

Health in Humanitarian Crises Centre Report 2017

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MEDICINE



Foreword

Humanitarian crises due to armed conflict, natural disasters, disease outbreaks and other causes are major contributors to ill health and vulnerability worldwide. The persisting effects of crises on health and health systems can undermine decades of social development.

Humanitarian crises also present many challenges for public health intervention and research. These include: violence and insecurity; mass population displacement; severely deteriorated daily living conditions and impoverishment; the sudden and widespread disruption of health services and the broader health system, including of health surveillance; and reduced domestic availability of human, financial and technical resources alongside increased need to coordinate aid from outside. Despite these challenges, many of our staff and students are actively engaged in public health research in crisis-affected contexts.



Professor Peter Piot
Director and Professor of Global Health
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

“At a time of widespread humanitarian disasters linked to war and environmental degradation, and more people displaced by conflict than ever before in history, the work of LSHTM’s Health in Humanitarian Crises Centre is more critical than ever. The Centre’s interdisciplinary research yields vital insights and intelligence to improve health services and support for vulnerable populations caught up in crises. Through the Centre’s face-to-face and free online courses on health in crisis-affected areas, we also hope that the Crisis Centre will continue to engage new audiences with some of the most urgent issues in global health.”

Cover Images:
Burundian refugee children walk on the dusty ground past huts and shelters at Kamvira transit centre. © UNHCR/
Eduardo Soteras Jalil
Syrian refugees at an informal settlement near Terbol in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon.
© UNHCR/David Azia

Who we are

The Health in Humanitarian Crises Centre was formally established in 2017, as a coordinating focus for the work of more than 70 London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) staff and research students in this area. It grew out of the Public Health in Humanitarian Crises Group, set up in 2012.



Karl Blanchet, Director

Karl Blanchet is Associate Professor of Health Systems Research. He has a background in public health and extensive experience in health systems research in Asia and Africa, and studying resilience issues in conflict-affected countries. Karl has developed innovative research approaches based on complexity science, system thinking and social network analysis; he is currently focusing on developing and testing people-centred approaches for refugee and migrant populations in the Middle East.



Jennifer Palmer, Deputy Director

Jennifer Palmer is a medical anthropologist and Assistant Professor. Having entered academia through humanitarian practice, much of her research has taken place in humanitarian settings and is centred on humanitarian practice or its effects. This has included ethnographic investigations or evaluations of sleeping sickness, reproductive health and disability programmes, particularly in the South Sudan/Uganda border area.

What we offer

We provide:

- Inter-disciplinary research in health in humanitarian crises
- A pool of experts for rapid response in times of crises contributing to the UK Public Health Rapid Support Team
- Ways for LSHTM Master’s students to get involved in humanitarian crises research

We work at:

- Supporting the development of teaching on health and crises through face-to-face and online modules and short courses
- Strengthening public engagement and communication of research findings through monthly lunchtime seminars open to the general public

Stay in touch:

Visit our website and subscribe to the newsletter: crises.lshtm.ac.uk
Find us on Facebook by searching: [LSHTM Humanitarian Crises Group](https://www.facebook.com/LSHTMHumanitarianCrisesGroup)

Our Research

Through a range of research projects in various conflict-affected countries, the Crisis Centre strengthens and promotes innovation, evaluation and evidence-based policy making by fostering collaboration inside and outside the School and between researchers and policy makers.

RECAP – Research capacity building and knowledge generation to support preparedness and response to humanitarian crises and epidemics

Principal Investigator: Bayard Roberts
Collaborators: John Edmunds, Melissa Parker, Francesco Checchi, Jo Borghi, Karl Blanchet
Partners: University of Sierra Leone, American University of Beirut, Oxford University, Refugee Law Initiative at the School of Advanced Studies, LSE, MSF, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children, and BRAC
Funder: Global Challenges Research Fund

In the thick of natural disasters or war, relief agencies work through the chaos to bring basic services – and dignity – to the victims. In such a challenging environment it is hard to stand back and study what is going on, collect data and assess whether and how aid could be delivered more effectively. Yet it is vital to find a way of examining it critically, if responses are to improve and the health of those caught up in crises is to be protected.

Involving Crises Centre members from all faculties of LSHTM with funding from the UK’s Global Challenges Research Fund, the RECAP project will create a network of academics and agencies to tackle this research problem.

The network will include leading organisations in the UK, as well as the American University of Beirut, in Lebanon, and the University of Sierra Leone. Working with Médecins sans Frontières, the International Rescue Committee, and the largest NGO in the world – Bangladesh’s BRAC – we are going to build research skills and conduct studies in some of the world’s hotspots. The result should be better research methods and strong links between all the organisations, leading, in turn, to improved humanitarian policies – and, ultimately, the safeguarding of populations’ health.

Anatomy of therapeutic itineraries: ethnographic insights on Syrian health professional-led initiatives in Lebanon

Principal Investigators: Karl Blanchet, Simon Cohn
Collaborators: Diane Duclos, Jennifer Palmer
Partners: American University of Beirut
Funder: The Wellcome Trust

The Health and Humanitarian Crises Centre is exploring to what extent international humanitarian agencies can build on initiatives led by refugee health professionals to pilot public health interventions for refugees.

Thanks to Wellcome Trust funding, we are conducting an ethnographic study in the Bekaa Valley which is home to the vast majority of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Researchers are exploring clinical encounters between displaced patients and displaced health professionals, and accounting for complex therapeutic itineraries at the intersection between formal and informal sectors. This study is providing critical insight on humanitarian spaces by looking at how narratives and lived experiences of health seeking intersect with, or challenge, the humanitarian response developed to meet refugees’ health needs.



Medicine is dispensed to Syrian refugees by a doctor and nurse from a local NGO in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon, on 8 January 2015. © UNHCR/Andrew McConnell



Refugees at UNHCR Mole Refugee camp in Democratic Republic of Congo, collect water from one of the many taps in the camp. Water is supplied through a 'water bladder' system where water is pumped from a nearby river into four large filtration and storage systems. The water is treated and clean but providing the volume of water needed is always a challenge. © UNHCR/Sebastian Rich

Improving handwashing promotion in humanitarian crises

Principal Investigator: Sian White
Collaborators: Val Curtis, Karl Blanchet
Partners: Action Contre la Faim
Funder: OFDA

When a humanitarian crisis occurs the social and physical environments of the affected population are disrupted. These disruptions result in behavioural shifts, including to behaviours of public health significance, such as handwashing with soap. This is an important issue for crisis-affected populations whose disease risk increases in the wake of an emergency. It is also an issue for emergency responders.

The Centre’s research, taking place in Kurdistan, Iraq, and eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), is using qualitative, participatory approaches to map the determinants of hygiene behaviour and develop our understanding of the constraints of hygiene programming within these crises settings.

Funded by the US Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), this research brings together the expertise of Action Contre la Faim (ACF), the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and the Centre for Affordable Water and Sanitation Technology (CAWST) in this collaborative project.

Establishing real-time evaluations of WASH interventions on disease outbreaks in emergency settings

Principal Investigator: Oliver Cumming
Collaborators: Lauren d’Mello-Guyett, Hillary Bower
Funder: NIHR through UK Public Health Rapid Support Team

More rigorous research that optimizes the use of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions during outbreak responses may improve the efficiency of other investments and yield additional public health benefits. Better evidence is also needed to resolve the sometimes conflicting messages promoted by agencies involved in emergency humanitarian relief, inform future guidelines and improve coordination of multi-agency responses.

This project brings together the operational expertise of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and the UK Public Health Rapid Support Team (UKRST). It is measuring the impact and outcome of WASH interventions on secondary transmission of disease in humanitarian crises in low and middle income countries, strengthening the evidence base for how these interventions contribute to control and prevention of disease in crises-affected populations.

Free Online Courses

Our free online course looks at the health needs of those affected by humanitarian crises, the challenges of delivering healthcare and what needs to be done.

This free online course is designed to answer key questions including:

- What are the key health needs in humanitarian crises?
- How can we develop responses to health needs in humanitarian settings with maximum impact?
- How will we respond to health needs in the future?

Our course begins by thinking about the key characteristics of humanitarian crises, describing some of the key political, economic and social factors that contribute to humanitarian crises and their effects on health and healthcare systems.

We then move on to look at the practical responses to health needs in humanitarian crises, including how and why we prioritise health interventions, the ways in which these might be conducted on the ground, and the evidence gathered and used to make decisions.

Finally we look ahead, identifying the new and continuing challenges facing the world, the potential health innovations and technologies that may help address these issues, and hearing experts' perspectives on the future landscape of humanitarianism and health.

www.lshtm.ac.uk/humanitarian-crisis-course

Teaching and Resources

We organise and lecture on a number of courses related to humanitarian crises and public health.

Individual modules

As part of the LSHTM Master's programmes, the following crises-related individual modules are available to study face-to-face in London or by distance learning:

- “Conflict and Health”
- “Nutrition in Emergencies”
- “Designing Disease Control Programmes in Developing Countries”

LSHTM also offers a professional diploma which has crises-related teaching:

- “Professional Diploma in Tropical Nursing”

Find out more: www.lshtm.ac.uk/study/short-courses

Free LSHTM resources and training

Centre members have developed a free online course on “Epidemiological Tools in Conflict-Affected Populations”, targeted at non-epidemiologists and policy makers operating in humanitarian crises: conflict.lshtm.ac.uk

LSHTM also offers a series of downloadable resources and learning activities from the School's previous free online courses: www.lshtm.ac.uk/study/open-educational-resources



The Health in Humanitarian Crises Centre brings together multi-disciplinary researchers and practitioners from across the School, other academic institutions, NGOs, governments and United Nations agencies to focus on improving the health of populations affected by humanitarian crises through quality research, teaching, consultancy, training and dissemination of objective, evidence-based information.

Our vision is to be a world-leading research centre on public health in humanitarian crises, working closely with international humanitarian agencies and research centres in affected countries to address critical health challenges.

Contact Us

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