

Emergencies

What is a humanitarian emergency?

A humanitarian emergency or crisis is a situation that causes great human suffering. This can be as a result of conflict, a disease epidemic or a natural disaster such as an earthquake or tsunami. Humanitarian crises can wipe out decades of progress in an instant.

Disasters caused by human action

FACT

30 PEOPLE PER MINUTE ARE FORCED FROM THEIR HOMES BY CONFLICT OR PERSECUTION. (UNHCR 2018)

The greatest emergencies caused by humans are conflict and persecution. There are now more people forced out of their homes than at any time since World War Two. Over 40 million are internally displaced – still living in their own countries. A further 25.4 million are refugees – those who have crossed borders. Over half of all refugees are children. Crises involving refugees and conflict are referred to as ‘complex emergencies’.

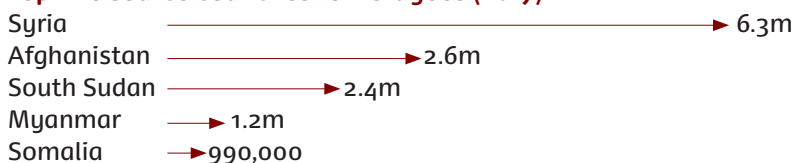
Being a refugee can be very dangerous, especially if you are a child or a woman. Refugee camps are overflowing, thousands are dying at sea on hazardous crossings. The average time a person spends as a refugee is 20 years (UNHCR). CAFOD is helping people affected by conflict in many places, including Syria, Gaza, Iraq and South Sudan.

Other disasters caused by humans include environmental crises, like oil spills or nuclear accidents, or indeed, climate change.

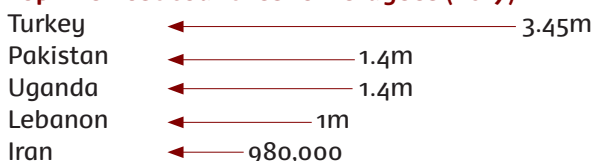
Refugees: where from and where to?

In 2017, rich countries were hosting just 15 per cent of the world’s refugees; the vast majority (85 per cent) are taken in by developing countries.

Top five source countries for refugees (2017)



Top five host countries for refugees (2017)



“ They are men and women like us... seeking a better life, starving, persecuted, wounded, exploited, victims of war. ”

Pope Francis on refugees, April 2015



A mother and child take shelter in a ruin after a powerful earthquake and tsunami hit their home town in Indonesia.

Natural disasters

Natural disasters or hazards happen when a severe weather or geological event takes place, like earthquakes, forest fires, typhoons and drought. Climate change is making weather events more frequent and severe.

CAFOD responds

We respond to many natural disasters including:

- 2018: Tsunami, Indonesia
- 2017: Flooding, Sierra Leone
- 2016: Drought, Ethiopia
- 2015: Earthquake, Nepal
- 2014: Ebola pandemic, West Africa

Helping people hit by natural disasters is a core part of CAFOD’s work. In 2017/18 one third of our expenditure went on disaster relief. See overleaf.

Why poor people suffer most

There are many reasons why people living in poverty are more vulnerable when disaster hits:

- › They have no coping mechanisms – if their crops die in a drought, they can’t afford to buy food. They have no savings, no insurance, no assets.
- › They may live on poor land prone to catastrophes like floods.
- › Their homes are often built from low-quality materials which easily collapse.
- › They are much less likely to have access to infrastructure like decent roads and hospitals that can help them out of danger.
- › Their needs are neglected by local governments.

TRY THIS

Use CAFOD’s Refugee Statistics Icebreaker as an activity:

cafod.org.uk/secondary/refugees



Responding to emergencies

During a major emergency, the Disasters and Emergency Committee (DEC) launches public appeals. This combines 14 leading UK aid charities including CAFOD. They share the money raised to get help to people who need it. CAFOD is also part of Caritas, the second largest humanitarian network in the world. This global Catholic network means we can reach even remote communities who have no other aid.

STAGE 1: Immediate help

Our first priority is to save lives at the epicentre of the emergency. Getting people to safety and giving them food, clean water, sanitation, hygiene management, shelter, basic non-food items and medical care is critical. Families must be reunited and unaccompanied children given protection.

CAFOD has specialised humanitarian staff on standby at all times ready to 'surge' – to deploy fast into emergency zones alongside local partners and communities.

In **Syria**, CAFOD continues to reach vulnerable people both inside and outside the country. The extensive church network within Syria is assisting people in the worst-hit regions. In refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon we are providing immediate help like food, bedding and kitchen items and longer-term relief, such as education and legal assistance.

Disaster diseases

Dangerous illnesses such as malaria, cholera, typhoid and diarrhoea spread quickly in the chaos following disasters if there are no mosquito nets, clean water or toilets. Survivors can end up dying from avoidable illnesses. Aid agencies and governments must act fast.

FACT

OUTBREAKS OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES FOLLOWING AN EMERGENCY CAN BE MORE DEADLY THAN THE ORIGINAL DISASTER.

TRY THIS

Find out more about the illnesses that can spread after an emergency. Imagine you are a health worker at a disaster site. What advice would you be giving people?

STAGE 2: Long-term recovery

Once the immediate crisis settles, the focus turns to the future and to development. Peace may need to be negotiated between warring sides. Homes, schools and medical centres may need to be rebuilt. Where livelihoods have been destroyed, people need help to retrain and start over. Survivors need emotional and psychological help. All this can take years.

Typhoon Haiyan hit the Philippines in late 2013, claiming 6,000 lives and making 5 million homeless. Years later, relief work continues. CAFOD raised over £8 million and helped almost 200,000 people. Communities now have permanent, disaster-resistant homes, proper water and sanitation facilities, and are learning new ways of making a living. We are helping local people look ahead and prepare for future crises.

Sources: UNHCR Global Trends 2017; UNOCHA.

Photo: Caritas. Illustrations: Rachel Summers. Facts compiled October 2018. Charity no. 1160384 and a company limited by guarantee no 09387398.

Being prepared

If communities can prepare for future emergencies, then they have a much better chance of surviving and coping. This is called disaster risk reduction or resilience. For example:

- › Set up early warning systems.
- › Map risks and practise disaster drills.
- › Protect wells from flood contamination.
- › Plant drought-resistant crops.
- › Build typhoon-resistant houses and community shelters.

“Public money buys about four times as much humanitarian ‘impact’ if spent on preparation before disaster strikes rather than on an expensive response.”

Bekele Geleta, former head of the Red Cross & Red Crescent

Imagine your family are forced to leave home right now and move far away. What might be the reasons for this? Where would you go? Who would help you? Discuss.



Useful websites

cafod.org.uk/secondary/refugees

dec.org.uk

Disasters and Emergencies Committee (DEC)

reliefweb.int

ReliefWeb

startnetwork.org

Start Network

unhcr.org

UN High Commission for Refugees

who.org

World Health Organisation

wfp.org

World Food Programme

unocha.org

Humanitarian relief agency of the UN

CAFOD is not responsible for the content of external websites.