



CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND RELIEF

Description of the Field:

We currently face a growing number of disasters and emergencies around the world and unprecedented levels of humanitarian need exacerbated by dozens of highly violent, protracted conflicts, the COVID-19 pandemic, and climate change. From flash flooding and forest fires that spread devastation rapidly, to protracted conflicts that cause migration flows, mass human suffering, and economic disaster, humanitarian need is on the rise worldwide. The purpose of humanitarian action is to save lives, preserve human dignity and minimize suffering resulting from conflict, natural phenomena, and epidemics. Humanitarian action is centered on basic and immediate human needs and is thus distinct from, though inextricably linked to, development, peace, and state building, which operate in a longer time horizon. These problems frequently overlap, particularly in the low-income countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. When combined with weak political, economic and social systems, low levels of resilience and state capacity, and/or civil war, humanitarian disasters become even more difficult to solve.

Humanitarian relief is an extraordinarily complex subject involving many actors, including governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), such as United Nations agencies, which seek to respond simultaneously to natural disasters (e.g. earthquakes and hurricanes) and/or complex emergencies (e.g. war and other violent conflicts). These actors employ life-saving skills and technologies to re-establish basic services, such as water and sanitation, set up schools, and to provide food and medical supplies.

Career Paths and Entry Salaries:

There are close to a million nonprofits, state and federal government agencies, and organizations locally and internationally that provide humanitarian assistance. As humanitarian relief is such a large field, it is difficult to provide a baseline salary, which varies based on the size and focus of the organization, the type of job within the organization, and the geographic location. Salaries can range from \$45,000 (entry-level in an NGO) to over \$125,000 a year for a senior level position.

Demand:

The environment where humanitarian action takes place is evolving rapidly and continually poses new challenges to the global community. The United Nations' (UN) Global Humanitarian Overview for 2021 predicts a record 235 million people will need humanitarian assistance and protection over the next year, an almost 40% increase over 2020 ([UNOCHA](#)). As needs and funding have risen, so too have the numbers of aid workers. Today, hundreds of thousands of people are employed in humanitarian aid. The estimated number of humanitarian workers has increased by 27% in the past three years ([ALNAP 2018](#)).

The last decade has seen a marked increase in the occurrence of natural disasters along with exposure to greater levels of loss of life, property and material damage. The lives of millions of civilians are at risk each time an earthquake, hurricane or other natural disaster occurs, particularly in low- and middle-income countries with fragile and underdeveloped infrastructures, high population densities and inadequate emergency preparedness ([www.unocha.org](#)). There is clearly a high demand for professionals to respond to such crises, and there are growing numbers of opportunities for administrators, fundraisers, grant-writers, program organizers, teachers, researchers, policy analysts, and others.

Recommended Qualifications to Enter the Field:

A Master's degree in International Affairs, International Development or a joint Master's of Public Health/MA degree, a dedication to making the world a better place to live, and a desire to serve others by doing good work are all necessary qualifications to enter this field. An expertise in one of the key technical areas including food security, public health, nutrition, logistics, or conflict resolution is strongly recommended to effectively and permanently solve issues that arise when disaster occurs. Candidates must also demonstrate business acumen, personal diplomacy and ability to work in challenging contexts under high stress. Other necessary qualifications for some positions include two or three years of experience in the developing world and the requisite foreign language requirement.

Sample Group of Employers and Resources for Additional Information

Employers:

- Action Against Hunger (Action Contre la Faim) <https://www.actionagainsthunger.org/>
- Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) www.adra.org
- Africare www.africare.org
- ALNAP <https://www.alnap.org/>
- American Red Cross www.redcross.org
- AmeriCares www.americares.org
- Amy Biehl Foundation <https://amyfoundation.co.za/>
- Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Deutschland e.V. www.asb.de
- Brotherhood of Blessed Gérard bbg.org.za/index.htm
- CARE www.care.org
- Catholic Relief Services www.crs.org
- Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Humanitarian Agenda <https://www.csis.org/programs/humanitarian-agenda>
- CDA Collaborative <https://www.cdacollaborative.org/>
- Christian Friends of Korea <https://www.cfk.org/>
- Church World Service www.churchworldservice.org
- Direct Relief International www.directrelief.org
- Doctors of the World (Médecins du Monde) <https://www.medecinsdumonde.org/en/about-us>
- Doctors Without Borders (Médecins sans Frontières) www.doctorswithoutborders.org
- Center for Global Development www.cgdev.org
- Healing Hands International, Inc. www.hhi.org
- Humanitarian Policy Group at the Overseas Development Institute <https://odi.org/en/about/our-work/humanitarian-policy-group/>
- Himalayan HealthCare <https://www.himalayanhealthcare.org/>
- International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) <https://www.icrc.org/en>
- International Medical Corps (IMC) <https://internationalmedicalcorps.org/>
- International Organization for Migration (IOM) <https://www.iom.int/>
- International Rescue Committee <https://www.rescue.org/>
- Mercy Corps <https://www.mercycorps.org/>
- Nishkam Sikh Welfare Council <https://nishkamusa.org/>
- Norwegian Refugee Council <https://www.nrc.no/>
- Oxfam (International or affiliate country offices) <https://www.oxfam.org/en> <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/>
- Pathfinder International <https://www.pathfinder.org/>
- Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) www.path.org
- Project HOPE www.projecthope.org
- Refugees International <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/>
- Relief International <https://www.ri.org/>
- Save the Children www.savethechildren.org
- UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) www.unhcr.org
- UN OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) <https://www.unocha.org/>
- USAID www.usaid.gov
- USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance <https://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/organization/bureaus/bureau-humanitarian-assistance>
- Vida www.vida.org
- World Food Program <https://www.wfp.org/>
- World Vision <https://www.worldvision.org/>

Volunteer Organizations:

- Center for Humanitarian Outreach and Intercultural Exchange <https://www.choicehumanitarian.org/>
- Cross-Cultural Solutions www.crossculturalsolutions.org
- Global Volunteer Network www.globalvolunteers.org
- Peace Corps www.peacecorps.gov
- United Way <https://www.unitedway.org/>

Internet Resources:

- ALNAP <https://www.alnap.org/jobs-opportunities>
- DevNetJobs.org www.devnetjobs.org
- GlobalCorps <http://globalcorps.com/>
- InterAction www.interaction.org



Course Suggestions for Careers in Humanitarian Action and Relief

The following list represents a sampling of different courses offered throughout The George Washington University that would be appropriate for this career field. As academic departments continually update their bulletin, these courses might not be available on a regular schedule. This list does not include required courses in the Core or Regional Fields and does not correspond to, though it closely follows, the curriculum for graduation. Students should consult their academic advisors to see if taking some of the courses below fits into their academic plan. The Humanitarian Action Initiative (HAI) at the Elliott School maintains an updated list of courses on its website: <https://hai.elliott.gwu.edu/home/academics/>

Students interested in pursuing careers in humanitarian action may contact HAI Director, Professor Maryam Deloffre, for advising on course selection or professional development by scheduling an appointment directly via Calendly: <https://calendly.com/profdeloffre/officehours>

International Affairs:

- Care of Children in Humanitarian Emergencies (Spring)
- Climate Change and Environmental Politics in Latin America (Fall)
- Early Warning and Conflict Prevention (Fall)
- Environmental Security (Fall)
- The Ethics of Foreign Aid (Spring)
- Foundations of Humanitarian Assistance (Fall)
- Gender, Disaster, and Development (Spring)
- Global Food Security (Spring)
- Global Justice (Fall)
- Human Trafficking (Fall)
- Humanitarian Action in Conflict (Spring)

- International Peacekeeping (Fall, Spring)
- Localizing Humanitarian Action (Spring)
- Monitoring & Evaluation for Foreign Assistance Programs (Fall)
- Refugees & Displaced People in the Middle East (Spring)
- Research Methods in Global Gender Issues (Fall)
- Security and Development (Fall)
- Stabilization and Peacebuilding (Fall, Spring)
- Violence, Gender, and Humanitarian Assistance (Spring)

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Anthropology:

- Anthropology of Intervention: Development, Human Rights, and Humanitarianism

Communication:

- Communication Strategies and Planning in Humanitarian Settings (Fall)
- Humanitarian Communication (Fall)

Education:

- Emergency & Protracted Crises (Fall)

Engineering Management & Systems Engineering:

- Building Technology in Crisis & Emergency Management (Spring)
- Crisis & Emergency Management (Fall)
- International Disaster Management (Fall)
- Med/Pub Health Emergency Management (Spring)

Geography:

- GIS for Emergency Management (Fall)

Philosophy:

- Ethical Issues in Policy Argument (Fall)
- Global Justice (Fall)

Public Health:

Ethics and Accountability in Humanitarian Settings (Fall)
Humanitarian Aid Seminars (Fall)
Mental Health in Humanitarian Settings (Spring)
Nutrition and Food in Large Humanitarian Emergencies (Spring)

Public Health in Humanitarian Settings (Fall)
Reproductive Health and Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Settings (Fall)
Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) in Low-Income Countries

Professional Skills Courses:

Developing Effective Proposals (Spring)
Gender Monitoring and Evaluation (Fall)
Gender Responsive Budgeting (Spring)
Human-Centered Design
Leadership and Teamwork (Summer)
Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation for Development (Fall)

Participatory Planning (Fall/Spring)
Political Analysis (Summer)
Resilience (Fall)
Tech for International Crisis Response (Fall)
Writing for International Policymakers (Fall)

Students with an interest in Humanitarian Aid & Relief careers may also be interested in study abroad programs with Elliott School partner institutions:

- University of Sydney (Australia)
- Jawaharlal Nehru University (India)
- American University of Beirut (Lebanon)
- Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (Switzerland)
- Sciences Po (France)
- Waseda University (Japan)

Students might also be interested in the summer **GW/Oxford Program in International Human Rights Law** at New College Oxford. For more information, please visit: <http://www.gwu.edu/~specprog/abroad/oxford.html>