

HUMANITARIAN
ACCOUNTABILITY
REPORT 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ARE WE
MAKING AID
WORK BETTER
FOR PEOPLE
AFFECTED
BY CRISIS?

Just over five years ago, at the end of 2014, the humanitarian sector marked a significant collective achievement when it launched the **Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS)** that set out the essential elements for principled humanitarian action.

The Standard was intended to clearly state the agreed, essential elements for working with communities and people affected by crisis – not to focus on additional, nice-to-haves for aid.

It combines both what organisations need to put in place and how organisations are supposed to work. The Standard was designed so its application could be measured. The results of these measurements reveal, overall, the areas where organisations are doing well, and the areas where they need to improve.

The start of this decade sees the humanitarian endeavour at an important juncture. This year the world has faced the Covid-19 pandemic and the report was written as the sector confronts the challenges of racism.

These challenges come at a time when the sector is already stretched in providing life-saving services and protection to the people caught in numerous protracted and complex humanitarian situations. Now is therefore an important time to reflect on what has been achieved after five years of application of the CHS and to consider what still needs to be done.

This year also sees the sector on the eve of the five-year anniversary of the Grand Bargain – another significant set of commitments and promises to improve humanitarian action – many of which are echoed in the CHS.

The 2020 edition of the Humanitarian Accountability Report (HAR) uses data from the CHS verification scheme and a variety of other sources to illustrate the degree to which aid organisations are meeting the CHS Nine Commitments.

“My paramount desire is that humanitarian aid always positively affects me and all IDPs and does not have a negative impact on our lives already disturbed by the crisis.”

Aysha Touma, Representative of Yasaminat Syria

It compares the results from CHS-verified organisations with broader trends in the humanitarian sector as a whole and considers how change and improvement in issues of quality and accountability can be accelerated.

The report demonstrates the achievements of the 90+ individual organisations in applying the CHS. The data from all organisations undergoing CHS verification in 2018 and 2019¹ shows that two-thirds of these organisations fully meet at least one of the Nine Commitments, and more than one-third meet three or more. The CHS has driven progress. Since 2016, the data shows that almost half of the certified organisations that have been assessed annually over at least a three-year period have made major improvements in one-quarter or more of the 62 CHS indicators.²

It is also useful to consider the aggregated data to paint a picture of how CHS-verified organisations, as a whole, are meeting the Commitments. The message from this is that while there is a general effort towards meeting the requirements, there is still a substantial way to go to fully meet the core, essential elements of principled and effective humanitarian action.

The aggregated data also illustrates that performance is generally better in those indicators related to establishing policies than those related to what staff do in practice.

→ [Read the full report: www.chsalliance.org/HAR2020](http://www.chsalliance.org/HAR2020)

▶ **DEC 2014**

CHS LAUNCHED,
COPENHAGEN

▶ **MAY 2016**

GRAND BARGAIN LAUNCHED,
ISTANBUL – INCLUDES
COMMITMENT TO THE CHS

▶ **DEC 2019**

90+ ORGANISATIONS
VERIFIED AGAINST
THE CHS

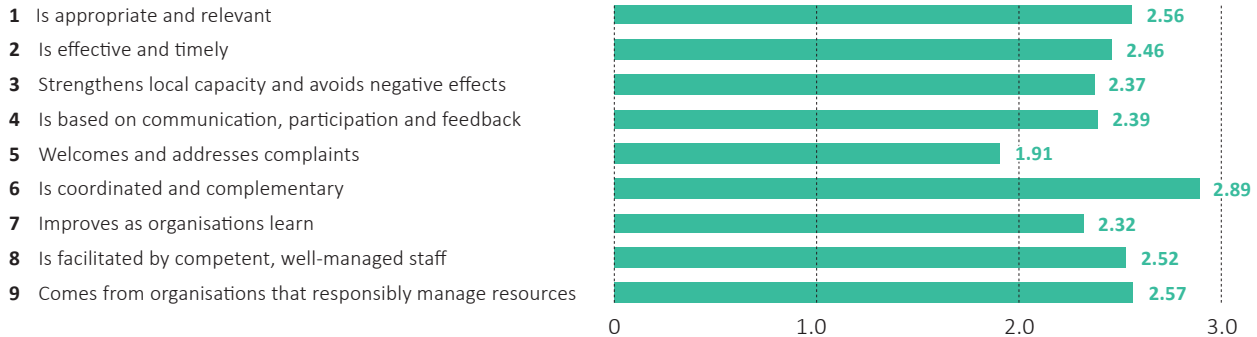
1. Data set one – data from CHS verifications (all options) completed in 2018 and 2019 representing 56 organisations.

2. Data set two – data from 13 organisations who have been in the certification process for at least three years.

PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE CHS COMMITMENTS

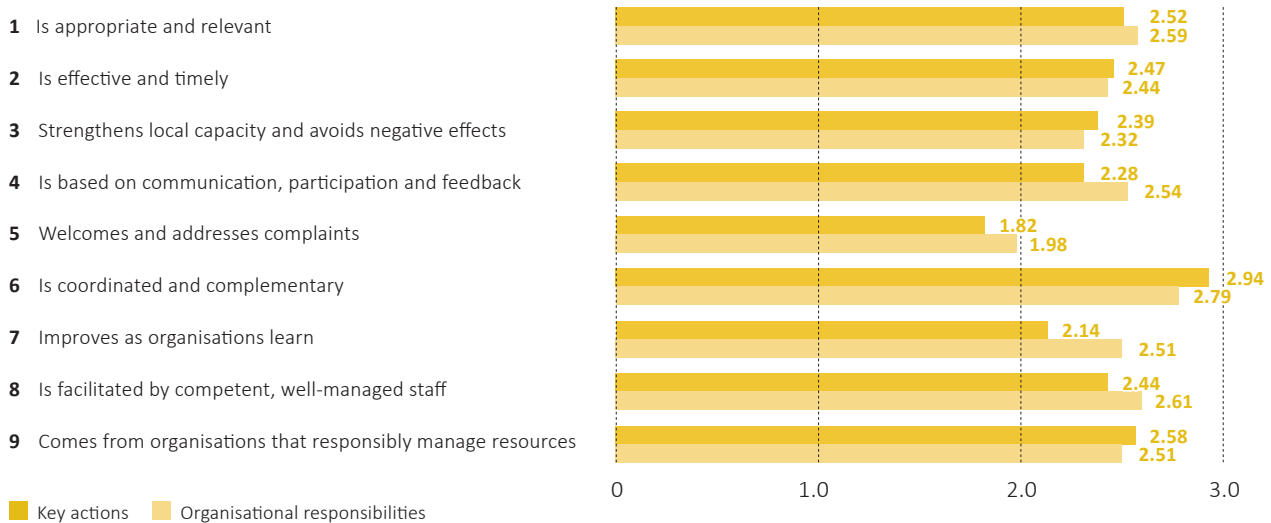
AVERAGE SCORE BY CHS COMMITMENTS¹

Communities and people affected by crisis can expect assistance that:



CHS COMMITMENTS: KEY ACTIONS VERSUS ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES²

Communities and people affected by crisis can expect assistance that:



1. Source: Data set one – Data from CHS verifications (all options) completed in 2018 and 2019 representing 56 organisations.

2. Source: Data set two – Data from 13 organisations who have been in the certification process for at least three years.

For more information the meaning of the scores see www.chsalliance.org/get-support/resource/chs-alliance-scoring-grid/

AN OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS

Overall, CHS-verified organisations are closer to meeting some commitments than others. Of the Nine Commitments, the one that comes closest to being fulfilled (as illustrated by the average verification score) is Commitment 6, on coordination and complementarity. This may reflect significant investment over the past decade in humanitarian coordination. At the other end of the scale, the lowest scoring Commitment is Commitment 5, which states that complaints should be welcomed and addressed.

This is of deep concern, as it shows that we still face a challenge about how we listen to the feedback, concerns and complaints of people we are supporting. Critically, it shows that despite acknowledging the huge challenges the sector faces in protecting people from sexual exploitation and abuse, and the substantial efforts made to strengthen these protections, there are still systemic weaknesses. If people don't know how to complain about their treatment, organisations are less likely to put a stop to abuse.

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This uneven picture of progress in the CHS verification data can be better understood when set against the background of weak improvement in the humanitarian sector as a whole. Numerous reviews and research reports have commented on the extremely slow pace of change in the sector. The CHS appears to have catalysed improvement in areas that humanitarian organisations have been trying to address for over two decades. But this also demonstrates how slowly change occurs in the sector and may help us to further understand why this is the case. At the same time, the scale of the humanitarian challenge, both now and in the immediate future, requires humanitarian organisations

to greatly increase the pace of improvement around quality and accountability.

The experience of organisations using the CHS suggests that significant gains could come from focusing on three areas of improvement: engaging better with people affected by crisis; improving how we manage information to ensure the right people access the right services; and improving organisational flexibility to respond to rapidly changing needs.

These three challenges emerge repeatedly as constraints to fulfilling all Nine Commitments. Focusing on them could have a 'multiplier effect', helping organisations to improve across the board.

Collectively we need to do far more to accelerate this change. Humanitarian organisations need to think about how they conduct change and what is required to drive improvements. This is an area that has received only limited attention in the humanitarian sector, as there has generally been an assumption that change can be planned and implemented like any other project. The experience of organisations engaging with the CHS, and of the humanitarian sector as a whole, suggests that this is not the case. New approaches to change are required if organisations are to adapt to the constant challenges that the sector is confronted by.

The essential elements of principled humanitarian action, which are the core of the CHS, must continue to guide this work if we are to honour our Commitments to the people whose lives have been affected by crisis.

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1 


ENGAGING
BETTER WITH
PEOPLE AFFECTED
BY CRISIS

2 


IMPROVING HOW
WE MANAGE
INFORMATION TO
ENSURE THE RIGHT
PEOPLE ACCESS
THE RIGHT
SERVICES

3 

IMPROVING
ORGANISATIONAL
FLEXIBILITY TO
RESPOND TO
RAPIDLY
CHANGING
NEEDS



THERE ARE MANY MILESTONES ON THE ROAD TO GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY, AND THIS REPORT BY THE CHS ALLIANCE MARKS A NUMBER OF THEM. IT OFFERS VALUABLE INSIGHT INTO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HUMANITARIAN RESPONSES, WHICH IN TURN HELPS TO MAKE THE SECTOR MORE ACCOUNTABLE.



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