IREL / PSCI 341 | Humanitarian Crises Today: Drivers, Response, Prospects
Spring 2025

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Course Description

In the face of continuing wars and conflicts, the effects of climate change/climate crisis and health emergencies, humanitarian needs across the globe have increased dramatically. What we call "humanitarian crises" have become today more complex and challenging to tackle. New needs have emerged added on traditional humanitarian needs such as food and shelter. At the same time, financial resources to respond to these needs have shrunk.

This course will examine the architecture of the international humanitarian system today, its characteristics, its shortcomings as well as methods of response to humanitarian needs and crises. Using first-hand experience, empirical evidence and specific case studies we will address two sets of questions: (1) what are the old and new drivers of humanitarian needs and crises? (2) What are effective methods of response to these crises? Finally, at the end of the course, will assess the lessons learned and look into the prospects for the future.

The course is divided into four main parts:
(a) Setting the conceptual stage: conceptualizing "humanitarian crises" and discussing definitions and theoretical constructs. What is humanitarianism? What are the origins of humanitarian action and what defines it today?

(b) Sketching the contours of the international humanitarian system, the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and of the humanitarian principles: What are the main features of the international humanitarian system? What are the basic categories of drivers of humanitarian emergencies and needs? What are the political and practical challenges to implementing IHL? How is humanitarian intervention decided? Are there objective criteria or is political expediency the determining factor? How do we secure safe passage of humanitarian aid to vulnerable populations and the safety of humanitarian workers?

(c) Case studies from four main categories: (i) Conflicts and wars (i.e. Syria, Ukraine, Israeli-Palestinian conflict), (ii) Climate change-Climate crises (i.e. Africa), (iii) health emergencies (i.e. Ebola, Covid19), (iv) natural disasters (i.e. earthquakes, floods).

(d) Responding to humanitarian crises-Lessons learned: we will examine old and new methods of response including the relationship between development aid and humanitarian aid, education in emergencies and the "cash and voucher" method. We will also look into the role of the United States and the European Union and look into the prospects for the future. Our key question: what have we learned and how can we turn lessons learned into a policy of reform of the humanitarian system?

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course students will be able to:
1. Describe the actors and architecture of the international humanitarian system;
2. Describe and explain the current and evolving nature of the drivers of humanitarian crises;
3. Identify and describe the main challenges and obstacles to humanitarian action;
4. Identify and describe the response mechanisms and tools to humanitarian crises;
5. Distinguish between humanitarian aid and development aid;
6. Describe and assess the main critiques of humanitarian action;
7. Describe the impact of conflict, climate crisis, natural disasters and health emergencies on humanitarian needs and action;
8. Identify and explain "lessons learned" aiming at improving quality, effectiveness, and accountability in humanitarian action.

Course Requirements

The course is based on a critical in-class discussion and participation utilizing required readings, outside readings, documentaries, study visits and other material. Students are expected to come to class prepared having read all the assigned readings per lecture. *Class participation is essential.*

Required readings:

- Maxwell, Daniel, and Kirsten Gelsdorf. 2019. *Understanding the Humanitarian World.* Series on Global Institutions. London, Routledge.
- Michael Barnett. 2011. *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Recommended websites:

- ACAPS (www.acaps.org)
- Centre for Humanitarian Change (www.whatworks.co.ke)
- Foreign Policy (https://foreighpolicy.com/)
- Professionals in Humanitarian Assistance and Protection (www.phap.org)
- Relief Web (www.reliefweb.int)
- The Core Humanitarian Standard Alliance (http://www.chsalliannce.org)
- The Humanitarian Policy Group/ODI (www.odo.org.uk/hpg)
- The Humanitarian Practice Network (www.odihpn.org)
- The New Humanitarian (https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/)

Major Humanitarian Agencies

- European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Operations-DG ECHO (https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/index_en)
- UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-OCHA (www.unocha.org)
- The World Food Programme (www.wfp.org)
- Education Cannot Wait (www.educationcannotwait.org)
- Africa Voices Foundation (https://www.africasvoices.org)
- CARE (www.care.org)
- IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation-Turkey (www.ihh.org.tr/en)
- International Committee of the Red Cross (www.icrc.org)
- International Federation of Red Cross/Red Crescent (www.ifrc.org)
- Doctors Without Borders (www.msf.org)
- Oxfam (www.oxfam.org)
- REACH (https://www.reach-initiative.org)
- Save the Children (www.savethechildren.org)
- International Rescue Committee (www.rescue.org)
- Syria Civil Defence-"White Helmets" (https://syriacivildefence.org/en/)
- World Vision (www.wvi.org)

Evaluation and Grading
Breakdown of the final grade:

- Class participation   5%
- Quizzes   10%
- In class presentation   20%
- Mid-Term Exam   30%
- Final Exam   35%

Attendance Policy
CYA regards attendance in class as essential. Absences are recorded and have consequences.

ePolicy on Original Work
Unless otherwise specified, all submitted work must be your own original work. Any ideas taken from the work of others must be clearly identified as quotations, paraphrases, summaries, figures etc., and accurate internal citations and/or captions (for visuals) as well as an accompanying bibliography must be provided.

Use of Laptops
In-class or onsite use of laptops and other devices is permitted if this facilitates course-related activities such as note-taking, looking up references, etc. Laptop or other device privileges will be suspended if devices are not used for class-related work.

Class Schedule
January 27: Introduction
Introduction to the course: getting to know us, purpose and expectations
Required reading:
United Nations: *Global Humanitarian Overview 2024* (December 2023)

January 29 and February 3 & 5: Humanitarianism-Humanitarian Crisis-Humanitarian Action
What is humanitarianism and what are the humanitarian principles? Is humanitarianism an act of aid and compassion? How do we know a humanitarian crisis when we see it? What are the characteristics of an humanitarian crisis and of humanitarian action?
Required readings:
Maxwell and Gelsdorf: Introduction
Barnett: Introduction and Chapters 1 & 2
Hugo Slim. 2015. *Humanitarian Ethics: A Guide to the Morality and Aid in War.* NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 25-93.

February 10, 12 & 17: The origins of humanitarian action and Post Cold War Developments
What are the origins of humanitarianism and of humanitarian action? How has humanitarian action changed and developed in the post Cold War period?
Required readings:
Maxwell and Gelsdorf: Chapters 1-2.
Barnett: Chapter 5-6

February 24 & 26: The Architecture of the international humanitarian system
What are the characteristics of the humanitarian system? Which are the main actors? What are its strengths and weaknesses?
Required readings:
Maxwell and Gelsdorf: Chapters 3, 4 & 5
Development Initiatives: *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2023*

March 5 & 10: Humanitarian Intervention & Action and International Humanitarian Law
Humanitarian intervention is a contested idea and action. When should the international community intervene to prevent an humanitarian crisis? What are the guiding principles of humanitarian intervention? Are there objective criteria or is political expediency the determining factor?
Required readings:
Nicholas Wheeler and Alex Bellamy. 2017. "Humanitarian Intervention and World Politics", in J. Baylis and S. Smith, eds., *The Globalization of World Politics,* 7th Edition, Oxford University Press, 514-528.
Kate Mackintosh, 2000. *The Politics of Humanitarian Action in International Humanitarian Law,* ODI.

March 12 & 17: War and Conflict and Humanitarian Action
During war and conflict providing humanitarian aid is sometimes "mission impossible". Through the case-studies of Syria, Ukraine and the latest Israeli-Palestinian war in Gaza we are looking into the challenges of humanitarian aid and ways to overcome them. How do you secure safe humanitarian aid corridors? How do you make sure that humanitarian aid will reach the most vulnerable?
Required readings:
Claudia McGoldrick, 2015. "The State of conflicts today: Can humanitarian action adapt?" *International Review of the Red Cross,* pp. 1179-1208.
Ryoji Tateyama, "The Syrian Civil War: politicization of the crisis and challenges and dilemmas for humanitarian response" in Atsushi Hanatani, Oscar A. Gomez and Chigumi Kawaguchi, eds, *Crisis Management beyond the Humanitarian-Development Nexus,* Routledge, 101-124.
Syria: https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-2024-humanitarian-needs-overview-february-2024-enar

Ukraine: https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/ukraine-summary-humanitarian-needs and-response-plan-and-regional-refugee-response-plan-january-2024
Gaza: https://www.unocha.org/occupied-palestinian-territory

*Additional updated material will be added accordingly.

March 24: Climate Crisis, Famine and Displacement
One of the most devastating consequences of climate crisis is the increase of people exposed to famine. This, in turn, has become a major driver of population movements and displacement. These developments have become drivers for humanitarian crises. What are their characteristics? What are the best methods of response?
Required readings:
Mark Lowcock, UN Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs (2021) "The Climate Crisis and Humanitarian Need"
https://reliefweb.int/report/world/under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-mark-lowcock-odi-humanitarian-policy-group
IFRC: Tackling the humanitarian impacts of the climate crisis together (2020)
https://www.ifrc.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/IFRC_WDR_ExecutiveSummary_EN_Web.pdf
WFP: A Year in Review 2023 (6 August 2024)
"How Climate Crisis Exacerbates Population Displacement" https://reliefweb.int/report/world/how-climate-change-exacerbates-population-displacment#:~:text=The%20effects%20of%20climate%20change,one%20ecological%20threat%20by%202050.

*Additional updated material will be added accordingly.

March 26 & 31: Health Crises: Ebola and Covid19
*Health crises have become drivers of humanitarian crises, especially in less developed countries. Drawing from the experience and the lessons from the Ebola outbreak in West
Africa (2014-2016) and of the Covid 19 pandemic (2020-2021) this section will examine the international response and its impact on vulnerable populations. What are the lessons learned? Where was the international response to humanitarian needs effective and where it failed and why?*
Required readings:
ICRC (2015): *Lessons Learnt from the Ebola Epidemic* https://www.icrc.org/en/document/lessons-learnt-ebola-epidemic
Sorcha O'Callaghan, "Covid19: Five Lessons from Ebola" https://odi.org/en/insights/covid-19-five-lessons-from-ebola/
UN (April-December 2020): *Global Humanitarian Response Plan COVID 19*

*Additional updated material will be added accordingly.

April 2: Natural disasters: earthquakes-floods
Natural disasters, such as earthquakes and floods, can create immediate humanitarian needs. Drawing lessons from recent catastrophic events in Turkiye and Syria (2023), we will examine (a) the consequences of the disaster on vulnerable populations and (b) the types of needs and the ways to address them.
Required readings:
Papa Seck, "Links Between Natural Disasters, Humanitarian Assistance and DRR:
    A Critical Perspective" Human Development Report 2007/2008 (UNDP, 2007)
Juddith Hubbard, "5 Lessons from past earthquakes to navigate Turkey's Tragedy" *Washington Post* (February 7, 2023)
    https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/02/07/turkey-earthquake-lessons-rebuilding/

April 7 & 9: Humanitarian Aid and Development Aid: finding the "nexus"
Humanitarian aid and development aid are the two sides of the same coin. However, they serve different, yet complementary, purposes by addressing the short-term immediate needs (humanitarian aid) and the long-term needs (development aid). In this section we are looking into the big debate about the "humanitarian-development nexus". What is it all about? Is it effective and why?
Required readings:
Yukie Osa and Atsushi Hanatani, "Introduction: addressing the humanitarian-development nexus since the Cold War", in Atsushi Hanatani, Oscar A. Gomez and Chigumi Kawaguchi, eds, *Crisis Management beyond the Humanitarian-Development Nexus,* Routledge, 3-14.
Oscar A. Gomez and Chigumi Kawaguchi, "A theory for the Continuum: multiple approaches to humanitarian crisis management" in Atsushi Hanatani, Oscar A. Gomez and Chigumi Kawaguchi, eds, *Crisis Management beyond the Humanitarian-Development Nexus,* Routledge, 15-36.
Jon Harald Sande Lie, 2020, "The Humanitarian Development nexus: humanitarian principles, practice and pragmatics" *Journal of International Humanitarian Action,* pp. 1-14.
 Eli Stamnes, 2016, "Rethinking the Humanitarian-Development Nexus" Policy Brief, Norwegian Interest of International Affairs, pp. 1-4.
  "Operationalizing the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: Lessons from Colombia, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia and Turkey" *International Organization of Migration,* 2019.

Class presentations

April 23 & 28: Responding to humanitarian crises: Old and new methods
In the face of a continuous increase in humanitarian needs and the shrinking in financial resources, international actors find themselves before hard dilemmas about who to help and how. And when the decision is made to help the question becomes how to respond? This section examines the ethical and political dilemmas in providing humanitarian aid as well as old and new methods of response to humanitarian crises. A critical examination of methods such (a) financial assistance and how it is channeled, (b) "cash and voucher" and (c) education in emergencies projects.
Required readings:
Maxwell and Gelsdorf: Chapter 6
      Barnett: Chapter 10
      IRC, 2023, "Why is Cash Assistance a critical form of humanitarian aid?" https://www.rescue.org/article/why-cash-assistance-critical-form-humanitarian-aid
      INFEiE "Education in Emergencies" https://inee.org/education-in-emergencies.

Class presentations

April 30 & May 5: Reforming the international humanitarian system
There is a general agreement among the members of the humanitarian community that there is a need to reform the humanitarian aid system. The question becomes how? And to what direction? Has the "Grand Bargain" paid off? What reforms are needed and why to make it more responsive and effective?
Required readings:
Maxwell and Gelsdorf: Chapter 7
 Barnett: Conclusion-Empire of Humanity
J. Konyndyk (2019), "Five Takes on the Future of Humanitarian Reform" Center for Global Development
https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/five-takeaways-future-humanitarian-reform.pdf
The Grand Bargain: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/content/grand-bargain-hosted-iasc

Class presentations

May 7: Conclusion
Lessons learned-Evaluation of the course