



International Services

Frequently Asked Questions International Disaster Response

How do I become a disaster volunteer overseas?

The American Red Cross International Services Department maintains an International Disaster Response (IDR) roster, which deploys trained personnel in support of Movement disaster response operations overseas. Roster members have technical skills in one or more sectors (see box below). Preferably these technical skills have been developed and utilized in an emergency response context.

Field experience is also a requirement. Roster members must have two years experience overseas in a volunteer or professional context, or at least three years of national or international disaster response deployments. Potential candidates must also possess personal attributes such as diplomacy, teamwork and problem-solving skills, cultural sensitivity, tolerance, flexibility and the ability to function effectively in a demanding and often rugged environment.

Potential candidates must also be available on short notice for a minimum of four-week assignments, as well as available for annual training and refresher courses. Foreign language skills—Spanish, French or Arabic—and affiliation with Red Cross/Red Crescent national societies are also strongly preferred.

If I have the appropriate skills and experience, how do I join the IDR roster?

Anyone who possesses the required skills and attributes and is interested in becoming an international disaster response roster member must apply for the six-day Basic Training Course for International Delegates (BTC). BTC is a prerequisite for international deployments and inclusion on the IDR roster. Approximately 20 percent of applicants are accepted into this highly sought after course. BTC is usually offered at least once a year for 20-25 participants who are accepted into the course. See the BTC training notice for further information about the course.

- The American Red Cross responds differently to disasters overseas.
- Even if a large disaster occurs and prompts media attention, most national societies have their own staff and volunteers who are trained and prepared to respond and manage the disaster operation.
- On average, we deploy only 20 people each year in response to international disasters.

Skills Required for IDR Roster

Emergency relief: disaster management, rapid needs assessments, beneficiary targeting, distribution planning and management, voucher programs

Shelter: planning and provision of shelter solutions, such as tents or locally constructed alternatives, settlement planning, public shelter management

Logistics: requisition, procurement, customs clearance, commodity tracking, stock control, warehousing, transportation

Information technology and telecommunications: installation of communications equipment (radios, repeaters, satellite phones, VSAT), design, installation and maintenance of network infrastructure, support for computer workstations and networks, global positioning systems (GPS)

Finance and administration: computerized accounting, finance and budget management, financial reporting, property management, human resources services, administrative procedures

Information and reporting: coordination and analysis of data, report preparation, writing, dissemination

How does the American Red Cross respond to international disasters?

The American Red Cross can respond to international disasters by sending financial assistance, pre-positioned relief supplies from our global warehouses and trained emergency response personnel, or any combination of the three. We send the contribution either to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) or directly to the affected national Red Cross or Red Crescent society in support of the response operation.

The most common way the American Red Cross supports international disasters is through financial assistance, and this is why cash donations from the public are the most effective way of supporting ARC international responses. Cash enables local Red Cross/Crescent responders to identify and address the most immediate needs, such as providing food and water or repairing damaged homes. When used to purchase relief supplies, cash reduces the time and cost of delivery to affected populations. It also stimulates the local economy, often undermined by a disaster.

When do other national societies need international assistance?

The severity of the disaster—in terms of affected population and infrastructure—generally determines whether a national society requests assistance. Even if a large disaster occurs and prompts media attention, most national societies have their own staff and volunteers who are trained and prepared to respond and manage the disaster operation. For example, Indonesia experiences frequent intense earthquakes and volcanic eruptions; as a result, the Indonesian Red Cross has the history and capacity to handle most of their disaster operations without outside support. Local national societies only request assistance when a disaster exceeds their capacity to respond.

When does the American Red Cross deploy international disaster responders?

The role of the American Red Cross in responding to international crises differs from its domestic disaster responses. After a disaster in another country, the American Red Cross provides aid only after the local Red Cross or Red Crescent society requests assistance from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement).

When help is requested, the International Federation coordinates the appropriate resources needed, including personnel. Ideally, regional responders closest to the affected country are skilled and available. If not, the International Federation looks to its global network. Many partner national societies, like the American Red Cross, also have volunteers and staff ready. Based on language and technical skills, the International Federation selects the best suited people available to deploy.