

# Humanitarian Response Architecture

The humanitarian operational environment is the one in which international and national aid organisations and commercial sector entities function and interact with during emergencies. It is significantly different from any other operating environment as all activities involved aim to delivery of humanitarian assistance in whatever form. There is no single organisation capable of delivering this assistance adequately on its own, hence the need to coordinate and collaborate with other entities to efficiently achieve this objective. Organisations operating in this environment include:

- National and local governments.
- United Nations agencies.
- The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.
- National and international non-governmental organisations (NGO).
- Commercial companies.
- Military forces.
- Donor agencies.

To facilitate engagement between these various entities, inclusive and well-defined structures – known as “clusters” – were created. To ensure accountability and efficiency, lead organisations for each cluster have been identified globally based on their sectors of expertise.

Enabling humanitarian actors to maximise their limited resources usage, ameliorate their efficiency, and demonstrate accountability, the [cluster approach](#) facilitates operations in multiple contexts. Therefore, clusters serve as a coordination mechanism improving the overall humanitarian responses thanks to the increased interaction they enable amongst all involved stakeholders working in the same sector (e.g. logistics, health, shelter). Each cluster operates under the leadership of a “lead agency” – accountable for its actions – usually selected according to its area of expertise (e.g. WHO is the Health Cluster lead agency).

## Humanitarian Principles

The principles of humanitarian practice aim to ensure the fundamental human rights of those affected by conflicts or natural disasters are safeguarded, notably by providing them with adequate protection and assistance. Simultaneously, humanitarian actors strive to minimising the potential negative externalities of such assistance and preparing for future emergencies. Humanitarian action includes – but is not limited to – the protection of civilians in crisis by meeting their basic needs for food, water, sanitation, shelter, and health care. It is furthermore geared to assist affected populations to return to normal lives and livelihoods. Humanitarian practice is guided by the humanitarian law and a range of international standards and codes of conduct including:

- [Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948](#).
- [Fourth Geneva Conventions of 1949 and additional protocols of 1977](#).
- [Principles of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Response Programmes](#).
- [Sphere Project Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response](#).

International humanitarian workers therefore abide by the following core humanitarian principles:

- **Humanity** – alleviate suffering wherever it is found to protect life and health and ensure respect for human beings.

- **Impartiality** – to act on the basis of needs, without discrimination.
- **Neutrality** – to act without taking sides for one group or another.
- **Independence** – to ensure humanitarian action autonomy from specifically political, economic or military interests.