affected population with access to safe and appropriate spaces for community meetings and information-sharing at the earliest opportunity (see guidance note 5).
- ▶ Enable people to lodge complaints about the programme easily and safely and establish transparent, timely procedures for response and remedial actions (see guidance note 6).
- ▶ Wherever feasible, use local labour, environmentally sustainable materials and socially responsible businesses to benefit the local economy and promote recovery.
- ▶ Design projects, wherever possible, to accommodate and respect helpful cultural, spiritual and traditional practices regarded as important by local people (see guidance note 7).



- ▶ Progressively increase disaster-affected people's decision-making power and ownership of programmes during the course of a response.

Key indicators (to be read in conjunction with the guidance notes)

- ▶ Project strategies are explicitly linked to community-based capacities and initiatives.
- ▶ Disaster-affected people conduct or actively participate in regular meetings on how to organise and implement the response (see guidance notes 1–2).
- ▶ The number of self-help initiatives led by the affected community and local authorities increases during the response period (see guidance note 1).
- ▶ Agencies have investigated and, as appropriate, acted upon complaints received about the assistance provided.

Guidance notes

1. **Local capacity:** Disaster-affected people possess and acquire skills, knowledge and capacities to cope with, respond to and recover from disasters. Active participation in humanitarian response is an essential foundation of people's right to life with dignity affirmed in Principles 6 and 7 of the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief (see Annex 2 on page 368). Self-help and community-led initiatives contribute to psychological and social well-being through restoring dignity and a degree of control to disaster-affected populations. Access to social, financial, cultural and emotional support through extended family, religious networks and rituals, friends, schools and community activities helps to re-establish individual and community self-respect and identity, decrease vulnerability and enhance resilience. Local people should be supported to identify and, if appropriate, reactivate or establish supportive networks and self-help groups. The extent to which people participate, and how they do so, will be determined by how recently the disaster occurred and by the physical, social and political circumstances. Indicators signalling participation should, therefore, be selected according to context and represent all those affected. The local population is usually the first to react in a disaster and even early in a response some degree of participation is always feasible. Explicit efforts to listen to, consult and engage people at an early stage will increase quality and community management later in the programme.
2. **Feedback mechanisms** provide a means for all those affected to influence programme planning and implementation (see HAP's 'participation' benchmark). They include focus group discussions, surveys, interviews and meetings on 'lessons learnt' with a representative sample of all the

affected population (see ECB's *Good Enough Guide* for tools and guidance notes 3–4). The findings and the agency's actions in response to feedback should be systematically shared with the affected population.

3. **Representative participation:** Understanding and addressing the barriers to participation faced by different people is critical to balanced participation. Measures should be taken to ensure the participation of members of all groups of affected people – young and old, men and women. Special efforts should be made to include people who are not well represented, are marginalised (e.g. by ethnicity or religion) or otherwise 'invisible' (e.g. housebound or in an institution). The participation of youth and children should be promoted so far as it is in their own best interest and measures taken to ensure that they are not exposed to abuse or harm.
4. **Sharing information:** People have a right to accurate and updated information about actions taken on their behalf. Information can reduce anxiety and is an essential foundation of community responsibility and ownership. At a minimum, agencies should provide a description of the agency's mandate and project(s), the population's entitlements and rights, and when and where to access assistance (see HAP's 'sharing information' benchmark). Common ways of sharing information include noticeboards, public meetings, schools, newspapers and radio broadcasts. The information should demonstrate considered understanding of people's situations and be conveyed in local language(s), using a variety of adapted media so that it is accessible to all those concerned. For example, use spoken communications or pictures for children and adults who cannot read, use uncomplicated language (i.e. understandable to local 12-year-olds) and employ a large typeface when printing information for people with visual impairments. Manage meetings so that older people or those with hearing difficulties can hear.
5. **Safe and accessible spaces:** Locate public meeting places in secure areas and ensure they are accessible to those with restricted mobility including to women whose attendance at public events is limited by cultural norms. Provide child-friendly spaces for children to play, learn, socialise and develop.
6. **Complaints:** People have the right to complain to an agency and seek a corresponding response (see HAP's 'handling complaints' benchmark). Formal mechanisms for complaints and redress are an essential component of an agency's accountability to people and help populations to re-establish control over their lives.
7. **Culturally appropriate practices,** such as burials and religious ceremonies and practices, are often an essential element of people's identity, dignity and capacity to recover from disaster. Some culturally acceptable practices



violate people's human rights (e.g. denial of education to girls and female genital mutilation) and should not be supported.

Core Standard 2: Coordination and collaboration

Humanitarian response is planned and implemented in coordination with the relevant authorities, humanitarian agencies and civil society organisations engaged in impartial humanitarian action, working together for maximum efficiency, coverage and effectiveness.

Key actions (to be read in conjunction with the guidance notes)

- ▶ Participate in general and any applicable sectoral coordination mechanisms from the outset (see guidance notes 1–2).
- ▶ Be informed of the responsibilities, objectives and coordination role of the state and other coordination groups where present (see guidance note 3).
- ▶ Provide coordination groups with information about the agency's mandate, objectives and programme.
- ▶ Share assessment information with the relevant coordination groups in a timely manner and in a format that can be readily used by other humanitarian agencies (see Core Standard 3 on page 61).
- ▶ Use programme information from other humanitarian agencies to inform analysis, selection of geographical area and response plans.
- ▶ Regularly update coordination groups on progress, reporting any major delays, agency shortages or spare capacity (see guidance note 4).
- ▶ Collaborate with other humanitarian agencies to strengthen advocacy on critical shared humanitarian concerns.
- ▶ Establish clear policies and practice regarding the agency's engagement with non-humanitarian actors, based on humanitarian principles and objectives (see guidance note 5).

Key indicators (to be read in conjunction with the guidance notes)

- ▶ Assessment reports and information about programme plans and progress are regularly submitted to the relevant coordinating groups (see guidance note 4).
- ▶ The humanitarian activities of other agencies in the same geographical or sectoral areas are not duplicated.

- ▶ Commitments made at coordination meetings are acted upon and reported in a timely manner.
- ▶ The agency's response takes account of the capacity and strategies of other humanitarian agencies, civil society organisations and relevant authorities.

Guidance notes

1. **Coordinated responses:** Adequate programme coverage, timeliness and quality require collective action. Active participation in coordination efforts enables coordination leaders to establish a timely, clear division of labour and responsibility, gauge the extent to which needs are being collectively met, reduce duplication and address gaps in coverage and quality. Coordinated responses, timely inter-agency assessments and information-sharing reduce the burden on affected people who may be subjected to demands for the same information from a series of assessment teams. Collaboration and, where possible, the sharing of resources and equipment optimise the capacity of communities, their neighbours, host governments, donors and humanitarian agencies with different mandates and expertise. Participation in coordination mechanisms prior to a disaster establishes relationships and enhances coordination during a response. Local civil society organisations and authorities may not participate if coordination mechanisms appear to be relevant only to international agencies. Respect the use of the local language(s) in meetings and in other shared communications. Identify local civil society actors and networks involved in the response and encourage them and other local and international humanitarian agencies to participate. Staff representing agencies in coordination meetings should have the appropriate information, skills and authority to contribute to planning and decision-making.
2. **Common coordination mechanisms** include meetings – general (for all programmes), sectoral (such as health) and cross-sectoral (such as gender) – and information-sharing mechanisms (such as databases of assessment and contextual information). Meetings which bring together different sectors can further enable people's needs to be addressed as a whole, rather than in isolation (e.g. people's shelter, water, sanitation, hygiene and psychosocial needs are interrelated). Relevant information should be shared between different coordination mechanisms to ensure integrated coordination across all programmes. In all coordination contexts, the commitment of agencies to participate will be affected by the quality of the coordination mechanisms: coordination leaders have a responsibility to ensure that meetings and information are well managed, efficient and results-orientated. If not, participating agencies should advocate for, and support, improved mechanisms.



- 3. *Coordination roles:*** It is the affected state's role to coordinate the humanitarian response of assisting organisations. Humanitarian agencies have an essential role to play by supporting the state's coordination function. However, in some contexts, alternative coordination mechanisms may be appropriate if, for example, state authorities are themselves responsible for abuse and violations or their assistance is not impartial or if the state is willing to play a coordination role, but lacks capacity. In these situations coordination meetings may be separately or jointly led by the local authorities with the United Nations or NGOs. Many large-scale humanitarian emergencies are now typically coordinated through the 'cluster approach', with groupings of agencies working in the same sector under a lead agency.
- 4. *Efficient data-sharing*** will be enhanced if the information is easy to use (clear, relevant, brief) and follows global humanitarian protocols which are technically compatible with other agencies' data (see Core Standard 3 on page 61). The exact frequency of data-sharing is agency- and context-specific but should be prompt to remain relevant. Sensitive information should remain confidential (see Core Standards 3–4 on pages 61–65).
- 5. *Military and private sector:*** The private sector and foreign and national military are increasingly part of the relief effort and therefore affect coordination efforts. The military bring particular expertise and resources, including security, logistics, transport and communication. However, their activities can blur the important distinction between humanitarian objectives and military or political agendas and create future security risks. Any association with the military should be in the service of, and led by, humanitarian agencies according to endorsed guidelines. Some agencies will maintain a minimum dialogue to ensure operational efficiency (e.g. basic programme information-sharing) while others may establish stronger links (e.g. use of military assets). In all cases, humanitarian agencies must remain clearly distinct from the military to avoid any real or perceived association with a political or military agenda that could compromise the agencies' independence, credibility, security and access to affected populations. The private sector can bring commercial efficiencies, complementary expertise and resources to humanitarian agencies. Information-sharing is required to avoid duplication and to promote humanitarian good practice. Private–humanitarian partnerships must strictly be for the benefit of humanitarian objectives.

Core Standard 3: Assessment

The priority needs of the disaster-affected population are identified through a systematic assessment of the context, risks to life with dignity and the capacity of the affected people and relevant authorities to respond.

Key actions (to be read in conjunction with the guidance notes)

- ▶ Find and use pre-disaster information about local humanitarian capacity, the affected and wider population, context and other pre-existing factors that may increase people's susceptibility to the disaster (see guidance note 1).
- ▶ Carry out an initial assessment immediately, building on pre-disaster information to assess changes in the context caused by the disaster, identifying any new factors that create or increase vulnerability (see guidance note 2).
- ▶ Carry out a rapid assessment as soon as possible, following up with subsequent in-depth assessments as time and the situation allow (see guidance note 3).
- ▶ Disaggregate population data by, at the very least, sex and age (see guidance note 4).
- ▶ Listen to an inclusive range of people in the assessment – women and men of all ages, girls, boys and other vulnerable people affected by the disaster as well as the wider population (see Core Standard 1 on page 55 and guidance notes 5–6).
- ▶ Participate in multisectoral, joint or inter-agency assessments wherever possible.
- ▶ Gather information systematically, using a variety of methods, triangulate with information gathered from a number of sources and agencies and document the data as they are collected (see guidance note 7).
- ▶ Assess the coping capacity, skills, resources and recovery strategies of the affected people (see guidance note 8).
- ▶ Assess the response plans and capacity of the state.
- ▶ Assess the impact of the disaster on the psychosocial well-being of individuals and communities.
- ▶ Assess current and potential safety concerns for the disaster-affected population and aid workers, including the potential for the response to exacerbate



a conflict or create tension between the affected and host populations (see guidance note 9).

- ▶ Share assessment data in a timely manner and in a format that is accessible to other humanitarian agencies (see Core Standard 2 on page 58 and guidance note 10).

Key indicators (to be read in conjunction with the guidance notes)

- ▶ Assessed needs have been explicitly linked to the capacity of affected people and the state to respond.
- ▶ Rapid and in-depth assessment reports contain views that are representative of all affected people, including members of vulnerable groups and those of the surrounding population.
- ▶ Assessment reports contain data disaggregated by, at the very least, sex and age.
- ▶ In-depth assessment reports contain information and analysis of vulnerability, context and capacity.
- ▶ Where assessment formats have been agreed and widely supported, they have been used.
- ▶ Rapid assessments have been followed by in-depth assessments of the populations selected for intervention.

Guidance notes

1. **Pre-disaster information:** A collaborative pooling of existing information is invaluable for initial and rapid assessments. A considerable amount of information is almost always available about the context (e.g. political, social, economic, security, conflict and natural environment) and the people (such as their sex, age, health, culture, spirituality and education). Sources of this information include the relevant state ministries (e.g. health and census data), academic or research institutions, community-based organisations and local and international humanitarian agencies present before the disaster. Disaster preparedness and early warning initiatives, new developments in shared web-based mapping, crowd-sourcing and mobile phone platforms (such as Ushahidi) have also generated databases of relevant information.
2. **Initial assessments,** typically carried out in the first hours following a disaster, may be based almost entirely on second-hand information and pre-existing data. They are essential to inform immediate relief needs and should be carried out and shared immediately.

3. **Phased assessments:** Assessment is a process, not a single event. Initial and rapid assessments provide the basis for subsequent in-depth assessments that deepen (but do not repeat) earlier assessment findings. Care should be taken as repeated assessments of sensitive protection concerns such as gender-based violence can be more harmful than beneficial to communities and individuals.
4. **Data disaggregation:** Detailed disaggregation is rarely possible initially but is of critical importance to identify the different needs and rights of children and adults of all ages. At the earliest opportunity, further disaggregate by sex and age for children 0–5 male/female, 6–12 male/female and 13–17 male/female, and then in 10-year age brackets, e.g. 50–59, male/female; 60–69, male/female; 70–79, male/female; 80+, male/female. Unlike the physiologically-related age groupings in the health chapter, these groupings address age-related differences linked to a range of rights, social and cultural issues.
5. **Representative assessments:** Needs-based assessments cover **all** disaster-affected populations. Special efforts are needed to assess people in hard-to-reach locations, e.g. people who are not in camps, are in less accessible geographical areas or in host families. The same applies for people less easily accessed but often at risk, such as persons with disabilities, older people, housebound individuals, children and youths, who may be targeted as child soldiers or subjected to gender-based violence. Sources of primary information include direct observation, focus group discussions, surveys and discussions with as wide a range of people and groups as possible (e.g. local authorities, male and female community leaders, older men and women, health staff, teachers and other educational personnel, traders and other humanitarian agencies). Speaking openly may be difficult or dangerous for some people. Talk with children separately as they are unlikely to speak in front of adults and doing so may put the children at risk. In most cases, women and girls should be consulted in separate spaces. Aid workers engaged in the collection of systematic information from people who have been abused or violated should have the necessary skills and systems to do so safely and appropriately. In conflict areas, information could be misused and place people at further risk or compromise an agency's ability to operate. Only with an individual's consent may information about them be shared with other humanitarian agencies or relevant organisations (see Protection Principle 1 on page 33). It will not be possible to immediately assess all those affected: excluded areas or groups should be clearly noted in the assessment report and returned to at the earliest opportunity.
6. **Assessing vulnerability:** The risks faced by people following a disaster will vary for different groups and individuals. Some people may be vulnerable



due to individual factors such as their age (particularly the very young and the very old) and illness (especially people living with HIV and AIDS). But individual factors alone do not automatically increase risk. Assess the social and contextual factors that contribute to vulnerability, such as discrimination and marginalisation (e.g. low status and power of women and girls); social isolation; environmental degradation; climate variability; poverty; lack of land tenure; poor governance; ethnicity; class or caste; and religious or political affiliations. Subsequent in-depth assessments should identify potential future hazards, such as changing risk patterns due to environmental degradation (e.g. soil erosion or deforestation) and climate change and geology (e.g. cyclones, floods, droughts, landslides and sea-level rise).

7. ***Data-gathering and checklists:*** Assessment information including population movements and numbers should be cross-checked, validated and referenced to as many sources as possible. If multisectoral assessments are not initially possible, pay extra attention to linkages with other individual sector, protection and cross-cutting assessments. Data sources and levels of disaggregation should be noted and mortality and morbidity of children under 5 years old documented from the outset. Many assessment checklists are available, based on agreed humanitarian standards (see the checklists in the appendices of some technical chapters). Checklists enhance the coherence and accessibility of data to other agencies, ensure that all key areas have been examined and reduce organisational or individual bias. A common inter-agency assessment format may have been developed prior to a disaster or agreed during the response. In all cases, assessments should clarify the objectives and methodology to be used and generate impartial information about the impact of the crisis on those affected. A mix of quantitative and qualitative methods appropriate to the context should be used. Assessment teams should, as far as possible, be composed of a mix of women and men, generalists and specialists, including those with skills in collecting gender-sensitive data and communicating with children. Teams should include people familiar with the language(s) and location and able to communicate with people in culturally acceptable ways.
8. ***Assessing capacities:*** Communities have capacities for coping and recovery (see Core Standard 1 on page 55). Many coping mechanisms are sustainable and helpful, while others may be negative, with potentially long-term harmful consequences, such as the sale of assets or heavy alcohol consumption. Assessments should identify the positive strategies that increase resilience as well as the reasons for negative strategies.
9. ***Assessing security:*** An assessment of the safety and security of disaster-affected and host populations should be carried out in all initial and subsequent assessments, identifying threats of violence and any forms of coercion

and denial of subsistence or basic human rights (see Protection Principle 3 on page 38).

- 10. *Sharing assessments:*** Assessment reports provide invaluable information to other humanitarian agencies, create baseline data and increase the transparency of response decisions. Regardless of variations in individual agency design, assessment reports should be clear and concise, enable users to identify priorities for action and describe their methodology to demonstrate the reliability of data and enable a comparative analysis if required.

Core Standard 4: Design and response

The humanitarian response meets the assessed needs of the disaster-affected population in relation to context, the risks faced and the capacity of the affected people and state to cope and recover.

Key actions (to be read in conjunction with the guidance notes)

- ▶ Design the programme based on an impartial assessment of needs, context, the risks faced and the capacity of the affected population (see Core Standard 3 on page 61).
- ▶ Design the programme to meet needs that cannot or will not be met by the state or the affected people (see guidance note 1).
- ▶ Prioritise life-saving actions that address basic, urgent survival needs in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.
- ▶ Using disaggregated assessment data, analyse the ways in which the disaster has affected different individuals and populations, and design the programme to meet their particular needs.
- ▶ Design the response so that vulnerable people have full access to assistance and protection services (see guidance note 2).
- ▶ Ensure that the programme design and approach supports all aspects of the dignity of the affected individuals and populations (see Core Standard 1 on page 55 and guidance note 3).
- ▶ Analyse all contextual factors that increase people's vulnerability, designing the programme to progressively reduce their vulnerability (see Core Standard 3 on page 61 and guidance note 4).
- ▶ Design the programme to minimise the risk of endangering people, worsen the dynamics of a conflict or create insecurity or opportunities for exploitation and abuse (see guidance note 5 and Protection Principle 1 on page 33).



- ▶ Progressively close the gap between assessed conditions and the Sphere minimum standards, meeting or exceeding Sphere indicators (see guidance note 6).
- ▶ Design programmes that promote early recovery, reduce risk and enhance the capacity of affected people to prevent, minimise or better cope with the effects of future hazards (see guidance note 7).
- ▶ Continually adapt the programme to maintain relevance and appropriateness (see Core Standard 5 on page 68).
- ▶ Enhance sustained recovery by planning for and communicating exit strategies with the affected population during the early stages of programme implementation.

Key indicators (to be read in conjunction with the guidance notes)

- ▶ Programme design is based on an analysis of the specific needs and risks faced by different groups of people.
- ▶ Programme design addresses the gap between people's needs and their own, or the state's, capacity to meet them.
- ▶ Programme designs are revised to reflect changes in the context, risks and people's needs and capacities.
- ▶ Programme design includes actions to reduce people's vulnerability to future hazards and increase their capacity to manage and cope with them.

Guidance notes

1. **Supporting existing capacity:** It is the primary role and responsibility of the state to provide timely assistance and protection to those affected (see Humanitarian Charter, paragraph 2 on page 20). Intervene if the affected population and/or state does not have sufficient capacity to respond (particularly early in the response) or if the state or controlling authorities actively discriminate against certain groups of people and/or affected areas. In all cases the capacity and intentions of the state towards all members of the affected population inform the scale and type of humanitarian response.
2. **Access:** Assistance is provided to those in need without discrimination (see Protection Principle 2 on page 36). People's access to aid and their ability to use and benefit from assistance is increased through the provision of timely information and through design that corresponds with their particular needs and cultural and safety considerations (for example, separate queues for older people or women with children attending food distributions). It is enhanced by the participation of women, men, girls and boys of all ages in the design.

Access is increased through the use of carefully designed targeting criteria and processes that are widely communicated, understood by the community and systematically monitored. Actions described in the technical chapters facilitate equal access through considered design, such as locating facilities in areas that are safe, etc.

3. **The foundation of life with dignity** is the assurance of access to basic services, security and respect for human rights (see Humanitarian Charter on page 19). Equally, the **way** in which humanitarian response is implemented strongly affects the dignity and well-being of the disaster-affected population. Programme approaches that respect the intrinsic value of each individual, support their religious and cultural identity, promote community-based self-help and encourage positive social support networks all contribute to psychosocial well-being and are an essential element of people's right to life with dignity.
4. **Context and vulnerability:** Social, political, cultural, economic, conflict and natural environment factors can increase people's susceptibility to disasters; changes in the context can create newly vulnerable people (see Core Standard 3 on page 61). Vulnerable people may face a number of factors simultaneously (for example, older people who are members of marginalised ethnic groups). The interplay of personal and contextual factors that heighten risk should be analysed and programmes should be designed to address and mitigate those risks and target the needs of vulnerable people.
5. **Conflict sensitivity:** Humanitarian assistance can have unintended negative impacts. Valuable aid resources can increase exploitation and abuse and lead to competition, misuse or misappropriation of aid. Famine can be a weapon of war (e.g. deliberately depopulating an area or forcing asset transfers). Aid can negatively affect the wider population and amplify unequal power relations between different groups, including men and women. Careful analysis and design can reduce the potential for assistance to increase conflict and insecurity (including during natural disasters). Design to ensure equitable distribution and the impartial targeting of assistance. Protect people's safety and dignity by respecting confidential personal information. For example, people living with HIV and AIDS may be stigmatised; survivors of human rights violations must be guaranteed safe and confidential assistance (see Core Standard 3 on page 61).
6. **Meeting Sphere's minimum standards:** The time taken to reach the minimum standards will depend on the context: it will be affected by resources, access, insecurity and the living standards of the area prior to a disaster. Tension may be created if the affected population attains standards that exceed those of the host and/or wider population, or even worsen their conditions. Develop strategies to minimise the disparities and risks by,



for example, mitigating any negative impacts of the response on the wider natural environment and economy and advocating to increase the standards of the host population. Where and when possible, increase the scope of the response to include the host population.

7. **Early recovery and risk reduction:** Actions taken at the earliest opportunity to strengthen local capacity, work with local resources and restore services, education, markets and livelihood opportunities will promote early economic recovery and the ability of people to manage risk after external assistance has ended (see Core Standard 1 on page 55). At the very least, humanitarian response should not harm or compromise the quality of life for future generations and inadvertently contribute to future hazards (through, for example, deforestation and the unsustainable use of natural resources). Once immediate threats to life have been stabilised, analyse present and (multiple) potential future hazards (such as those created by climate change). Design to reduce future risks. For example, take opportunities during the response to invest in risk reduction and ‘build back safer’. Examples include building earthquake- and hurricane-resistant houses, protecting wetlands that absorb storm surges and supporting policy development and community-driven initiatives in early warning and disaster preparedness.

Core Standard 5: Performance, transparency and learning

The performance of humanitarian agencies is continually examined and communicated to stakeholders; projects are adapted in response to performance.

Key actions (to be read in conjunction with the guidance notes)

- ▶ Establish systematic but simple, timely and participatory mechanisms to monitor progress towards all relevant Sphere standards and the programme’s stated principles, outputs and activities (see guidance note 1).
- ▶ Establish basic mechanisms for monitoring the agency’s overall performance with respect to the agency’s management and quality control systems (see guidance note 2).
- ▶ Monitor the outcomes and, where possible, the early impact of a humanitarian response on the affected and wider populations (see guidance note 3).
- ▶ Establish systematic mechanisms for adapting programme strategies in response to monitoring data, changing needs and an evolving context (see guidance note 4).

- ▶ Conduct periodic reflection and learning exercises throughout the implementation of the response.
- ▶ Carry out a final evaluation or other form of objective learning review of the programme, with reference to its stated objectives, principles and agreed minimum standards (see guidance note 5).
- ▶ Participate in joint, inter-agency and other collaborative learning initiatives wherever feasible.
- ▶ Share key monitoring findings and, where appropriate, the findings of evaluation and other key learning processes with the affected population, relevant authorities and coordination groups in a timely manner (see guidance note 6).

Key indicators (to be read in conjunction with the guidance notes)

- ▶ Programmes are adapted in response to monitoring and learning information.
- ▶ Monitoring and evaluation sources include the views of a representative number of people targeted by the response, as well as the host community if different.
- ▶ Accurate, updated, non-confidential progress information is shared with the people targeted by the response and relevant local authorities and other humanitarian agencies on a regular basis.
- ▶ Performance is regularly monitored in relation to all Sphere Core and relevant technical minimum standards (and related global or agency performance standards), and the main results shared with key stakeholders (see guidance note 6).
- ▶ Agencies consistently conduct an objective evaluation or learning review of a major humanitarian response in accordance with recognised standards of evaluation practice (see guidance note 6).

Guidance notes

1. **Monitoring** compares intentions with results. It measures progress against project objectives and indicators and its impact on vulnerability and the context. Monitoring information guides project revisions, verifies targeting criteria and whether aid is reaching the people intended. It enables decision-makers to respond to community feedback and identify emerging problems and trends. It is also an opportunity for agencies to provide, as well as gather, information. Effective monitoring selects methods suited to the particular programme and context, combining



qualitative and quantitative data as appropriate and maintaining consistent records. Openness and communication (transparency) about monitoring information increases accountability to the affected population. Monitoring carried out by the population itself further enhances transparency and the quality and people's ownership of the information. Clarity about the intended use and users of the data should determine what is collected and how it is presented. Data should be presented in a brief accessible format that facilitates sharing and decision-making.

2. **Agency performance** is not confined to measuring the extent of its programme achievements. It covers the agency's overall function – its progress with respect to aspects such as its relationships with other organisations, adherence to humanitarian good practice, codes and principles and the effectiveness and efficiency of its management systems. Quality assurance approaches such as Groupe URD's *Quality Compas* can be used to assess overall agency performance.
3. **Impact monitoring:** Increasingly, the assessment of impact (the wider effects of interventions in the short to medium term, positive or negative, intended or unintended) is viewed as both feasible and essential for humanitarian response. Impact assessment is an important emerging field, linking particular humanitarian contributions to changes in populations and the context that are complex and interrelated. The affected people are the best judges of changes in their lives; hence outcome and impact assessment must include people's feedback, open-ended listening and other participatory qualitative approaches, as well as quantitative approaches.
4. **Maintaining relevance:** Monitoring should periodically check whether the programme continues to be relevant to the affected populations. Findings should lead to revisions to the programme as appropriate.
5. **Methods for examining performance:** Different approaches suit different performance, learning and accountability purposes. A variety of methods may be used including monitoring and evaluation, participatory impact assessments and listening exercises, quality assurance tools, audits and internal learning and reflection exercises. Programme evaluations are typically carried out at the end of a response, recommending changes to organisational policies and future programmes. Performance monitoring and 'real-time evaluation' can also be carried out during a response, leading to immediate changes in policy and practice. Evaluations are usually carried out by independent, external evaluators but internal staff members can also evaluate a programme as long as they take an objective approach. This would normally mean agency staff who were not involved in the response themselves. Humanitarian evaluation uses a set of eight dimensions known as the DAC (Development Assistance Committee)

criteria: relevance; appropriateness; connectedness; coherence; coverage; efficiency; effectiveness; and impact.

6. **Sector-wide performance:** Sharing information about each agency's progress towards the Sphere minimum standards with coordination groups supports response-wide monitoring and creates an invaluable source of sector-wide performance data.

Core Standard 6: Aid worker performance

Humanitarian agencies provide appropriate management, supervisory and psychosocial support, enabling aid workers to have the knowledge, skills, behaviour and attitudes to plan and implement an effective humanitarian response with humanity and respect.

Key actions (to be read in conjunction with the guidance notes)

- ▶ Provide managers with adequate leadership training, familiarity with key policies and the resources to manage effectively (see guidance note 1).
- ▶ Establish systematic, fair and transparent recruitment procedures to attract the maximum number of appropriate candidates (see guidance note 2).
- ▶ Recruit teams with a balance of women and men, ethnicity, age and social background so that the team's diversity is appropriate to the local culture and context.
- ▶ Provide aid workers (staff, volunteers and consultants, both national and international) with adequate and timely inductions, briefings, clear reporting lines and updated job descriptions to enable them to understand their responsibilities, work objectives, organisational values, key policies and local context.
- ▶ Establish security and evacuation guidelines, health and safety policies and use them to brief aid workers before they start work with the agency.
- ▶ Ensure that aid workers have access to medical care and psychosocial support.
- ▶ Establish codes of personal conduct for aid workers that protect disaster-affected people from sexual abuse, corruption, exploitation and other violations of people's human rights. Share the codes with disaster-affected people (see guidance note 3).
- ▶ Promote a culture of respect towards the disaster-affected population (see guidance note 4).



- ▶ Establish grievance procedures and take appropriate disciplinary action against aid workers following confirmed violation of the agency's code of conduct.
- ▶ Carry out regular appraisals of staff and volunteers and provide feedback on performance in relation to work objectives, knowledge, skills, behaviour and attitudes.
- ▶ Support aid workers to manage their workload and minimise stress (see guidance note 5).
- ▶ Enable staff and managers to jointly identify opportunities for continual learning and development (see guidance note 6).
- ▶ Provide appropriate support to aid workers who have experienced or witnessed extremely distressing events (see guidance note 7).

Key indicators (to be read in conjunction with the guidance notes)

- ▶ Staff and volunteers' performance reviews indicate adequate competency levels in relation to their knowledge, skills, behaviour attitudes and the responsibilities described in their job descriptions.
- ▶ Aid workers who breach codes of conduct prohibiting corrupt and abusive behaviour are formally disciplined.
- ▶ The principles, or similar, of the People In Aid Code of Good Practice are reflected in the agency's policy and practice.
- ▶ The incidence of aid workers' illness, injury and stress-related health issues remains stable, or decreases over the course of the disaster response.

Guidance notes

1. **Management good practice:** People management systems depend on the agency and context but managers and supervisors should be familiar with the People In Aid Code of Good Practice which includes policies and guidelines for planning, recruitment, management, learning and development, transition at the end of a contract and, for international agencies, deployment.
2. **Recruitment procedures** should be open and understandable to all staff and applicants. Such transparency includes the development and sharing of updated and relevant job descriptions for each post and is essential to establish diverse and competent teams. Existing teams can increase their appropriateness and diversity through new recruitment as required. Rapid staff expansion may lead to the recruitment of inexperienced team members who should be supported by experienced staff.

3. ***Aid workers' control*** over the management and allocation of valuable aid resources puts them in a position of power over the disaster-affected population. Such power over people dependent on assistance and whose protective social networks have been disturbed or destroyed can lead to corruption and abuse. Women, children and persons with disabilities are frequently coerced into sexually abusive situations. Sexual activity can never be demanded in exchange for humanitarian assistance or protection. No individual associated with humanitarian response (aid workers and military, state or private sector personnel) should be party to abuse, corruption or sexual exploitation. The forced labour of adults or children, illicit drug use and trading in humanitarian goods and services by those connected with humanitarian distributions are also prohibited.
4. ***Aid workers should respect*** the values and dignity of the disaster-affected population and avoid behaviours (such as inappropriate dress) that are culturally unacceptable to them.
5. ***Aid workers often work long hours*** in risky and stressful conditions. An agency's duty of care to its workers includes actions to promote well-being and avoid long-term exhaustion, injury or illness. Managers must make aid workers aware of the risks and protect them from exposure to unnecessary threats to their physical and emotional health through, for example, effective security management, adequate rest and recuperation, active support to work reasonable hours and access to psychological support. Managers can promote a duty of care through modelling good practice and personally complying with policy. Aid workers also need to take personal responsibility for managing their well-being.
6. ***In the early phase of a disaster***, staff capacity development may be restricted. Over time, through performance reviews and feedback from staff, managers should identify and support areas for learning and development. Disaster preparedness also provides opportunities to identify and develop humanitarian-related competencies.
7. ***Psychological first aid*** should be immediately available to workers who have experienced or witnessed extremely distressing events (see Essential health services – mental health standard 1 on page 333 and References and further reading). Psychological debriefing is ineffective and should not be provided.



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