Revising the Core Humanitarian Standard 2022-2023:
Process, Participation, Learning and Accountability

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) has been a pivotal framework for the humanitarian community since its introduction in 2014. It established a harmonised core standard of accountability in the sector, providing clear guidance on how to design principled and high-quality assistance with people and communities receiving that assistance.

This Standard has been used by hundreds of organisations and a range of country-level operations since its inception, resulting in fundamental shifts within the sector towards more participatory, people-centred and accountable practice. In anticipation of the 10-year anniversary of this harmonised Standard, CHS Alliance, Groupe URD and Sphere proposed to revise the Standard and bring learning forward with all stakeholders.

More than eight years of practical experience has shown that the CHS is robust and makes a difference in how we collectively deliver assistance, how we coordinate for better effectiveness and how we hold ourselves and each other to account. With compiled learning and documentation to shape the consultation process, the revision was designed to build on knowledge and experience, identify what has worked to support improvements in accountability, and explore where more support would be useful.

The development of the CHS in 2014 involved more than 2,000 practitioners drawing together their knowledge and experience. The 2022-23 revision has involved more than 4,000 individual contributors, 500 community representatives and input from more than 90 countries across two rounds of consultations. The growth in contributions is a testimony to the widespread use of the Standard and the importance placed on this framework on quality and accountability by all stakeholders.

Throughout the revision, we focused on a few guiding elements at each stage of review:
- The CHS is a **people-centred** framework for quality and accountability.
- The CHS must be **accessible** for all stakeholders in its presentation, language and guidance.
- The CHS aims to be **coherent** with all existing technical and quality standards it supports.
- Any revision of the CHS is informed by **good accountability practice**.
- Any revision proposals should strengthen the **role and future adoption** of the CHS by local and national actors.

The Commitments have been strengthened, the structure of the Standard has been simplified and it more clearly drives towards assistance being rooted in communities, where responders can hold each other to account with dignity.

1. The Process and Consultations

The revision of the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) was launched in May 2022, building on learning gained since 2014 and overseen by the CHS Steering Committee.

The first round of broad consultations took place from May-December 2022, focusing on how to improve clarity of the Standard, identify any gaps and duplications, build on good practice and ensure the Standard is accessible to all stakeholders—prioritising communities and crisis-affected people. More than 3,300 individuals from 80 countries contributed through workshops, webinars, feedback sessions and online consultations.

The full analysis of the first-round consultation report provides an in-depth review of the comments and recommendations received, flagging issues to address to meet the expectations of users. There was strong support for the framework as a harmonised accountability tool, with clear recommendations to address gaps, such as environmental impact, climate change, community engagement and operational power dynamics, and to strengthen the overall coherence with other standards in the sector.

> **Box 1: Revision Timeline**
>
> **May-December 2022: First Consultation on the CHS**
> - 3,000+ individuals and organisations contributed.
> - More than 250 crisis-affected people and communities were consulted.
>
> **January-May 2023: Feedback and analysis to produce the first draft of the revised Standard**
>
> **June-September 2023: Second Consultation on Draft CHS**
> - 1,300+ organisational stakeholders from more than 90 countries.
> - Regional workshops in Amman, Dakar, Panama, Nairobi, Geneva and Bangkok.
> - National workshops in Beirut, Niamey, Bogota, Addis Ababa and Dhaka.
> - 15 national organisations from Lebanon, Niger, Ethiopia and Bangladesh shared in-depth analyses of their capacity to meet the requirements.
> - Online survey.
> - Focus group discussions providing detailed organisational comments.
> - 250+ community representatives consulted in Lebanon, Niger, Jordan, Colombia, Ethiopia, Kenya and Bangladesh.
>
> **October-November 2023: Analysis and incorporating feedback into the draft CHS**
>
> **December 2023: Final updated CHS shared with stakeholders**

This first series of consultations gathered information about the different ways the CHS was being used to increase accountability to people in situations of crisis and vulnerability. For example, it has been used to support changes in practice, strategies and policies for better accountability to people, programme planning, monitoring, evaluations, the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and to support due diligence processes. This input directly informed the drafting of the updated Standard.

Box 2: Revision Criteria Guiding the CHS Steering Committee

1. Do the proposed changes reaffirm and reinforce the Standard as a people-centred framework for quality and accountability?
2. Do the proposed changes address the most important issues that affect quality and accountability?
3. Do the proposed changes clarify concepts, simplify language and make it more accessible for users and stakeholders?
4. Do the proposed changes reinforce the measurability of the Standard?
5. Do the proposed changes reinforce coherence and alignment with existing quality and technical standards and good accountability practices?
6. Do the proposed changes have the potential to increase adoption and use of the Standard by a wider number of stakeholders, particularly local and national actors?

The second round of consultations began in May 2023, reviewing the revised draft Standard and scoring the proposed text to make sure that feedback was well incorporated and the draft met the revision criteria. Key to this review was making sure that diverse organisations, staff, volunteers and communities felt they could access and use the Standard in their own context.

Key changes in the updated Standard included:
*   Recognising the active role of crisis-affected people in response and emphasising this as the first commitment.
*   Simplifying the structure of the Standard to include Commitments and supporting Requirements.
*   Separating the original Commitment 3 to have two distinct commitments to a) local leadership and sustainability; and b) addressing and preventing risks to people and their environment.

A summary of all changes in the draft can be found in this short overview document. This following section summarises the feedback received in the second round of consultations and how this feedback was incorporated into the final drafting and review of the revised Core Humanitarian Standard (2024).

2. Participation and Feedback: Second Consultation, May-December 2023[1]

> *"I have learned today that access to support and assistance is a right – not charity – and should be available without discrimination because of where you come from"*
> *Focus group discussion participant, Colombia*

Throughout this round of consultations, contributors shared a high level of agreement with the revised language and structure of the Standard. Rich feedback provided further input and refinement to strengthen the final draft, including a focus on preparedness, a rights-based approach and greater emphasis on inclusion.

Participants were asked to measure the updated draft of the Standard against the revision criteria during in-person and online consultations during May-December 2023. Key findings are provided, delineated by criteria, below.

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[1] The full text of the second consultation CHS draft can be found here:
https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/files/files/Draft%201%20CHS%20for%20uploading%209%20June(1).pdf

Criteria 1: Do the proposed changes reaffirm and reinforce the Standard as a people-centred framework for quality and accountability?

Discussions with communities revealed strong support for the draft revised CHS Commitments, confirming that the proposed text reflected their expectations around quality and accountability from those working to support them. People and communities strongly called for application of these Commitments by all organisations working with and for them.

Staff and volunteers from organisations (national and international) confirmed that the CHS remains a relevant and useful framework to support people-centred quality and accountability. They recognised the value of efforts to **strengthen the people-centred approach** in the draft revised CHS, as demonstrated by the prioritisation of rights and dignity of people and communities and the focus on their participation.

> *"We support the effort toward a people-centred approach. Making Commitment 1 focus on participation positions participation as the backbone of the Standard".*
>
> Participant at the
> Amman CHS Revision Regional Workshop

The feedback from government authorities, especially in Latin America, also confirmed that the CHS is relevant to them, especially in areas such as disaster risk reduction and preparedness.

Local and national organisations called for more support to deliver the CHS, while international organisations suggested more advocacy for investment in the capacities of those operating closer to people and communities.

Where can the CHS be further strengthened in the final draft?
- **Consider reformulating some expressions such as "actively participate"** which is read by some as an *obligation* to participate while participation should be *voluntary* and adapted to the degree to which people and communities would like to.
- **Avoid using "receive"** (which positions people and communities in a passive mode) and **"engage with"** (putting the responsibility on people and communities). "Engage with competent staff" implies people and communities are selecting the organisation staff they will engage with.
- **Include the requirement of a fair and transparent targeting system.** This was particularly important to community representatives and was suggested as a way to strengthen Commitment 2.

Criteria 2: Do the proposed changes address the most important issues that affect quality and accountability?

Communities generally considered the draft text covered their most important issues. They emphasised timeliness, adapting actions to their feedback and priorities, the use of resources in optimal and transparent ways and being supported by competent staff and volunteers.

Organisational stakeholders considered that the draft addressed the most important issues around quality and accountability. Participants appreciated efforts to **reinforce partnerships and local leadership**, **consideration of local actors**, and an **increased focus on the environment.**

> *"The Standard acknowledges the diversity of actors intervening in humanitarian contexts. Thank you for the effort to reinforce the wider applicability of the Standard to different types and sizes of organisations, especially local actors".*
>
> Participant at the
> Amman CHS Revision Regional Workshop

Where can the CHS be further strengthened in the final draft?
- **Reinforce diversity and inclusion**. During almost all the regional/national workshops and through comments, participants wanted strengthened language on diversity and inclusion. Despite the mention of *"…with attention to gender, age, race, equity, diversity and inclusion…"* and the utilisation of "*inclusive*" in many Commitments and Requirements, this was not seen to be strong enough to bring about changes in the way the humanitarian responders consider female leadership, child participation and disability inclusion.
- **Reinforce data protection**, especially while using digital tools.
- **Reinforce reference to culture**, religion, context specificities and language issues.
- **Make the reference to environment stronger** by reinforcing the responsibility of organisations to protect the environment.
- **Strengthen preparedness and anticipatory action**. Participants from contexts with recurring or chronic crises noted that the requirements do not mention anticipatory action, early responses, contingency plans, early warning systems or disaster risk reduction – which were seen as fundamental to their contexts. They also wanted clarification on the scope of longer-term and resilience interventions. Respondents particularly wanted to see Commitment 3 revised to integrate preparedness.
- Improve linkages to using the CHS in conflict situations and as part of **peacebuilding** (triple-nexus).
- Provide more details on the **roles and responsibilities of governments and donors** and how the CHS can be used by them.
- **Provide guidance on how to apply the Standard.** Participants expressed the importance of explaining how requirements could be met, and the need for the sharing of good practices on specific aspects of the Standard to inspire organisations to meet the Commitments, especially for small and local organisations.
- **Amplify or initiate advocacy** for key challenges in the sector, including:
  o Reducing power imbalances between international and national actors and between aid workers and people in situations of crisis and vulnerability.
  o Encouraging capacity sharing among organisations
  o Ensure organisations are in close proximity to the people and communities they are serving and are equipped to deliver the Commitments of the CHS.

Criteria 3: Do the proposed changes clarify concepts, simplify language and make it more accessible for users and stakeholders?

In the discussions with community members, the text was easy to present, explain and translate in local languages. The discussions showed that community members understood the main ideas with relative ease. The feedback from all stakeholders showed strong agreement that the proposed draft text has succeeded in simplifying the language and making the CHS more accessible.

Organisational stakeholders supported the efforts to simplify the draft text, including merging organisational responsibilities and key actions together, simplifying the language and reducing the number of requirements. There was appreciation for making the Standard less prescriptive and more accessible, reducing expectations, such as ensuring "policies are in place".

The introduction of the General System Requirements section was welcomed by some organisational stakeholders, including many local and national actors who saw this as reducing the complexity of the Standard for them. However, others saw this as adding complexity to the structure and reducing the measurability of the CHS, as well as potentially duplicating some of the Requirements within the Commitments.

Where can the CHS be further strengthened in the final draft?
- **Make the General System Requirements texts more specific and verifiable**.
- **Reduce remaining duplications** within and across the Commitments and General System Requirements.
- **Provide definitions for key terms used in the Standard.** Participants insisted on the importance of clarity, for key terms to have defined meanings in the context of the CHS. These included "rights", "organisation" and "staff and volunteers".

Criteria 4: Do the proposed changes reinforce the measurability of the Standard?

The issue of measurability of the CHS came up in different ways during the consultations. Feedback from communities often mentioned the need for organisations to demonstrate how they apply the CHS. Many commented on the need for organisations to report back to them on the CHS, while others suggested stronger oversight of aid actors. As noted above, many community members felt that Commitment 7 was important to ensure aid organisations adjust and improve activities *during* implementation and learn from feedback, mistakes and successes.

Organisational stakeholders appreciated the changes to Commitment 7 and the attempt to link ongoing feedback, monitoring, reporting and decision-making processes at the programme level.

Organisational stakeholders, particularly local and national actors, saw the draft text as a useful framework to orient and track progress on organisation-wide capacity development and continuous improvement. They appreciated the existing approach and tools that facilitate the application of the

Standard and track progress on delivering the CHS Commitments (an example being the Humanitarian Accountability Reports). They supported the evidence-based, continuous-improvement approach of the CHS and the wider applicability to different types and sizes of organisation – acknowledging the diversity of actors implementing humanitarian response.

In some consultations, government representatives also saw the potential to use the CHS as a part of their own procedures and monitoring frameworks.

The selected group of national organisations from Lebanon, Niger, Ethiopia and Bangladesh involved in a deep analysis of the CHS Requirements confirmed that they had the capacity to meet these, with reasonable effort and support. This confirmed the CHS requirements are not out of reach for national and local organisations.

Where can the CHS be further strengthened in the final draft?
- **Ensuring continuity in CHS verification** between the current CHS and the revised CHS.
- **Amplify or initiate advocacy** to:
    o Encourage all stakeholders interacting with people in situations of crisis and vulnerability to apply the CHS.
    o Engagement with governments to encourage application of the CHS.
    o Ensure/reinforce collective accountability, for example integrating the CHS Commitments in humanitarian response plans (HRP).

> **Criteria 5: Do proposed changes reinforce coherence and alignment with existing quality and technical standards and good accountability practices?**

The draft text attempted to strengthen the coherence and alignment with Sphere, the Humanitarian Standards Partnership, and other related humanitarian standards and accountability frameworks. However, for many stakeholders, more work is needed to explain the linkages between these different standards. Many stakeholders commented on the need to reinforce the rights-based approach that underpins the Humanitarian Charter and Sphere Standards.

Some stakeholders suggested that the CHS makes more explicit reference to long-term international agreements, such as the Sendai Framework, or to specific initiatives in the sector, such as the Grand Bargain, to show the complementarity and alignment with core humanitarian-sector concepts.

Where can the CHS be further strengthened in the final draft?
- **Guidance about and the explicit harmonisation of the CHS with other sector standards** is needed to inform stakeholders about how the revised CHS fits within the ecosystem of existing standards, including Sphere and HSP Standards, as well national standards.

Criteria 6: Do the proposed changes have the potential to increase adoption and use of the Standard by a wider number of stakeholders, particularly local and national actors?

This round of consultations included many stakeholders who were not previously aware of the CHS. The positive engagement and interest in the CHS from these groups shows that the revision process has been an opportunity to raise awareness of the CHS, increasing the potential for wider adoption and use of the CHS.

Participants in CHS revision events appreciated efforts to **open the Standard to other actors** by including the notion of vulnerability and the increased consideration of preparedness, as well as referencing the humanitarian/development nexus.

> *"What I like the most is that the revision has given more access to non-humanitarian organisations to also be included in the CHS. The term "humanitarian actor" was limiting other organisations from applying the Standard in day-to-day work."*
>
> Participant at the
> Bangkok CHS Revision Regional Workshop

The stakeholder consultation was noted for its inclusivity, reaching a diverse range of actors through different channels including country case studies, regional workshops, online webinars and a survey. Materials were available in English, Arabic, French and Spanish.

Where can the CHS be further strengthened in the final draft?
- Participants suggested **amplifying or initiating advocacy** for key challenges in the sector, including:
  o Ensuring the CHS is applied by all stakeholders interacting with people in situations of crisis and vulnerability.
  o Engagement with governments to encourage application of the CHS.
  o Ensure/reinforce collective accountability, for example integrating the CHS Commitments in humanitarian response plans (HRP).
  o Encouraging capacity sharing among organisations, ensuring organisations in close proximity to the people and communities they are serving are equipped to deliver the Commitments of the CHS.
  o Inclusion and clarity on the relevance and use of the CHS by governments and public sector actors, civil society, faith-based organisations and private sector actors.

3. Incorporating Feedback into the Final Revised Standard

The results of the second consultation confirmed that the changes to the CHS met with contributors' expectations and reflected their recommendations. The comments and contributions from the second consultation were summarised, discussed deeply and weighed before making any changes.

In summary, the key areas addressed in the final version of the revised CHS are:

A. **Reinforcing the CHS as people-centred framework**. Commitment 1 is now reconfirming this focus, and language has been modified throughout the text to reflect what people and communities can expect from those working to support them and can hold them to account.

B. **Simplifying and reducing duplications**.
   - Reintegrating the **General System Requirements** into the Commitments.
   - Strengthening the Requirements to be more **specific and measurable**.
   - **Rearranging some Requirements and reducing their number**. The requirements have been reorganised and reformulated for better consistency with the Commitments, resulting in a total of 50 Requirements across the nine Commitments.[2]
   - **Sharpening the introduction** to focus on the essentials of the Standard. Application and use by different stakeholders will be available through online tools and language versions.

C. **Reviewing the key requirements to strengthen cross-cutting topics** raised during the consultation including:
   - **Diversity and inclusion**. In the context of the CHS, the term "people and communities" refers to "the totality of women, men, girls and boys with different needs, vulnerabilities and capacities who are affected by disasters, conflict, poverty or other crises and challenges." This implies that diversity, equity and inclusion should be considered in all actions with people and communities. In addition, a specific Requirement *"1.1. Ensure that diversity, equity and inclusion considerations are integrated into all aspects of the organisation at its work, with attention to the most marginalised groups"* has been integrated into the final version of the revised CHS to ensure this is specifically measured and addressed.
   - **Preparedness and anticipation**. Commitment 3 was reviewed to reinforce the focus on peoples' and communities' efforts and capacities for preparedness, anticipatory action and resilience, as in Requirement 3.2: *"Support local capacities to anticipate and reduce risks of potential crises or disasters",* and 3.4: *"Take early actions to support local owenserhsip of resources and decision making by people and communities"*.
   - **Data protection**. The requirement related to data protection in the draft revised CHS was reformulated as follows in the final version of the revised CHS as Requirement 4.3: *"Protect and safeguard data and information that could place people, communities and the organisation at risk, in line with recognised good practice"*.
   - **Environment.** In the final version of the revised CHS, environmental issues were grouped into a single Requirement to reinforce the need for organisations to address this issue at all levels of their work: Requirement 4.2 *"Identify potential negative environmental impacts of the organisation and its work and take actions to prevent, mitigate and address immediate and long-term negative effects"*.

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[2] This compares to 62 key actions and organisational responsibilities in the 2014 CHS.

- **Transparency in selection of people and communities getting support**. The requirement *"2.2 Use fair, impartial and transparent criteria to define programmes and the people or groups supported by the organisation"* was introduced in the final version of the revised CHS to address this, which was of core importance to people and communities.

D. **Including a short glossary to define key terms used.** The final version of the updated CHS includes a short glossary of key terms that have a specific significance in the context of the Standard.

E. **Making clearer connections to and between existing standards and key initiatives in the sector**. This was addressed in the introduction to the updated Standard.

4. Learning and Accountability: Areas for Further Action

The feedback provided during the full consultation process led to important discussions, ideas and recommendations, some of which fell outside the scope of the revision of the text and the Standard itself. These have been fully captured and will be addressed by partners in the coming year as the Standard is being rolled out.

These topics include the following:
- **Updating the CHS Verification Framework/Guide and tools**. This process is ongoing; the aim is to update the CHS Verification Framework by the time of the launch of the Standard in March 2024. Information on the CHS self-assessment tools will be available on the CHS Commitment tracker platform.
- **Providing more guidance on how key players can engage with the CHS**. Guidance on how various actors, including donors, UN agencies and governments can use the CHS in a rage of situations and advocating to encourage their involvement and support. This will be developed.
- **Advocacy to overcome key challenges in the sector.** CHS Alliance and partners are already working on some of issues around which advocacy is needed to reinforce/accelerate progress in the sector and support meeting the Commitments of the CHS.
- **Encouraging all stakeholders interacting with people in situations of crisis to apply the CHS**. The CHS Alliance encourages and offers support to all organisations wanting to engage with the CHS. To join the network of organisations dedicated to assisting organisations in the application of the CHS, visit https://www.chsalliance.org/join/.

5. The Core Humanitarian Standard: Moving Forward

The revised Core Humanitarian Standard is a strong framework for all stakeholders of humanitarian action. It has been validated by practitioners, organisations and community participants through a comprehensive consultation over the past 18 months. It is a tool that is now more accessible, informed by knowledge and insights gained from eight years of use. It will guide practitioners working across all sectors, supporting quality programming, technical excellence and sector accountability.

It will remain only as strong as the practitioners and people using it, however, and several challenges have been noted, and on which work will continue. Below are the voices of some of the people that this sector seeks to serve, and which should guide our collective application of the Commitments and deepen our own individual and organisational commitments to quality and accountability.

"We always provide feedback and express what we want, but nothing really changes. We will feel listened to when we will see the programmes changed based on our feedback".

o   *Woman in South Lebanon.*

"We appreciate it when the use of resources is transparent, and we all work to ensure they are used for their intended purposes".

o   *Man in Tahoua, Niger.*

"Please implore organisations to ensure their support goes to people who actually need it the most".

o   *Woman in South Omo, Ethiopia.*

"I have learned today that access to support and assistance is a right – not charity – and should be available without discrimination because of where you come from"

o   *Focus group discussion participant, Colombia.*

"As young people, we know if organisations send us competent staff to support, we will learn a lot from them to prepare for our future".

o   *An adolescent in a Rohingya camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh*

Annex 1: Overview of participation in the second-round consultation

o **Regional/national workshops, webinars, and online survey**

Table 1: Regions covered

Region	Location	Date	Number of participants	Number of countries
Middle East & North Africa	Amman	16 May 2023	70	7
Europe/Global	Geneva	7 June 2023	83	19
Central & South America	Panama City	11-12 July 2023	70	14
Western and Central Region	Dakar	12 July 2023	30	4
Southern & Eastern Africa	Nairobi	7 September 2023	100	8
Asia and Pacific	Bangkok	28 September 2023	90	19
Totals			473	

Table 2: Webinars and survey

	Date	Number of participants	Countries covered
Webinar in French	20 July 2023	56	16
Webinar in Spanish	3 August 2023	60	14
Webinar in English	17 August 2023	122	39
Online survey	June 2023 to September 2023	259	65
		497	

o **Community consultations – Country Case Studies**

Profile of community representatives: people affected by natural disaster, conflict, protracted crisis; women/men; adults/older people/youth and adolescents; people with disabilities migrants/refugees/host communities.

Table 3: Community consultations were held in the following countries:

Country	Date of the country visit	Community consultation in	Number of community representatives		
			Females	Males	Total
Lebanon	8 – 12 May 2023	South Lebanon	12	-	12
Colombia	7 – 10 July 2023	Bogota	35	10	45
Jordan	12 – 17 May 2023	East Amman	15	15	30
Niger	12 – 16 June 2023	Tahoua region	18	5	23
Ethiopia	28 August – 1 Sept 2023	South Omo region	32	16	48
Kenya	5 – 9 September 2023	Taita Taveta region	19	7	26
Bangladesh	18 – 26 September 2023	Cox's Bazar	44	29	73
Totals			175	82	**257**

Table 4: In-depth discussions were held with entities in the following countries:

Countries	Number of participants	Number of organisations
Lebanon	30	4
Colombia	40	6
Niger	40	5
Ethiopia	30	6
Bangladesh	65	4
Totals	**205**	**25**

o **Specific groups and individuals**

Table 5: In-depth discussions were held with the following entities:

	Dates	Number of participants/orgs
HQAI Auditors	19 July 2023	20
CHS Alliance members	14 September 2023	110
DEC members	19 June 2023	15
IASC Task force	6 September 2023	15
C4C endorsers	11 September 2023	17
Accountability Group France (Groupe Redevabilité)	6 July 2023	7
Contributions from organisations and individuals	-	6 orgs (FCDO, DEC, World Vision, CARE, UNHCR. Trocaire)