Working in Humanitarian Aid/Emergency Relief Work
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Introduction

A growing number of graduates express an interest in working in the global humanitarian sector.

There are a number of definitions of Humanitarian Aid and a guide can be found on the Global Humanitarian Assistance website www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org.

In this leaflet humanitarian relief work is being seen in the context of planning for and providing assistance during human-made (violent conflict, hazardous substance spillages, transport accidents) and natural disasters (earthquakes, storms, floods, volcanic eruptions) and emergencies.

Activities in emergency situations include: the provision of food and water, shelter, medical/healthcare services, transport, restoration of infrastructure (including water and power), provision for and if necessary evacuation of survivors. The demand for front-line workers will to some extent be dictated by the type of emergency/disaster and location in the world.

Those working in the field have to be prepared for personal hardship both physical and emotional and may be working under very difficult circumstances including a lack of communications. It can involve working in hostile environments and there may be personal safety and security issues. There is a need for cultural sensitivity and the ability to adapt to working within the traditions and ways of working of a particular country/region.

Some organisations in the sector may be involved in both emergency aid/relief work offering immediate assistance and undertake longer term humanitarian work beyond the initial emergency phase which could be considered to encompass development work.
For further information on international development see the Starting Point series handout International/Overseas Development work which is available to collect from the Careers Service in University Place or download as a PDF from www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/startingpoints

**Getting into the sector**

The humanitarian relief sector is very complex involving many different occupations and employing organisations. It is important to have the appropriate skill set for the position that you will be applying for. These may differ greatly depending on the hiring organisation and the job role. In emergency relief work the roles are frequently of a highly specialist nature.

People may have differing motivations for wishing to work in this sector. Some will seek to provide assistance by taking time out from their established career in areas such as health care, engineering, emergency services and logistics to volunteer, often at short notice, in response to an emergency. Organisations/agencies may hold registers of workers who can be called upon at short notice whilst others may be recruited on fixed/short term paid contracts.

There are other roles such as those required to enable organisations to prosper and function effectively including administration, communications, finance, fundraising, IT and Human Resources. Although many organisations may be classified as charities or not-for-profit organisations they still need to be run along business lines.

Some individuals will seek to build a more long term career in this area of work. It tends to be a difficult sector to get into and you will need to consider the best ways to gain the experience and skills which may be required. Recruitment practices are different around the globe and jobs may never be advertised but they are being filled through personal contacts or internally to existing staff and volunteers.
Because of the global nature of this sector people may work in a wide range of organisations and be based in both the UK or around the globe. Work visas and residency permits may still be required even for volunteers. Make sure that you have a current passport as you may need to travel at very short notice.

There is no set route for gaining the experience and/or further qualifications that may be required. Whilst a Masters degree may be helpful for some areas, for others professional training and qualifications may be of greater importance. You will need to research and gain the experience, skills and knowledge needed in the area of aid work you wish to enter.

**Qualifications/Training**

There are a number of UK University postgraduate programmes and research opportunities on offer in a range of subjects/disciplines related to the sector. The Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute (HCRI) at the University of Manchester [www.hcri.manchester.ac.uk/](http://www.hcri.manchester.ac.uk/) offers a range of study and research opportunities in the fields of humanitarianism, conflict responses, global health, international disaster management and peacebuilding. For other programmes at the University of Manchester, find out more at: [www.manchester.ac.uk/study/](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/)

For other further study/research options in the UK and globally consult websites such as Prospects [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk), FindaMasters [www.findamasters.com](http://www.findamasters.com) and FindaPhd [www.findaphd.com](http://www.findaphd.com) for listings of opportunities. The Network of Humanitarian Assistance (NOHA) universities [www.nohanet.org](http://www.nohanet.org) will enable you to find postgraduate study opportunities overseas.

Enhance your academic qualifications with practical skills such as languages, first aid, building/ vehicle maintenance and advanced driving. Some organisations offer training courses e.g. Medair [www.medair.org](http://www.medair.org),
RedR [www.redr.org.uk](http://www.redr.org.uk) and Merlin [www.merlin.org.uk](http://www.merlin.org.uk), and some courses e.g. personal safety and security training may be offered by private companies. There are also a number of short courses offered by universities in specific areas.

**Work Experience**

This area of work is very competitive and it is essential that you have a good mix of qualifications and work experience.

**Internships**

Internships will be offered by many of the organisations listed in this booklet. Please see individual organisation websites for details. The University of Manchester also has a variety of internship opportunities for students and recent graduates. [www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/recruit/internships/](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/recruit/internships/)

**Volunteering**

Volunteering is a valuable way of gaining work experience. [www.volunteers.manchester.ac.uk/](http://www.volunteers.manchester.ac.uk/)

For more information see the Starting Point series booklet on Volunteering at [www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/startingpoints](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/startingpoints) or call into the Careers Service to pick up a copy.

The University has a small number of trusted partners for international volunteering. Outside those the University is unable to verify the quality of most international volunteering organisations, so we recommend that before applying, you research the organisation regarding issues such as safety, organisation ethics, reputation and practical considerations. Find out about our trusted partners and practical considerations when assessing opportunities. [www.volunteers.manchester.ac.uk/students-becomingavolunteer/findvolunteering/internationalvolunteering](http://www.volunteers.manchester.ac.uk/students-becomingavolunteer/findvolunteering/internationalvolunteering).
In the UK organisations such as the WRVS [www.wrvs.org.uk/how-we-help/community-support](http://www.wrvs.org.uk/how-we-help/community-support) and British Red Cross [www.redcross.org.uk/Get-involved/volunteer](http://www.redcross.org.uk/Get-involved/volunteer) can offer volunteering opportunities with their emergency response teams. The volunteering website [www.do-it.org.uk](http://www.do-it.org.uk) enables a search for voluntary opportunities under International Aid and Disaster Relief categories. There may be limited opportunities available in North-West England.

**Careers Library sources of information**

**Reference Books**
A full listing of all titles available through the Careers Library catalogue at [www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/library](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/library) Examples include:

- **Volunteering**
  - Volunteer – A traveller’s Guide to making a Difference Around the World

- **Charity sector**
  - Charities Digest
  - Working for a Better World – Your Guide to Careers in the Charity Sector

- **Working Abroad**
  - Looking for work in International Organisations
  - The No –Nonsense Guide to the United Nations

**Starting Point guides**
Available to collect from the Careers Service or to download as a PDF from [www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/startingpoints](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/careers/startingpoints)
Titles in series include:

- Human Rights Work
- International & Overseas Development Work
- Working for a Charity or Community Organisation
- Political and International Relations & related work

Websites

Please note: This is not a fully comprehensive list of websites

The following is a selection of websites which provide background information which may be of interest. However, they may not all include specific careers/job information. We cannot be held responsible for the recruitment practices and the ethos of the organisations listed.

Information Gateways/Resources

- Aid Workers Network – a collaborative project to provide practical advice for aid workers. It includes a section on “Your career in Aid Work”
  www.aidworkers.net
- AlertNet Reuters Foundation – a humanitarian news network
  www.trust.org/alertnet
- CIDI – Centre for International Disaster Information
  www.cidi.org
- Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN) – an independent forum for improving humanitarian action
  www.odihpn.org
- International Humanitarian Studies Association – Founded in 2009 a network for those engaged in the study of humanitarian crises
  www.ihsa.info
- International Crisis Group – a NGO working to prevent and resolve conflict has information about global conflicts
  www.crisisgroup.org
ICVA (International Council of Voluntary Agencies) – Global network of human rights, humanitarian and development NGOs
www.icva.ch

NGO VOICE (Voluntary organisations in cooperation in emergencies)
A network of over 80 European NGOs active in humanitarian aid
www.ngovoice.org

People in Aid – an international network of development and humanitarian assistance organisations
www.peopleinaid.org

ReliefWeb – a project of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs providing humanitarian information on complex emergencies and natural disasters
www.reliefweb.int

The Sphere Project – Humanitarian charter and minimum standards in humanitarian response
www.sphereproject.org

The World Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (WANGO) – includes a link to the Worldwide NGO Directory
www.wango.org

UK Government and International Organisations

Civil Service
www.civilservice.gov.uk

DFID – Department for International Development www.dfid.gov.uk

European Commission including the Directorate General for Development and European Aid Co-operation Office
http://ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm

ECHO – European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection
http://ec.europa.eu/echo

The European Union External Action (EEAS)
http://eeas.europa.eu

United Nations (UN) Home Page
www.un.org

UN Careers Portal
• United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Agency (UNHCR)
  www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home
• United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – England
  www.unhcr.org.uk/
• UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
  www.unisdr.org
• United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA)
  www.unocha.org

**Aid/Relief Organisations**
Selection of organisations including Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), voluntary organisations and charities involved in relief and humanitarian aid work.

• Action Against Hunger
  www.actionagainsthunger.org
• ADRA – Adventist Development and Relief Agency
  www.adra.org.uk
• Aviation Without Borders
  www.aviationwithoutborders.org
• British Red Cross
  www.redcross.org.uk
• CAFOD
  www.cafod.org.uk
• CARE International UK
  www.careinternational.org.uk
• Catholic Relief Services
  www.crs.org
• Christian Aid
  www.christianaid.org.uk
• Concern Worldwide
  www.concern.net
• Direct Relief International – organisation providing medical assistance
  www.directrelief.org
- Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) organisation for 13 humanitarian aid agencies
  [www.dec.org.uk](http://www.dec.org.uk)
- EMERGENCY UK – charity supporting health care projects in conflict/post conflict areas
  [www.emergencyuk.org](http://www.emergencyuk.org)
- GIS Corps – GIS professionals volunteering for a better world
  [http://giscorps.org](http://giscorps.org)
- Global Humanitarian Assistance
  [www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org](http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org)
- GOAL – International humanitarian organisation
  [www.goal.ie](http://www.goal.ie)
- International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
  [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)
- International Medical Corps (IMC)
  [http://internationalmedicalcorps.org](http://internationalmedicalcorps.org)
- IRC – UK (International Rescue Committee UK)
  [www.rescue-uk.org](http://www.rescue-uk.org)
- Islamic Relief
  [www.islamic-relief.com](http://www.islamic-relief.com)
- Lutheran World Federation – has a Department for World Service
  [www.lutheranworld.org/content/about-dws](http://www.lutheranworld.org/content/about-dws)
- Map Action – emergency mapping service
  [www.mapaction.org](http://www.mapaction.org)
- MEDAIR International – emergency relief and rehabilitation
  [www.medair.org](http://www.medair.org)
- Mercy Corps UK
  [www.mercycorps.org.uk](http://www.mercycorps.org.uk)
- Merlin (Health Care & Medical Relief)
  [www.merlin.org.uk](http://www.merlin.org.uk)
- MSF - Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders) – includes other medical professionals, nurses and pharmacists
  [www.doctorswithoutborders.org](http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org)
- OXFAM
  [www.oxfam.org.uk](http://www.oxfam.org.uk)
- PCI (Project Concern International) – non-profit health and humanitarian aid organisation
  www.pciglobal.org
- Practical Action – uses technology to reduce poverty /disaster risk reduction
  www.practicalaction.org.uk/disaster-reduction
- Plan – international child-centred community development agency
  www.plan-international.org
- RedR – Engineers and other professionals wishing to work on humanitarian programmes
  www.redr.org.uk
- Relief International – humanitarian non-profit agency providing emergency relief, rehabilitation, development assistance and services around the world
  www.rti.org
- Save the Children
  www.savethechildren.org.uk
- Shelterbox – provides emergency shelter and lifesaving supplies
  http://shelterbox.org/index.php
- Tearfund
  www.tearfund.org
- UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief)
  www.umcmission.org/Get-Involved/Volunteer-Opportunities/Types-of-Volunteers/Disaster-Response/Disaster-Response
- World Concern
  www.worldconcern.org
- World Jewish Relief
  www.wjr.org.uk
- World Vision UK
  www.worldvision.org.uk

**Working with refugees and displaced persons**
- Asylum Aid – charity assisting refugees in the UK
  www.asylumaid.org.uk/
- European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) – an umbrella organisation of 80 refugee assisting agencies
  [www.ecre.org](http://www.ecre.org)
- IOM (International Organization for Migration) IGO working in the field of migration
  [www.iom.int/jahia/jsp/index.jsp](http://www.iom.int/jahia/jsp/index.jsp)
- Refugees International
  [www.refugeesinternational.org](http://www.refugeesinternational.org)
- UNHCR – United Nations Refugee Agency in the UK
  [www.unhcr.org.uk](http://www.unhcr.org.uk)

**Peace Building and Conflict Resolution**
- Conflict Resolution Information Source
  [www.crinfo.org/](http://www.crinfo.org/)
- Human Rights Internet
  [www.hri.ca](http://www.hri.ca)
- Human Rights Watch
  [http://hrw.org](http://hrw.org)
- International Alert - Peace building organisation
  [www.international-alert.org](http://www.international-alert.org)
- International Crisis Group – NGO working to prevent and resolve conflict
  [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org)
- UN Department of Peace Keeping
- War Child International – a network of independent organisations involved in helping children affected by war
  [www.warchild.org](http://www.warchild.org)

**Other websites to source jobs include:**
Dev Jobs – includes jobs in emergency response and post-disaster rehabilitation
[www.devjobsmail.com/](http://www.devjobsmail.com/)
- Devnet Jobs – various types of jobs world-wide
  [www.devnetjobs.org](http://www.devnetjobs.org)
Devex – a network of development, health and aid workers includes humanitarian aid jobs
www.devex.com/en

Plus internet sites of various agencies, charities, voluntary sector organisations etc.

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