



Polish Humanitarian Action

CULTURE BOOK



What is Culture Book?

The Culture Book of Polish Humanitarian Action is a comprehensive document outlining the organization's values, goals, vision, mission, and operational framework. Here, we highlight the importance of our core values, explaining what conduct and attitudes we cherish in both PAH's employees and volunteers.

The Culture Book offers an opportunity for anyone interested in understanding PAH's activities to learn about the history and strategy of the organization and the people who make it up.

In the document, we describe the organizational culture at Polish Humanitarian Action. We discuss how we approach management and how PAH builds relationships with the communities we support, our staff, partners, volunteers, and all those dedicated to supporting others.

The Culture Book of Polish Humanitarian Action was created with inspiration from the consulting agency HR4future and came into being thanks to the commitment of PAH's leaders, colleagues, and associates. In preparing this document, we partnered with the creative agency Kuźniar Media.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
MISSION AND VISION	5
STRATEGY	8
VALUES	14
ETHICAL STANDARDS	16
ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE	20
SUCCESSSES	24
PARTNERS	26
CONTACT US	28

INTRODUCTION

Polish Humanitarian Action has a history spanning over 30 years. The origins of the organization date back to the 1990s. Driven by the momentum of the transformations sweeping across Eastern Europe and the world at that time, we were confident in our ability to provide effective aid to those in need. It was then, at the very beginning of our journey, that our fundamental values took shape: agency while upholding dignity – including honoring the dignity of those in need and fostering a sense of dignity and empowerment among those who provide, finance and deliver aid.

Today, we understand that providing impactful assistance goes beyond supporting those in need. It is a multifaceted process involving numerous individuals in various aspects regarding aid. It also entails fostering connections with those willing to assist, nurturing lasting relationships, and sharing accomplishments, concerns, requirements, successes, and occasionally setbacks with our donors and partners.

The challenges we confront today are far more profound than those we faced 30 years ago. The escalation of the war in Ukraine has highlighted the possibility of armed conflict right at Poland's borders, urging us to adapt to the evolving reality and become more attuned to the emerging needs. Each year, migration pressures stemming from conflicts, climate

change, political upheaval, and critical water shortages, the main focus of our work, continue to intensify. In addition to responding to current challenges, we need to establish a robust operational framework to confront future crises. For this purpose, we need people like you: open-minded and dedicated, willing to think and take action. No matter the role or responsibilities – whether in the field or office, as employees, volunteers, activists, or donors – we are all united by the idea of helping. However, to help effectively, we must always consider the most suitable approach. Learn to see and feel more. Nurture in ourselves, among our colleagues, and across the board a greater feeling of empowerment, expand the scope of possibilities, and adopt a more purposeful approach to action.

We hope that this set of guidelines – our Culture Book – will enable us to strategize and pursue our goals in a more thoughtful, cohesive, and structured manner. We also trust that our actions will empower the communities we support, equipping them with the tools and resilience to respond to the challenges posed by the modern world.

Management Board of Polish Humanitarian Action



MISSION AND VISION

Polish Humanitarian Action was born out of the fundamental need to help – the belief that everyone deserves to be supported and treated with dignity. Our organization believes in the transformative power of kindness, which can achieve remarkable feats with the support of other people.

MISSION AND VISION

Polish Humanitarian Action was established from the inspiration of Janina Ochojska, who observed the efforts of the French organization Amitié Pologne providing assistance to Poles during the period of martial law.

In 1992, **Janina Ochojska** traveled with Equilibre, an organization which evolved from Amitié Pologne, to the besieged city of Sarajevo. That journey was the catalyst for the founding of PAH. It was then that the decision was made to dispatch a Polish humanitarian aid convoy to the war-torn city following the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The first convoy left Poland on 26 December 1992, and PAH began sending aid to other cities in the former Yugoslavia, such as Belgrade and Kosovo.

One of the overarching ideas behind the founding of our organization was **solidarity** rooted in the belief that **even when we need support ourselves, we can provide assistance to those facing even more severe challenges.**



MISSION AND VISION

At the same time, the founders and members of Polish Humanitarian Action firmly believed that humanitarian efforts should not rely solely on impulsive actions and emotions. They aimed to create an organization that would provide assistance with empathy, while maintaining **professionalism, sustainability, and transparency**. An organization that places people at the core of its mission and supports their empowerment, addressing their genuine needs and recognizing that the humanity is inseparable from the planet and nature.

Our **vision** is rooted in the commitment to strive for a world where people are ready to take action and have the means and knowledge to lead dignified lives.

The **mission of Polish Humanitarian Action** is to aid those facing the impacts of armed conflict, the climate crisis, and natural disasters. In its activities, PAH is guided by the principles of **humanitarianism, impartiality, neutrality, and independence**.

We are building an organization that embraces global perspectives and multiculturalism: human-centered and oriented toward solving specific problems.

We support local communities in improving their resilience to climate-related impacts and work to preserve local ecosystems, drawing from the experiences of aid recipients.

Our number one focus is on people: the recipients of our aid, our employees and donors, and the communities in which we operate. We focus on long-term relationships, founded on trust and mutual respect.

We do not want to induce guilt or pity in our donors. In our social campaigns, **we never play on emotions or evoke feelings of guilt and shame**.

At Polish Humanitarian Action, we believe that every person has a right to a dignified life and support during periods of crisis. This is why we act **quickly and effectively** to ensure that as many individuals as possible receive the necessary assistance in the shortest feasible time.

STRATEGY



The main objective of Polish Humanitarian Action is to provide effective and professional assistance to individuals facing challenging life circumstances. Our approach is grounded in the belief that the most impactful support comes from helping individuals to achieve self-reliance. This instills in them a sense of self-initiative and empowerment.

STRATEGY

In developing our strategy, we are **guided by a vision of** providing long-term assistance to all individuals in need, whether impacted by climate change, war, or economic hardship.

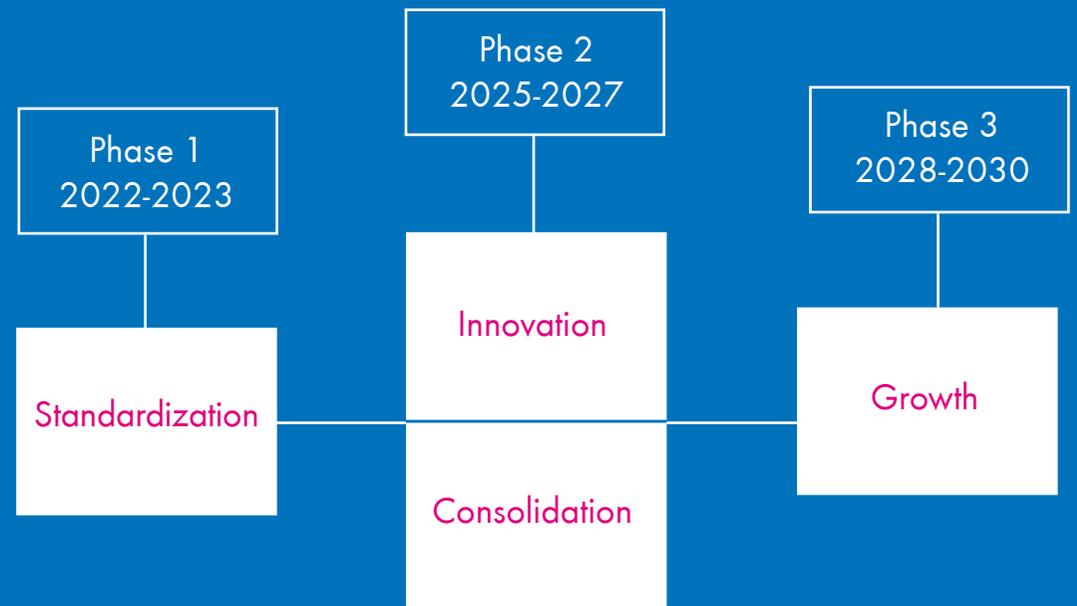
Polish Humanitarian Action strives to alleviate human suffering through **well-managed and coordinated programs** that take into account environmental protection.

All of our efforts revolve around the well-being of the people and the world around us: the PAH team, aid program participants, partners, and all those affected by crises. At the same time, we ensure that our assistance does not inadvertently harm or lead to added stress for its recipients.

We are also dedicated to creating vital infrastructure, introducing innovative solutions, and developing aid programs aligned with actual human needs, all while respecting people's dignity.

We aim for PAH to be perceived not only as an effective and transparent NGO, but also as a **friendly and transparent workplace**.

In 2021, we developed our Strategic Priorities for 2030. It is a comprehensive long-term development plan, comprising three phases, which serves as a guiding beacon for Polish Humanitarian Action, defining the path forward and highlighting PAH's global significance.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Polish Humanitarian Action operates both on an international scale and within Poland. Our primary focus is on saving lives and preserving health, and enhancing the well-being of vulnerable people. Our priorities are determined by the area of aid delivery, local context, and geography.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES – Global

Priority 1



Saving lives and preserving health through water, sanitation, and hygiene programs.

A key focus of Polish Humanitarian Action is to preserve health and save lives through the implementation of innovative water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) solutions and programs. PAH builds wells and facilitates access to proper sanitation, always mindful of environmental aspects, particularly those associated with climate change.

Priority 2



Saving lives, preserving health, and improving the quality of life: access to food, sustainable livelihoods, safe shelter, quality education, psychological and psychosocial support, and aspects of civilian protection.

PAH focuses on developing expertise in access to food, generating employment opportunities, rebuilding and building homes, ensuring safe shelter, and providing psychological support. Moreover, we place significant emphasis on protecting civilians, particularly in challenging conflict scenarios. In our activities, we take into account the social, cultural, and political context, working to provide education, training, and support to promote community stability and growth.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES – Poland

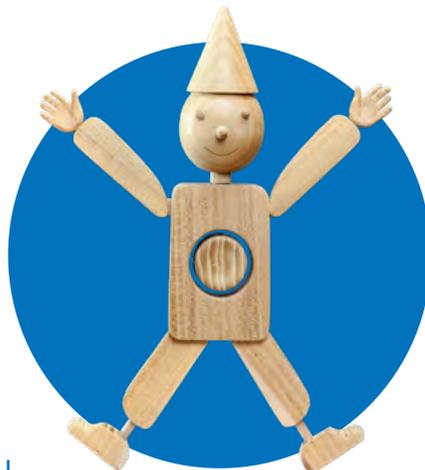
PAJACYK program

In addition to providing assistance to countries in crisis, our organization brings aid to those most in need in Poland. In the pursuit of our objectives, we concentrate on specific activities, such as the development of our “Pajacyk” program. The campaign is among the most widely recognized social initiatives in Poland.

PAH has been expanding the “Pajacyk” program since 1998. Within its framework, we provide funding for meals and initiatives supporting the mental health of children and youth in Poland. We deliver assistance not only to Polish children but also to those who have arrived in our country for various reasons.

Since the beginning of the program, we have provided nearly 10 million meals to children.

For more information about our “Pajacyk” program, [click here](#)



GLOBAL EDUCATION

We have created the PAH Global Education Program to offer Polish society better **access to information** about **sustainable development, global citizenship, and humanitarian principles**. It also focuses on developing essential 21st-century skills, with a particular emphasis on critical thinking. Thanks to these initiatives, society can engage more actively in global affairs and effectively face worldwide challenges.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

CONTEXT

Our primary focus is on building expertise to promptly respond to natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods or tsunamis, while also attending to the aftermath of armed conflicts. Our involvement depends on multiple factors including needs, access to affected regions, our capacity and resources at our disposal. When responding to emergencies, we maintain the continuity of our aid programs for those affected by the environmental crisis.



AREA

Our goal is to deliver fast and effective aid to people in need in French-speaking countries across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East by 2027. We want to be prepared to support these communities in their native language and within their cultural context.

Equally important to us is ensuring the safety of everyone involved in PAH's activities, including both the PAH team and project participants. We are dedicated to ensuring complete safety and protection of everyone involved.

Our goals are focused not only on relief efforts but also on establishing a modern NGO that seeks to minimize environmental impact, mitigate the risk of natural disasters, and leverage digital innovation and modern technology for precise and effective action. We concentrate on efficient logistics systems, effective program management, and transparent distribution of aid – coupled with nurturing the skills of capable staff in line with global operating standards. Through these actions, we will be able to support those in need and respond adeptly to evolving challenges and needs.

VALUES

Polish Humanitarian Action was established upon the foundational values of humanitarianism, impartiality, neutrality, and independence. These principles embody the core values of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, a humanitarian organization with a history spanning 160 years.



VALUES

During over three decades of providing aid, Polish Humanitarian Action has established fundamental values that underpin the organization's operations:

- ◆ **Respect** – PAH prioritizes respect for human dignity, especially during crises and armed conflicts. This principle extends beyond the PAH team and the communities we assist: it encompasses everyone we encounter on our journey. We advocate for diversity and inclusion, while taking care of the well-being and safety of all our team members. We prioritize open communication and discussions that consider diverse perspectives, conducted in a spirit of mutual respect for the needs and values of all parties involved.
- ◆ **Responsibility** – we grow from our experiences, taking responsibility for our daily tasks, projects, and relationships. We work transparently and openly, caring for the people, our planet, and natural resources in every initiative we undertake.
- ◆ **Professionalism** – we work towards this goal by fostering effective communication within the team and using constructive feedback to enhance working conditions. We operate according to high standards and hold ourselves accountable for our actions and decisions. We enhance our knowledge by applying it in practice and sharing it with the team.
- ◆ **Growth** – we cultivate an environment that nurtures skill development, embraces innovation, and promotes optimization, thereby contributing to PAH's improved efficiency. We use feedback to evolve and operate more effectively. We believe that lifelong learning is the foundation of growth, and we actively promote this mindset in all our endeavors.

Values serve as our guiding principles: they outline our operational approach and the goals we strive to attain. When assembling a team, we make sure that we are united around shared goals, values, and beliefs. In this way, we achieve a collective commitment toward understanding and caring for the welfare of aid recipients at every stage.

We make no compromises on matters that are contrary to our values. We strictly enforce a zero-tolerance policy for sexual abuse and violence.



ETHICAL STANDARDS

In our initiatives, we place a priority on caring for those in need while upholding fundamental values like respect and responsibility. We have implemented tools like the Code of Ethical Conduct to guarantee a workplace that is free from abuse, harassment, and discrimination.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

As a non-profit organization, we are subject to regular inspections by designated external agencies, such as the Public Benefit Committee. We have a purchasing control system in place to perform accounting settlements of our grants. Also, we regularly review our organization's procedures to prevent violations of employees' rights and obligations.

Our work is based on the trust of our donors and the communities we support. That is why we have adopted the principle of "ZERO tolerance for corruption and fraud". We have also implemented a policy of "ZERO tolerance for any kind of sexual exploitation, abuse, and sexual harassment". We provide support to whistleblowers who report irregularities and violations.

We attempt to proactively prevent such incidents and, if they do arise, address them without delay.

We aim to achieve complete transparency in all our operations. These principles serve as guiding values for all team members at Polish Humanitarian Action.



HUMANITARIANISM

Our aid efforts undertaken simultaneously for the Albanian communities in Kačanik and the Serbian communities in Štrpce reflect the fundamental humanitarian principle of impartiality, whereby assistance is provided to all those in need irrespective of their origin, race, or nationality.

- PAH report



RESPECT

In defining its identity and mission, PAH firmly believes that the first step toward helping is to show interest in the other person's situation and try to understand their perspective. This is why we explain the nature of conflicts, address the needs of civilian victims, and highlight the importance of impartial assistance.

- Karolina Anna Kuta



RESPONSIBILITY

In an ever-evolving reality [...] PAH maintains an enduring commitment to mobilization and respect for everyone, regardless of differences. At its essence lies a commitment to provide aid consistently and in a responsible manner. It is not about providing help to appease the helper's conscience, but authentic, impactful, and professional assistance.

- Karolina Anna Kuta



NEUTRALITY

Among the organizations operating in Palestine, we were one of the few to declare neutrality. We stressed at every opportunity that we are neither pro-Palestinian nor anti-Israeli. Most organizations providing aid to Palestinians express their pro-Palestinian sympathies.

- Janina Ochojska

PAH'S INTERNATIONAL OPERATING STANDARDS

PAH follows the international standards established for humanitarian organizations, including the Core Humanitarian Standard, Sphere Minimum Standards, and the four IASC Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations, to ensure effective delivery of assistance to those in need while honoring their rights and respecting their dignity.



PAH'S INTERNATIONAL OPERATING STANDARDS

The humanitarian standards we adhere to define the decision-making processes involved in the delivery of aid, emphasizing community empowerment and maintaining transparency in our operations.

Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) puts **communities and affected individuals at the heart of humanitarian action**. This is one of our fundamental guidelines, outlining the key components of measurable, accountable, high-quality humanitarian aid guided by clearly defined principles.

In 2021, PAH joined the CHS Alliance, pledging to comply with the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) as a guiding benchmark in its humanitarian and developmental efforts. We review our policies, procedures, programs, and services for compliance with the CHS to **strengthen our operations and strive for continuous improvement**. At the same time, the person overseeing CHS implementation at PAH conducts regular training sessions for staff in our country offices, headquarters, and partner organizations. This includes integrating CHS into our organization's strategy and providing updates on the progress towards our commitments.

CORE HUMANITARIAN STANDARD



ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

We are an institution of international relevance. However, for the purpose of ensuring effective delivery of aid, we function like a company, employing a committed team and dispelling myths about how humanitarian organizations operate – such as the misconception that their staff are not compensated for their work.



ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

We want to provide our team with the **best environment to work efficiently**, so we invest in digital tools that streamline our internal procedures. This approach allows us to concentrate on building meaningful relationships and pursuing the organization's objectives.

An important facet of our organizational culture is to create space for **experimentation and risk-taking**, all within the framework of the rules we have adopted and the laws in place. We believe in learning from our mistakes and growing through experience. Even amid crises, we consistently uphold our organizational values: responsibility and professionalism. We adhere to our principles and obligations, building up our credibility.

At PAH, we also place great emphasis on the values of **inclusion, diversity, and a sense of belonging**. Our aim is for every individual to feel acknowledged and valued. That is why we focus on preventing discrimination and employing fair, transparent, and consistent procedures and processes. We believe that internal care and kindness form the cornerstone for building a resilient and cohesive organization.

Consistent and transparent communication is the bedrock of our organizational culture. At PAH, we focus on consultation and dialog, involving the team in the creation and development of initiatives. Engagement surveys enable us to gain better insights into the employee experience. Regular meetings with the Board, internal communication tools, and routine sessions dedicated to discussing our organization's activities strengthen our collaboration and efficiency. All employees actively contribute to the creation of PAH's published content and engage in the **feedback culture**, which promotes commitment and growth of our organization.

One of our goals is to build up our brand recognition and advocate for its core values. This is why we **share our knowledge, best practices, and success stories**. At PAH, development and learning are fundamental to our values. We provide internal training opportunities and actively promote the sharing of knowledge and experiences among our teams.



ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Polish Humanitarian Action is an organization dedicated to providing aid to people across diverse regions worldwide, taking into account differences in languages, customs, and legal systems. We respect and comply with the laws of the countries in which we operate, which results in variations in organizational culture across different PAH branches. Our priority is **respect for cultural diversity and human dignity**. Even though we operate globally, we take into account local cultural contexts.

PAH teams operate and provide aid across the globe. While PAH's headquarters are in Warsaw, the organization has employees across different regions, for example in Ukraine, where they coordinate support for refugees, or in the countries of the Global South, where they engage in humanitarian aid for areas impacted by armed conflicts and natural disasters.

An important pillar of our organization consists of program teams that quickly assess needs and coordinate effective on-site activities. In our operations, we rely on **managerial competencies**, and the professionalism, efficiency, and accountability of our staff and volunteers have earned the trust of the people we support as well as our donors and partners.



ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

How we communicate – with aid recipients, partners, and the media



At PAH, we place a high value on effective and trustworthy communication founded on the principles of dignity and honest dialog with our audiences, and guided by our core values of professionalism, respect, and responsibility.

When preparing communications, we always consider the wider context of the situation, including cultural nuances, traditions, and the local language of the area where we are providing aid.

When engaging with our partners, donors, or the media, we avoid focusing on poverty and suffering just to shock the audience. We treat people as subjects, avoiding messages that might strip people of their dignity or evoke pity. Our goal is to ensure that our published content accurately reflects reality and prevents the perpetuation of stereotypes. We engage with message recipients as conversational equals, providing them with reliable information and avoiding emotional manipulation.

In our communication efforts, we focus on conveying appropriate images and information in a responsible manner. We follow the principles laid down in the "Code of Conduct on Images and Messages Related to the Countries of the Global South". In our publications, we respect third-party rights, and ensure that all individuals featured in our materials have explicitly consented to the use of their images.

SUCCESSSES



SUCCESSSES

◆ Certified DG ECHO Partner

PAH was the first Polish organization to acquire this certification, even before Poland's accession to the EU. The distinction attests to the professionalism and high quality of PAH's humanitarian activities. PAH remains the sole Polish organization authorized to implement DG ECHO-funded projects.

◆ USAID certification

Since 2017, we have been an official partner of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Since then, we have continuously run US government-funded aid projects in Ukraine. Confidence shown by such an important donor validates PAH's adherence to the highest standards of safety and quality in its operations.

◆ CHS Alliance

Since 2021, we have been the sole Polish organization within the CHS Alliance, a coalition centered around the Core Humanitarian Standard – a set of top-tier standards that responsible humanitarian organizations should uphold. Being part of the Alliance involves undergoing a comprehensive assessment of the organization against these criteria. Successful completion of the assessment process leads to certification that validates compliance.



Awards received in recent years:

European Citizens' Prize

Awarded by the European Parliament in recognition of PAH's "Volunteers Without Borders" project in 2022.

Gold MIXX Award 2020

Awarded for the campaign Play and Help with #PajacykBezPrzerwy (in partnership with Kwadratowa Masakra and Craftserve)

NGO of the Year 2017

Title awarded at the 28th Economic Forum in Krynica



PARTNERS

The enduring success of Polish Humanitarian Action is partly attributed to our long-standing collaboration with our partners and donors. With their help, we can plan and execute long-term humanitarian aid projects. We are grateful to our partners for their dedication and support in implementing humanitarian initiatives.

Selected partners and donors of PAH:

Accenture	KW Trade
Apart	Lemoniq
Boston Consulting Group	Lidl
bp	Meblik
Carrefour	Mechanistry
Chylak	Mercedes
Deloitte	Meta
DHL	Michał Szafrński
Displate	Microsoft
Dziennik Gazeta Prawna	Noxan
Electrolux	Orange
Gofin	Pryzmat
Google	Renault
GXO	Saatchi & Saatchi
Hochland	Santander Bank
IMM	Pluxee
International Paper	State Street
Jerónimo Martins	TVN Warner Bros Discovery
Kaufland	Altenberg Publishing
Context	Zenith

Institutional donors:

ECHO
FAO
GIZ
Humanitarian Fund (Managed by UN OCHA)
MSZ
UNHCR
UNICEF
USAID-BHA
USAID-RRF
WFP

Non-governmental organizations:

arche noVa
CARE USA

Core Humanitarian Standards documents:

[Core Humanitarian Standard](#)

[Sphere Minimum Standards](#)

[The Four IASC Commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations](#)

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