



Building Resilient Communities

Advocacy Report



Emergency response volunteer Lou (left) and community reserve volunteer Victoria (right). British Red Cross volunteers were out in force providing support to many communities after widespread flooding swept across northern England.

Building resilient communities

In this, the 150th anniversary year of the British Red Cross, we are calling for greater collaboration between Westminster and civil society to make a real difference to those in need.

Whether it's getting people home safely from hospital, reuniting refugee families torn apart by conflict, supporting those trafficked and exploited, equipping young people with the skills to save a life or working with communities here and overseas when a disaster hits; we know lasting change, at scale, will only be secured together with the support of government, parliament and other agencies.

In the UK and across the world, complex issues – such as climate change and forced migration – are putting people in extremely vulnerable situations. Responding to these issues requires a strategic, connected approach that utilises the strengths across sectors, with the backing of government.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is the world's largest humanitarian network, connecting people's kindness with people in crisis. Being present in almost every community in the UK and around the globe gives us an in-depth, local knowledge that is critical when disaster strikes.

We know that connected communities are more able to prepare effectively for crisis and recover better afterwards. But still, far too many people are isolated from others, leaving them vulnerable when emergencies occur. We need you to help us to build stronger, more resilient communities, both here and abroad.



(Above) Mada and Hala in London. The British Red Cross' family reunion programme helped reunite Mada and children with her husband

Together we can make key changes this year that will see people and communities become better connected, so that those who find themselves in crisis are able to adapt and thrive.

Help us to take the first steps in making the systemic changes that will help protect the most vulnerable. We want to create a cross-party network of "Kindness Champions" in our parliament. Our vision is for this to provide a new way for those who wish to work with us to show their support and collaborate with other parliamentarians, irrespective of political allegiances.

We have listed out in this document our British Red Cross advocacy aims for our 150th year. These are all practical steps which we believe are achievable in 2020, and would bring about necessary changes in policy and practice to help ensure that the most vulnerable are better protected.

How you have helped us help people in crisis over the past 150 years

Since 1870, we have been supporting people with acts of compassion and kindness during the most difficult times in their lives. And you have been with us, supporting us all the way. When we work together with Westminster, the results can be life changing.

We worked with government in the early years of the National Health Service, staffing out-patient canteens, running hospital library trolleys, and providing wheelchairs to help people get home. Today, we still provide mobility aids as part of our wider mission to ensure people can get home safely from hospital and have what they need to recover and live their best possible lives at home.

Our work with government over the last few years has succeeded in making significant changes to help the most vulnerable.

Together, we have helped to make sure the Global Compacts for Refugees and on Migration reflect the UK's humanitarian principles. As it becomes clear that the issues facing displaced people are here to stay, it is critical that the UK continues to play its role as a world leader in this area.

Working across parties and in collaboration with others, we've seen a growth in support for improving the rules on refugee family reunion. We've

also been pleased to see small but significant changes to immigration detention and to the way that people seeking asylum can access financial support. Transformation now needs to be focused on the bigger changes, to create a more humane, effective and person-centred UK asylum system.

When tragedy struck at Grenfell Tower, we successfully advocated for survivors of the fire to receive leave to remain, removing an additional stress and worry from those suffering with trauma. Since 2017, we've also worked with organisations across the voluntary and community sector as well as statutory agencies and government, to advocate for a more person-centred response to UK emergencies.

And we have worked closely with government, with parliament – including as the secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Loneliness – and have convened over 60 organisations from across business, public and voluntary sectors, to take action on loneliness and social isolation. This resulted in the appointment of a Loneliness Minister, and a cross-government strategy for tackling loneliness committing to all of our recommendations, including the rollout of social prescribing in England.

Just last year a huge wave of cross-party support saw First Aid added to the national curriculum in England. This followed years of advocacy from the British Red Cross, St John Ambulance and the British Heart Foundation. A first aider in the right place at the right time can make the difference between life and death and yet just five per cent of adults have the skills and confidence to be one.

Now we need Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to follow England's lead and put first aid on their curriculums, to help us build on the work we're doing online through our hugely popular teaching videos, and to create a generation of life savers and true community resilience.

Help us in our 150th year to create a world where:

- people in the UK or around the world are safe and able to survive and recover whenever disaster strikes;
- people experiencing displacement feel safe, live with dignity and have choice and opportunity on their journey; and
- people in the UK receive the care and support they need without falling through the gaps in the health and care system.

Photo © Anna Gordon/BRC



Red Cross Baby First Aid Training with Sharon Marshall at her Home in Ealing.



People at risk of and impacted by disasters and emergencies

Globally, humanitarian crises are lasting longer and affecting more people than in any time over the last 60 years.

Despite significant gains in poverty reduction, epidemic control, access to education and child mortality, protracted conflict and climate related disasters are causing widespread reversal of these gains. This means untold suffering to millions of people; many of whom are forced to leave their homes and risk everything in search of safety.

The devastating impact of climate change on individuals and their communities is not ten or twenty years away. The most vulnerable people on our planet are experiencing crises caused by global warming right now.

Indeed, right here at home in the UK, climate change is also causing challenges and suffering. We see families lose their homes and livelihoods every winter due to flooding, and every summer our hospitals are busy with elderly people struggling to cope with heatwaves.

As the British Red Cross, we have thousands of trained emergency response volunteers across the UK ready to provide practical and emotional support at a moment's notice. When people in the UK need us, we are there and we do all we can – but we can always do better.

The major incidents in 2017 and since then, including the Grenfell Tower fire and terror attacks in London and Manchester, have taught us that what communities need is

A Red Cross aid distribution in Njalane fishing village, 25km from Beira. In Mozambique, the Red Cross supported over 200,000 people by providing emergency aid, shelter supplies, clean sanitation and safe water.

an emergency response that's better coordinated, compassionate and focused on meeting people's needs. Which is why we want people and communities to be at the heart of crisis planning, response and recovery in the UK.

When crisis strikes, statutory and voluntary agencies should work in partnership to meet people's practical and emotional needs with dignity and respect. However, the involvement of the voluntary and community sector in emergency responses is currently not legally binding, so local knowledge about needs, vulnerabilities and sensitivities is not always taken into account.

We cannot make assumptions about what people in crisis need. We must listen to them and allow them to shape the support they get.

You can help us do this. We want local voluntary sector organisations to be a central part of every emergency response, so that people receive the support and compassion they deserve.

What can you do right now

You can support:

- Focusing on tackling the humanitarian impact of climate change and extreme weather, internationally as well as in the UK.
- Protecting the humanitarian aid budget and ensure that humanitarian assistance, including cash-based assistance, reaches the most vulnerable and marginalised people. For those affected by protracted conflict, this should have a particular focus on preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence.
- Updating the Civil Contingencies Act to reflect the changing nature of emergencies in the UK and the increasing threats we are facing, including from Climate Change. Extend the Act to Northern Ireland and include the voluntary sector as a 'category responder', so that charities and community organisations are able to provide compassionate, individually-tailored support at every emergency response.
- Calls to create a "minister for emergencies" to take a strategic lead within the UK government during crises at home, providing a clear point of contact and accountability.

What we do

In the UK, we are there as soon as disaster strikes, from terror attacks to house fires, power outages, evacuations, car accidents and flooding. We provide first aid and practical help at the scene, psychological support and financial assistance for those affected and vital support to help communities communicate effectively with the state. Our volunteers are trained to handle crisis with skill, respect and kindness; they play a vital role in supporting government provision and the emergency services.

Internationally, the British Red Cross is currently working with communities in more than 23 countries to help people recover from devastating disasters, caused by climate change and protracted conflict, and prepare others for crises we know are going to hit.

We are providing emergency relief items to support people affected by the ongoing violence in Syria, Yemen, Nigeria and Central African Republic, to name just a few. We are building water and sanitation sites in Bangladesh and helping to prepare and protect the community for when the hurricane season hits again. We are providing cash assistance to help people recover their livelihoods in Nepal after the earthquake and Indonesia after the tsunami, we are distributing emergency relief items in Yemen following the cholera epidemic and providing food and clean water in Kenya following the drought.

This is just a small sample of the many places we are present at any one time: rebuilding, supporting, helping and preparing the communities that need us.



(Above) British Red Cross emergency response volunteer Ian Hunter, one of more than 80 volunteers who responded to support people affected by flooding in Yorkshire and the East Midlands in November 2019.

Photo © David Severn/RBC



People who are displaced

Families across the world are being forced out of their homes every day to search for safety from climate change, protracted conflict, disease and chronic hunger. Many are living in extremely precarious situations, leaving everything behind to travel along some of the world's most dangerous routes in the hope that they'll find safety for themselves and their loved ones.

We are doing all we can to support people along these treacherous routes and protect them from abuse and exploitation by traffickers. We want people to have access to safe and legal routes to claim asylum and to be treated with dignity and respect.

For those who arrive in the UK, the long, harsh journey is often very far from over. Even those who succeed in claiming asylum often find themselves in extreme poverty, which in turn makes them vulnerable once more to those who wish to exploit them, at the very time when they should be rebuilding their lives in safety.

Refugees are given only 28 days to 'move on' from state asylum support to supporting themselves. We know, from our work with refugees, that less than a month is not enough time to find somewhere to live, find a job or to make a benefits application. A Universal Credit application takes at least 35 days. The safeguards within the system meant to ensure people are not left without support do not always work for refugees, who may be unaware that they are eligible for support, or cannot receive it because they don't have a bank account.

(Above) Shamila Dhana, volunteers her time at the British Red Cross, reaching out to help vulnerable migrants, refugees and asylum-seeking women in her community.

Those granted asylum can also often be isolated from family. The current rules allow parents to sponsor their children up to the age of 18, to come to the UK, but dependents over 18 are not included, leaving many families cruelly fractured.

Those who experience the trauma of human trafficking or exploitation can suffer greatly from the lasting impact it can have on their mental and physical health, wellbeing, and ability to rebuild their lives. We want people recognised as survivors to receive further specialist support to help them properly recover.

What can you do right now

You can support:

- Extending the 'move on' period for refugees to at least 56 days, so that those granted asylum in the UK have the chance to start a new life without their journey ending in poverty, vulnerability and abuse.
- Extending the family reunion rules to allow parents to sponsor their dependent children up to the age of 25.
- Granting those identified as survivors of trafficking or exploitation a special immigration status with an automatic grant of 30 months leave to remain and recourse to public funds, so that they have the time and space to recover and rebuild their lives.

What we do

With more than 17 million volunteers across 191 countries, we aim to support vulnerable people wherever they find themselves in their journey. We are there along the migration routes in Guinea, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, Sudan and Egypt, giving out medical supplies, reuniting lost family members and providing care and compassion to people as they search for safety.

And we are here in the UK, supporting those who claim asylum here. We are the largest single independent provider of refugee support in the UK, supporting over 35,000 people a year, including hundreds who have been trafficked.



(Above) Lebanese Red Cross volunteer Hadi with Syrian refugee child Talal, 2. The Red Cross and partners is using cash grants to help families to meet their basic needs for food, medicines and other health-related items.

Photo © Alicia Melville-Smith / BPC

We help people navigate the UK's complex casework systems and access the services they are entitled to. We provide food, clothing and small amounts of emergency cash to those facing extreme poverty. We reunite over 900 families every year who have been separated by war, conflict or persecution, and we help hundreds of unaccompanied children to gain skills in English language, independent living and cultural awareness.

For people who have been trafficked or exploited, we provide one-to-one casework support to people at all stages of their experience. Since 2010 our Emergency Response teams have coordinated reception centre support immediately after police raids. These centres provide initial assistance and support to people who have been trafficked or exploited while police complete their procedures. Our role in these centres is to provide psychosocial assistance which may include First Aid, food, hygiene kits and blankets.

People who are falling between the gaps in the health and social care system

Throughout our work in hospitals, the community and in people's homes, we see an incredible amount of good work taking place within the health and social care system. NHS staff are doing an outstanding job. But we also see the stresses that these services are under. Too many opportunities are being missed by health and social care services to prevent the most vulnerable people from falling between the gaps.

Hospitals are not always tuned in to notice when somebody comes in and out multiple times, or else the services aren't in place to prevent this. People are getting stuck in hospital, often because of a lack of care closer to home – particularly those living on their own. Some are living in fear of how they will cope when they are discharged home, in case they fall, or they can't cook or go to the toilet themselves or won't have anyone to talk to.

Ill-health and other major life changes like having children, the loss of mobility, or the death of a loved one, can leave people feeling lonely, disconnected and vulnerable. Our own research found that nine million adults in the UK – roughly 1 in 5 people – struggle with loneliness.



(Above) Patricia. British Red Cross bringing lonely people together by teaching them how to use the internet on a computer, mobile phone and on a tablet.

The impact all of this has on people and the system is hard to overstate. We believe there are some simple, effective interventions that could make all the difference to people's wellbeing. This in turn would improve the movement of patients along a pathway of care, including in, through and out of hospitals.

Treating non-clinical support with parity to medical interventions as part of a personalised, whole-person approach to care is key. From improving hospital discharge and home checks to increase independence through to social prescribing that builds better connections with the community; these are all measures that can help improve outcomes and relieve a system under pressure.

What can you do right now

You can support:

- Introducing automatic home assessments for people who have come in and out of hospital several times within a few months.
- Planning for and sufficiently resourcing non-clinical support and partnerships with the voluntary and community sector to relieve year-round pressures on the NHS.
- Reviewing the variability in hospital discharge practices and ensure every patient discharged from hospital has the opportunity for a meaningful discussion about the practical, emotional, financial, psychological and social factors that will impact on their return home and access to appropriate follow-up support. See the British Red Cross **5-part Independence Checklist**.
- Introducing a statutory duty for the short-term provision of mobility aids in England and work with the relevant authorities in the devolved nations to ensure the same provision across the UK.
- Renewing government commitments to tackling loneliness, backed by clear plans and funding for sustaining action and ensure social prescribing delivers for loneliness, by connecting people successfully with communities.



Photo © Percy Dean/BRC

(Above) BRC Staff Christine McDonnell, Nyla Rasul-Healer, Julia Reason. British Red Cross teams work in hospitals to support people who are medically fit to return home, but need some extra practical and emotional support to do so safely.

What we do

The British Red Cross plays a unique role in health and social care in the UK. Our staff and volunteers work in people's homes and in hospitals across the country. We provide ambulance support, transport patients to and from hospital and help tens of thousands of older and vulnerable people to live independently at home each year. We also support hospitals over winter and at other points of pressure to get people home safely.

All this gives us unique insight into every stage of a patient's journey, from home to hospital and back again. We believe preventative and personalised approaches are key to building personal resilience and helping people to live full and independent lives.

We are also playing a lead role in the UK in tackling loneliness, convening organisations from across civil society to build on the work of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness. We provide social prescribing services to people feeling lonely or socially isolated – helping to re-connect people to their communities and establish meaningful connections through one to one, person-centred support. So far, our Community Connector services across the UK have helped over 12,000 people make and maintain meaningful connections.

Join us

Help us in our 150th year to protect the vulnerable and build a resilient, connected, compassionate society that truly values the power of kindness.

- Pledge to be a Kindness Champion
- Visit a British Red Cross service to see our work in action
- Speak out on the issues we've raised
- Read our reports at redcross.org.uk
- Follow us on Twitter: @RedCrossPolicy
- Contact our public affairs team to find out more:
advocacy@redcross.org.uk