HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT

Geneva, 19-20 October 2026



“Together, we shape the future of humanitarian standards”

Setting the Scene



William Anderson
Sphere Executive Director

Dignity is not an optional extra to technical quality.

Sphere's influence does not come from enforcement. It comes from trust, legitimacy and collective ownership.

Written 'by the many, for the many' is more than a slogan, as it will shape the revision itself.

Sphere standards are used across our work. They help teams make practical decisions in difficult environments

Scarcity cannot become our justification for lowering our standards.

Will these standards work for the people closest to the crisis?



Caroline Holt
IFRC Director of Disasters, Climate, and Crises



Elias Wieland
SDC Head of Humanitarian Centre of Expertise

For Switzerland, Sphere is really key.

Many people are not even aware that they are using it, that they are benefitting from it.

You're here together to make this better, to make it accessible, that it's really used, that it makes a difference for the people in the future.

1 Executive Summary

The Sphere Humanitarian Summit took place on 19–20 October 2026 in Geneva, hosted by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

The two-day in-person Summit brought together members of the Revision Steering Committee and Technical Content Leads from each technical chapter, alongside the Sphere team, to launch the technical review of the Sphere Handbook.

Participants began reviewing the existing Handbook to identify key areas for improvement. They clarified their respective roles and developed a shared understanding of the review's objectives, process and next steps.

The Summit concluded with a Briefing and Reception on 20 October, welcoming a wider humanitarian and diplomatic audience from around the world.

2 Background

The Humanitarian Summit took place during the Review & Align phase of the Sphere Handbook Revision, which was launched at Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week (HNPW) in Geneva in March 2026.



3 Participants and Expertise

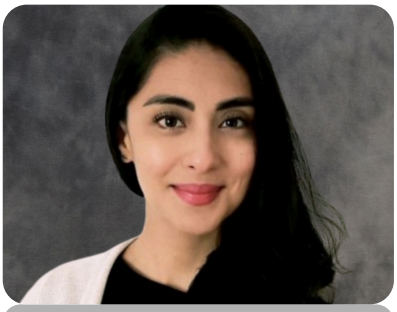
The Sphere Handbook revision brings together a diverse network of humanitarian professionals, organisations and technical experts. More than 200 technical contributors from over 85 organisations and 55 nationalities make up the technical Working Groups, led by Technical Content Leads across the five technical chapters: WASH, Health, Food Security, Nutrition, and Shelter & Settlement.

The Revision Steering Committee comprises 13 members who provide strategic guidance throughout the revision process.

At the Sphere Humanitarian Summit on 19–20 October 2026, 12 Steering Committee members and Technical Content Leads and Working Group representatives from the five technical chapters came together in Geneva to prepare for the substantive technical review.

THE SPHERE HANDBOOK REVISION -
GLOBAL PARTICIPATION AS OF OCTOBER 2026





Andrea Expinosa
Revision Project Manager

> *There are already hundreds of people involved in the Revision and we will continue to seek input from humanitarian professionals and frontline responders, communities affected by crisis, the Sphere network, academia, governments, private sector, donors, and many more.*
>
> *Bringing all of these people together is one part of the challenge, but making sure that their perspectives can genuinely influence the content while keeping the process connected and moving, that is a whole other challenge.*

4 Key Discussions

The Summit aimed to prepare the Revision Steering Committee to guide the revision process and enable the Technical Content Leads to begin the substantive technical review of the Sphere Handbook.

Discussions over the two days focused on reviewing the 2018 Handbook, building a shared understanding of the revision's direction and identifying what needs to change to keep the Handbook relevant and useful. Through group discussions and practical exercises, participants reflected on the Handbook's strengths and limitations, explored key questions for the revision and considered how to make the process meaningful and inclusive.

Working with selected extracts from the current Handbook, participants explored what remains useful, what creates barriers to its application and which elements may need to be reconsidered or updated.

Four key questions guided these discussions:

Usability:
Who is the Sphere Handbook still not working for, and what keeps users from using or shaping it?

Evaluating evidence:
When research, practice and lived experience point in different directions, what should guide decisions on what is included in the Handbook?

Local relevance:
How can global minimum standards remain meaningful across different contexts and strengthen locally led action?

Future-proofing:
What must the revision get right for the next Handbook to remain useful and relevant in the next ten years?



Sarah Ward
Global Content Lead

> *I've been working my whole life to improve how to promote communities' voices into our decision-making process.*
>
> *It is one thing to ask a question, it is another thing to change based on the answer.*
>
> *Please come with us on this journey, and let's try and make it even better than it was last time!*

4.2 Agreeing on Cross-Cutting Priorities

Participants also discussed the eight cross-cutting priorities that will guide the revision. These will shape how the technical chapters, Humanitarian Charter and Protection Principles are revised and applied. Rather than appearing as standalone sections, they will be considered across the Handbook to ensure it responds to current and emerging social, political, economic, legal, technological and environmental challenges.

On Day 1, participants shared and discussed recommendations. On Day 2, the Revision Steering Committee refined and affirmed the framing of the eight priorities.

Locally Led Humanitarian Action
Strengthening the participation, leadership and decision-making role of local and national responders in humanitarian action.

Displacement and Mobility
Reflecting the needs of displaced and mobile populations.

Environment & Climate
Addressing environmental and climate-related considerations.

Resilience
Supporting communities in managing and recovering from crises.

Protection, Inclusion & Accountability
Upholding rights, safety, dignity, inclusion and accountability to affected people.

Digital Technology & Data
Using technology and data safely, responsibly, ethically and transparently.

Cash, Markets & Economic Recovery
Using cash and vouchers where appropriate and supporting local economic recovery.

Humanitarian System Effectiveness
Strengthening coordination, shared learning and continuous improvement.

5 Briefing and Reception



The Summit concluded with a Briefing and Reception at the IFRC on 20 October, welcoming humanitarian partners and representatives of Permanent Missions.

Summit participants shared takeaways from the Summit, as well as their motivations for supporting the Sphere Revision as Steering Committee members.



Laura Valencia
Revision Steering Committee

> *I became a refugee when I was 12 in Latin America.*
>
> *We were in need of support at that moment, but what I learned is depending on the organisation or depending on who is providing the support, they do not normally know what are the needs that they need to cover.*
>
> *This is why Sphere is important to me.*

> *Sphere has been my go-to when I needed to understand how to ensure we have a quality programme, when I needed to work in the field, to submit projects, to put in place an emergency department, when I wanted to get points for policy, for advocacy, when I needed to bring the humanitarian work to masters students, into the universities.*



Rita Rhayem
Revision Steering Committee

6 With thanks to all those who attended the Summit

Guest Speakers

Caroline Holt, Global Director - Disaster, Climate and Crises, IFRC
Diana Ongiti, Senior Advisor, National Society Development and Coordination, IFRC
Elias Wieland, Head of Humanitarian Centre of Expertise, Swiss Federal Department for Foreign Affairs

Sphere Handbook Revision Steering Committee

Avianto Amri, Chairperson, Indonesian Society for Disaster Management, Indonesia
Axel Schmidt, Response and Training Coordinator, ASB, Germany
Aya Yagan, Technical Director, NSDation, Syria
*Beatriz Corral, President, Fundacion delALTO, Argentina
Jeremy Wellard, Head of Humanitarian Coordination, ICVA, Switzerland
Jessica Camburn, CEO Cerebra, UK
Joumana Souaid, Programme Technical Director, World Vision, UAE
Laura Valencia, Strategy and Partnership Coordinator, Global Refugee Youth Network, Ecuador
Osas Aizeyosabor Agho, Humanitarian Programme Consultant, Nigeria
Rita Rhayem, Head of Country Health Systems, GAVI Vaccines Alliance, Switzerland
Sarah Henly-Shepard, Consultant Disaster Resilience, Costa Rica
Shamiso Moyo, Public Health, Nutrition & Food Systems Consultant, Zimbabwe
Tushar Wali, Disaster Risk Management Director, CBM, Belgium

Members of Technical Teams in attendance

Monica Ramos, Global WASH Cluster Coordintaor, UNICEF
Michelle Farrington-Creffield, Public Health Promotion Lead, Oxfam
Colleen Emary, Global Nutrition Cluster Operations Team Coordinator, Global Nutrition Cluster/ACF Canada
Rasha Al-ardhi, Deputy Global Nutrition Cluster Coordinator, UNICEF
Joanne Philpott, Consultant
Ela Serdaroglu, Consultant
Seki Hirano, Consultant
Valerie Tremblay, Programme Policy Officer, World Food Programme
Allen Maina, Head of Public Health, UNHCR

Observers

Christian Modino Hok, Humanitarian Director, Caritas Internationalis
Bonaventure Sokpoh, Policy and Outreach Senior Advisor, CHS Alliance
Friar Luciano, Secretary-General, Fraternity - International Humanitarian Missions
Friar Noah, Fraternity - International Humanitarian Missions
Friar Efraín, Fraternity - International Humanitarian Missions

Team Sphere

Andrea Espinosa, Revision Project Manager
Daniel Felli, Development Associate
Felicity Fallon, Engagement Director
Maria Ayoub, Stakeholder and Events Associate
Raquel Weintraub, Network Development Advisor
Sarah Ward, Revision Global Content Lead
Sophie Frilander, Policy Researcher
Tristan Hale, Operations Director
William Anderson, Executive Director

*Member of the Revision Steering Committee who was unable to attend the Summit.