



Humanitarian standards for a better world

Sphere is a global community that brings together frontline practitioners, humanitarian organisations, community groups, trainers, donors, policy makers, academics, UN agencies, governments and affected communities, to set standards for humanitarian action and promote quality and accountability.

1. Annual priorities

Sphere's priorities for 2021, which are aligned with its 2021-2025 Strategy:

A. Sphere Standards

To promote increased awareness, understanding, accessibility, localisation, ownership, application and review of Sphere standards across diverse contexts globally.

B. Sphere Community and Membership

To enhance the ownership and application of Sphere standards by expanding, diversifying and strengthening our global Sphere community of purpose and practice, and deepening their engagement with locally led response.

C. Humanitarian Standards

To be a convenor, thought leader and global resource on humanitarian standards. To promote and facilitate collaboration and best practice across humanitarian standards to ensure quality and accountability in the sector and better respond to the needs of users and communities. To influence the inclusion of humanitarian standards in national, global and donor policies.

D. Accountability, Evidence, Impact and Learning

To promote accountability and learning, and better understand and articulate the evidence for and impact of Sphere standards.

2. Context

In response to the continuing global COVID-19 pandemic, Sphere prioritised online events and activities to support the dissemination and application of Sphere and other humanitarian standards.

Despite the pandemic, several in-person activities took place including a Training of Trainers programme in Mozambique. The Sphere team continued to operate efficiently and effectively with no major challenges.

Sphere responded to funding pressures on members by reducing membership fees, simplifying the membership structure and opening the door to a more diverse range of humanitarian actors.

3. Key achievements

Sphere successfully delivered planned activities and implemented additional ones in response to demand. Key achievements include:

3.1 Sphere enhanced its **governance structure** and welcomed a diverse **new Governing board** which will serve from 2021 to 2024.

3.2 The team provided leadership to Sphere members and focal points on engagement with National Disaster Management Authorities (NDMAs).

3.3 Sphere continued its stewardship of the Humanitarian Standards Partnership and welcomed two new partners: the Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster and CHS Alliance.

Sphere in numbers

During 2021 there were:



176,255

visitors to the Sphere website



65,474

consultations of the Interactive Handbook



37,983

downloads of the Sphere Handbook



9,346

downloads of other Sphere resources



7,111

new registrations on the learning platform



140

Sphere-related events in the Sphere Calendar

As of 31 December 2021, Sphere has:



97,854

mail subscribers



37,806

social media followers



123

listed trainers



55

focal points



41

full members

3.4 Sphere's first ever **Massive Open Online Course**, in English, brought together over 900 participants from around the world.

3.5 Sphere supported its focal point in Zimbabwe to run a **Training of Trainers** (ToT) programme in Mozambique, a country with acute humanitarian needs but no Sphere focal points, trainers or members at the start of 2021.

3.6 An **audit** of Sphere's online platforms against web content accessibility guidelines paved the way for improvements from 2022.

3.7 Sphere expanded its membership with five new member organisations including two from the Global South: **PALPER asbl** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) and **DPNet-Nepal**.

3.8 An increase in demand for online workshops as a result of COVID-19 restrictions led to Sphere delivering three workshops in online teaching methods for trainers.

3.9 A prolific year for new training and policy products, including: **microlearning assets; activity cards version 2; standards vs targets activity; COVID-19 case studies; Sphere in Context and for Assessment, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning**; and **Applying Sphere standards in Brazil** (video).

3.10 A boost in the Lusophone world with European Portuguese translations of the **2018 Sphere Handbook**, the **Sphere training package**, and the **Urban settings guide** (part 2).

3.11 In addition to European Portuguese, translations of the Sphere Handbook were completed in Turkish, Bahasa Indonesia and Urdu.

4. Progress on annual priorities

A. Sphere standards

i Sphere launched the Sphere in Practice self-paced 10-hour online course in **French** and **Spanish**. The Spanish version was translated and localised by a team of disaster risk management experts in **Bolivia**.

ii Sphere delivered the first ever Sphere in Practice **Massive Open Online Course**, connecting over 900 learners from around the globe during COVID-19 lockdowns.

iii Handbook translations initiated by the Sphere global community are an indicator of the continued relevance and demand for Sphere standards. **European Portuguese, Turkish, Urdu** and **Bahasa Indonesia** Handbooks were completed, further supporting local uptake of the standards and bringing the total number of 2018 Sphere Handbook translations to 14 (including English).

iv In collaboration with the **Sphere trainer community**, the pilot version of a new training package for online Sphere workshops was completed.

v Sphere made its e-learning courses more accessible by adding a "skip log in" feature to its **learning management system**, allowing learners to access Sphere courses without or before creating a user account.

vi In partnership with its focal point in Zimbabwe, Sphere launched the European Portuguese version of the Sphere Handbook and delivered a ToT programme in Mozambique. A series of seven in-person and two online workshops reached 247 humanitarian practitioners across Mozambique's eleven provinces.

vii Sphere supported its trainers and focal points networks to deliver Sphere ToT events in **Hong Kong** and **Venezuela**.

viii A **web content accessibility audit was completed**, paving the way for more accessible products and services.

ix Following a global consultation in 2020, Sphere released its **new strategy** for 2021-2025 in February 2021.

x Sphere updated and restocked its Handbook **activity cards**; releasing a new training package to support this innovative product, including guidance for in-person and online workshops.

xi Sphere supported its network to engage with NDMA's by hosting an online meeting to understand needs, followed by development of a thematic sheet and training module.

Sphere resources published in 2021

- 🕒 NEW: Sphere strategy 2021-2025 (**full** and **overview** versions)
- 🕒 NEW: Annual report 2020 (in **English**)
- 🕒 NEW: COVID-19 case studies (in **English, French, Spanish** and **Arabic**)
- 🕒 NEW: Sphere in Context and for Assessment, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (in **English**)
- 🕒 NEW: Standards vs. targets training activity (in **six languages**)
- 🕒 NEW: Microlearning assets (in **five languages**)
- 🕒 NEW: Sphere in action: Applying Sphere standards in Brazil (**video**)
- 🕒 UPDATED: Sphere Handbook activity cards Version 2 and new training package (in **English**)
- 🕒 TRANSLATED: The Sphere Handbook (in **European Portuguese, Turkish, Urdu** and **Bahasa Indonesia**)
- 🕒 TRANSLATED: Using Sphere standards in urban settings Part 2 (in **Portuguese**)
- 🕒 TRANSLATED: Sphere Training Package 2018 edition (in **Portuguese**)

B. Sphere Community and Membership

i In response to increased demand for online workshops, Sphere offered training in online teaching methods for 72 trainers in three workshops (**two in English** and one in **Spanish**). Trainers also participated in a **Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) refresher training** in Spanish.

ii Four graduates of the training courses in online teaching methods facilitated a **series of online workshops** for SIMEX, the largest humanitarian simulation in the United Kingdom.

iii The Sphere network participated in 140 Sphere-related events which are in the **Sphere Calendar**, demonstrating the power of the network – notably focal points, trainers and members – to disseminate Sphere standards around the world.



Humanitarian Standards Partnership (HSP) expansion

Sphere welcomed two new partners to the HSP in 2021.

The Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster, led by IOM and UNHCR, released the first edition of the **Minimum Standards for Camp Management**. CCCM’s application met all criteria, including providing evidence that the development process of their standards was sufficiently inclusive, collaborative and consultative; and that they have a funded plan for wide dissemination of the standards.

CHS Alliance joined the HSP as its first associate partner. Sphere, CHS Alliance and Groupe URD jointly own the Core Humanitarian Standard (**CHS**), which is a foundation of all HSP handbooks.

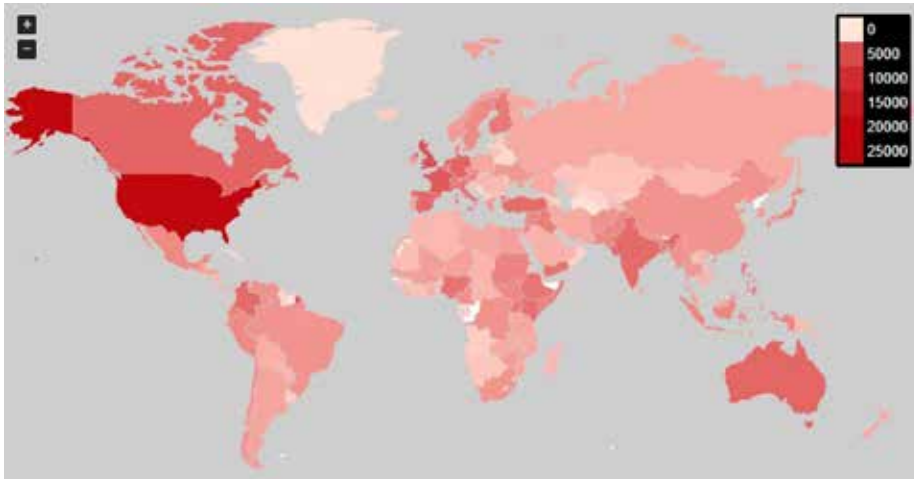


- iv Sphere **reviewed its governance and membership model** in consultation with its stakeholders. The General Assembly in April 2021 approved a new membership structure and lower membership fees. The objectives are to increase engagement of national and local organisations and to diversify Sphere’s governance and membership to better reflect the Sphere network.
- v Members **elected a new Governing Board** which will serve for three years from December 2021. The new Board is more representative of the Sphere network, with better gender balance and representation from regional and national organisations.
- vi Membership of Sphere was expanded with five new member organisations including two from the Global South: **PALPER asbl** (Democratic Republic of the Congo) and **DPNet-Nepal**.
- vii Sphere welcomed four additional focal points to its global network: in The Netherlands (**KUNO**), the Republic of Ireland (**Concern Worldwide**), Guatemala (**Red Esfera Guatemala**) and Portugal (**FIHM**).
- viii Eight new trainers were welcomed to the community of **listed Sphere trainers**, increasing the number of trainers available in Bangladesh, Canada, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic and Turkey.
- ix Sphere continued to support local ownership of standards by providing grants, guidance and technical assistance to focal point activities locally, including:
 - a Translation of the Sphere Handbook into Dari (due for release in 2022) with Sphere’s regional partner for Asia, **CWSA**;
 - b Dissemination of the Nepali Handbook with **DPNet-Nepal**, including a **street drama** (video); and
 - c A **ToT programme in Venezuela** led by Sphere’s **focal point**.
- x Sphere supported its network to establish regional Sphere platforms for sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. The objectives of these emerging platforms are to strengthen coordination and increase

- experience sharing and learning among Sphere practitioners.
- xi Sphere continued to engage with its donors, including raising additional funding to respond to the spike in humanitarian needs in Mozambique.

C. Humanitarian Standards

- i Sphere continued to lead the Humanitarian Standards Partnership (HSP), convening regular meetings with partners and promoting collaboration.
- ii The HSP gained two new members in 2021: the **CHS Alliance** (associate member) and the **Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster**. The **Minimum Standards for Camp Management** handbook was added to the Interactive Handbook in English.
- iii Led by Sphere, the HSP developed an initial set of “mapped themes”, a curated directory of information on particular themes such as *Environment* across the HSP handbooks. These will form the *HSP Navigation tool* for release in 2022.
- iv The Handbook Digital Platform is the HSP’s end-to-end digital publishing system, of which the **Interactive Handbook** is the front end. Sphere worked with a prospective HSP member to successfully develop the back end “Editor Suite” interface so that a team of authors and experts can efficiently handle thousands of user comments received during public consultations.
- v During 2021, the Interactive Handbook had 65,474 visits. The new **“bookshelf” landing page** gives users easy access to 22 documents: **Sphere** in 6 languages; Minimum Economic Recovery Standards (**MERS**) in 4; Child Protection Minimum Standards (**CPMS**) in 4; Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for Older People and People with Disabilities (**HIS**) in 4; and Minimum Standard for Market Analysis (**MISMA**), Livestock Emergency Guidelines (**LEGS**), Minimum Standards for Education (**INEE**) and Minimum Standards for Camp Management (**MSCM**) in one language each.



Heat map showing the global distribution of Interactive Handbook users in 2021

- vi The usage dashboard on the Interactive Handbook was enhanced for a better interface and visualisations, including a heat map which shows the global distribution of users in 2021.
- vii Sphere engaged with several initiatives which are developing additional humanitarian standards. As the HSP becomes better established, more organisations tap into Sphere’s expertise, use our platforms to streamline their development processes and eventually apply to become HSP partners.
- viii Sphere advocated with various other standards and guidance setting organisations, including CHS Alliance, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and Cluster leads and humanitarian coordinators, to promote coherence, discourage duplication, and enhance access to and use of standards and guidance.

D. Accountability, Evidence, Impact and Learning

- i. Sphere practitioners shared their success stories, including from **Chile** and **Venezuela** where focal points delivered Sphere training in response to national government strategies to improve disaster preparedness and response.
- ii Following the popular series of **COVID-19 webinars** in 2020, Sphere released a corresponding series of **COVID-19 case studies** in 2021. Each case study is written by practitioners in the field, and includes lessons learned and good practice for applying

- humanitarian standards in contexts which were further complicated by the virus.
- iii Sphere collated case studies illustrating how focal points worked with governments to ensure that Sphere is referenced in local, departmental or national disaster management authority policies and guidelines.
- iv Sphere released a new video in its **Sphere in Action series: Applying Sphere standards in Brazil**. Filmed on location in Roraima, it demonstrates how Sphere’s focal point, **Fraternidade – International Humanitarian Federation**, applies Sphere standards in their camps for refugees and migrants from Venezuela. In 2021, Brazil was struggling with one of the highest COVID-19 death rates in Latin America.
- v Sphere added six public videos to **YouTube** during 2021 – including interviews, animations and a webinar recording – which attracted over 2,000 views. The Sphere MOOC generated 6 webinar recordings and 5 unique videos: short, low-budget recordings which proved highly popular with participants.
- vi Sphere released a major new unpacked guide, **Sphere in Context and for Assessment, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning**, which describes how to work with standards, how to contextualise indicators and the advantages of including Sphere indicators throughout the humanitarian programme cycle. The new guide is an evolution of two



Sphere in Practice

The Sphere in Practice Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) represents the culmination of several years of work. Sphere has offered self-paced online courses since 2013 with the first release of *The Sphere Handbook in Action*, now replaced by *Sphere in Practice*. The new course is based on the 2018 Sphere Handbook and was designed with two study routes in mind: self-paced and the MOOC.

Use of the *Sphere in Practice* self-paced course and general awareness of Sphere were boosted through a combination of an innovative “skip log in” feature and targeted social media campaigns.

MOOCs occupy the space between self-paced online learning (which is highly cost-effective but lacks meaningful interactivity) and in-person workshops (which are highly engaging but cost-intensive).

A good measure of the quality of a MOOC is the ratio of people completing the course compared to those registering for it. Based on a benchmark from two leading US universities, Sphere’s first MOOC was a great success!

Following the MOOC, Sphere has remained in contact with the 376 graduates, many of whom attended a 6-month catch-up meeting.

- earlier ones: Sphere for Assessments (2014) and Sphere for Monitoring and Evaluation (2015).
- vii The **Sphere Handbook** was downloaded from the Sphere website 37,983 times during 2021. There were 9,346 downloads from Sphere’s **resource library**. Download figures are one indicator of global interest in Sphere products.

5. Other activities

5.1 Sphere continued to disseminate information, resources and materials on humanitarian standards and to advocate for their application globally. Sphere remains committed to producing the majority of its content in at least English, French, Spanish and Arabic, and encouraging and supporting the Sphere network to produce further translations and localised materials.

5.2 During the year, Sphere’s website was visited 258,204 times by 176,255 unique users of whom 82% were first-time visitors, an indication of the continuing importance of Sphere to new practitioners.

5.3 Sphere added 19 articles to its **news feed** of which the most popular – read over 1,400 times during the year – was on the **Mozambique ToT programme**.

5.4 Sphere continued to engage with its global community through social media platforms, reaching 18,716 followers on Facebook (3.5% growth), 9,834 on Twitter (7.5% growth), 5,216 (59.5% growth) on LinkedIn and 4,040 (not reported in previous years) on YouTube.

5.5 Sphere ran nine mail campaigns during the year and continues to reach almost 98,000 subscribers.

5.6 Sphere updated its social media strategy, to focus on collaboration with its network of focal points, members and trainers to co-create and cross-post content to reach new audiences across the globe in multiple languages.

5.7 Sphere staff were invited to present, join various panel discussions and facilitate workshops on Sphere and the HSP, including conferences on **Humanitarian Studies** and **Disaster Management**, and events organised by **OCHA**, **ICVA** and the **IFRC**.

6. Reflections and insights

6.1 Sphere was actively involved in up to six Sphere ToT programmes per year between 2000 and 2011. In 2011, this opportunity was passed to the Sphere focal points network which by then had grown substantially over the course of 10 years when some 50

Sphere ToTs took place. From 2011 to 2019, Sphere ToT programmes continued, but only in countries with focal points. In 2019, Sphere decided to return to active involvement in one major ToT programme per year, targeting a country with no focal point. Following successful programmes in Burkina Faso in 2020 and in Mozambique in 2021, Sphere intends to continue this



Mozambique ToT programme

A spike in humanitarian needs – caused by conflict in Cabo Delgado and cyclones in coastal regions – combined with the completion of the European Portuguese translation of the Sphere Handbook in early 2021, meant Mozambique was a suitable country for Sphere to grow its network with a **full ToT programme**.

Sphere’s focal point in neighbouring Zimbabwe, The Centre for Humanitarian Analytics (**CHA**), led the project; providing training for 247 people involved in the humanitarian response, including government actors and participants from 50 organisations across Mozambique’s 11 provinces. Despite COVID-19 restrictions, most training events were held in-person as internet penetration in Mozambique is around 20% only.

Twelve people were selected from among workshop graduates to attend a 5-day in-person ToT workshop in Maputo in December 2021.

This project was made possible by the flexibility of Sphere’s donors who promptly released additional funds in response to the spike in humanitarian needs.

Read the full report in **English** or **Portuguese**.

activity as it complements the work of our focal points and helps the global Sphere network grow.

6.2 Humanitarian organisations – including Sphere focal points and members – are facing an increasingly competitive funding environment, and a greater burden to provide evidence of the impact of their activities. This presents an opportunity to work with focal points and members to develop guidance and frameworks for understanding impact and to work with donors to ensure that such expectations are realistic and fully resourced.

6.3 In May 2021, Sphere took the bold step to change its membership model, creating a flatter structure and offering significant reductions in fees. The objectives were to increase the engagement of national and local organisations and to diversify governance. This led to the election of a more diverse **Governing board** for the next three years.

6.4 As demonstrated by COVID-19 in 2021 and the war in Ukraine in 2022, humanitarian crises often require a prompt response to new and emerging demands from Sphere’s network. Funding flexibility from donors and the prompt release of additional funds for crises enable Sphere to respond to demands and ensure that Sphere standards are accessible and consistently applied where most needed.

6.5 The NDMA project is a good example of demand-driven, collaborative product development: Sphere was committed to organising forums for focal points and developing new guidance. From discussions with focal points, *working with NDMAs* was identified as an important challenge faced by many organisations, and therefore became the focus of discussions in 2021. This led to the collaborative development of guidance on working with NDMAs and an accompanying training module.

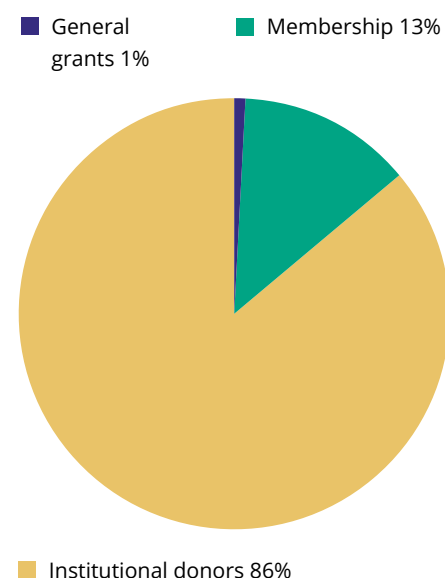
6.6 For over 20 years, Sphere has made significant efforts to ensure its products and services are accessible: freely available and easy to use by everyone. An audit of Sphere’s digital content against Web Content Accessibility Guidelines in 2021 represents another **bold step forward on accessibility**. Sphere will address the issues raised by the audit and ensure that new Sphere products and services are more accessible.

Statement of Income and Expenses

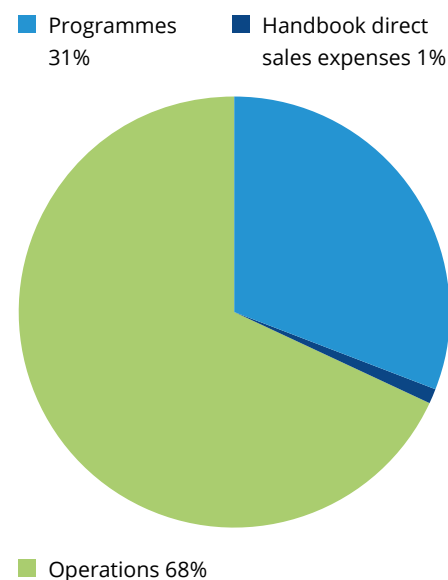
01.01.2021 to 31.12.2021 with comparative figures in Swiss francs

	2021	2020
INCOME		
Board contributions and donations		
Membership Fees	183,600	274,020
Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs	70,156	70,977
Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs	150,000	150,000
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany	369,218	190,456
U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration	220,810	247,559
U.S. Agency for International Development, Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance	375,700	406,028
Danish Refugee Council H2H	-	153,219
Other general grants and donations	7,187	111,810
Total Board Contributions and Donations	1,376,671	1,604,069
Other Income		
Handbook Sales	5,108	5,648
Miscellaneous Income	34	3,774
Other Income	5,142	9,422
TOTAL INCOME	1,381,813	1,613,491
EXPENSES		
Handbook direct sales expenses	-8,136	-12,467
Personnel expenses	-828,469	-913,024
Premises charges	-34,567	-46,232
Administration and office costs	-15,493	-10,665
IT expenses	-12,654	-27,272
Professional fees	-75,281	-79,053
Consultancies & Development fees	-327,069	-349,968
Travel, Representation & Meetings	-1,152	-3,197
TOTAL EXPENSES	-1,302,821	-1,441,878
NET OPERATING RESULT	78,992	171,613
Financial Income	9,698	2,740
Financial Expenses	-16,509	-20,407
NET RESULT BEFORE CHANGES IN RESTRICTED FUNDS	72,181	153,946
Allocation to restricted funds	-1,035,883	-1,068,240
Use of restricted funds	1,085,883	1,048,765
NET RESULT BEFORE ALLOCATIONS	122,181	134,471
Allocation to Operational Reserve and specific project balances	-45,318	-43,944
Use of Operational Reserve and specific project balances	-	5,028
NET RESULT FOR THE YEAR	76,863	95,555

Percentage of income 2021



Percentage of expenses 2021



Management, governance and donors

Sphere team

Dr Balwant Singh
Executive Director

Romain Benicchio
Partnerships Director

Felicity Fallon
Learning and Events (from August)

Tristan Hale
Communications and Learning Services

Wassila Mansouri
Membership and Network

Aninia Nadig
Policy and Practice

Barbara Sartore
Communications (to April)

Loredana Serban
Finance and Operations

Sphere Governing Board

Elected in December 2021

ACT Alliance (Niall O'Rourke)

Caritas Internationalis (Rita Rhayem, *President*)

Community World Service Asia (Ayesha Hassan)

Fast Rural Development Program (Fozia Rajput)

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (Nelson Castano, *Treasurer*) (from November 2018, re-elected)

Mercy Malaysia (Normaliza Mohd Nasir)

Plan International (Vanda Lengkong)

RedR International (Kirsten Sayers) (from September 2021, re-elected)

Save the Children (Cat Carter) (from September 2021, re-elected)

Turkish Red Crescent Society (Alper Küçük, *Vice President*)

Outgoing members

ACT Alliance (Alwynn Javier)

BIFERD (Jonas Habimana Seruvugu)

Caritas Internationalis (Suzanna Tkalec, *Vice President*) (to February 2021)

Caritas Internationalis (John Coughlin) (from March 2021 to November 2021)

Concern Worldwide (Ros O'Sullivan)

International Council of Voluntary Agencies (Ignacio Packer)

Plan International (Colin Rogers, *President*)

RedR International (Tanaji Sen) (to August 2021)

Save the Children (Michelle Brown) (to August 2021)

Sphere India (Vikrant Mahajan)

Sphere Donors

Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany

Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration

U.S. Agency for International Development, Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance

Sphere full and individual members

Humanitarian Standards Partnership partners

Cover picture: Credit: Plan International/Quinn Neely. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed, deepened and created significant cracks in our systems, institutions and leadership. As the world continues to respond to the emergency, we have turned our attention to the future – and we do not want to simply return to ‘normal’. We asked Stecia, 16, and Mastula, 22, from Uganda to share their stories of the pandemic and to imagine a new normal, a new world, post-COVID-19. What would they do to create a better world, we asked, if they were in charge? What kind of world do they dream of?

Below: Credit: Plan International/Matthew Kisa. The drought in Somalia continues to escalate following three consecutive failed rainy seasons, posing a severe threat to almost half of the population. 13-year-old Barwaaqo lives in a camp in Sool region with her family. Although she has two older brothers, as the eldest girl of seven siblings she has the responsibility of collecting water for the family's needs. The water is delivered to the camp by truck, but as Barwaaqo never knows when the truck is going to arrive, she has to stay alert at all times so she does not miss her chance for clean water.

