Aid Operations in Emergencies: Command, Coordination and Staff Safety Course for Relief Leaders

18 – 22 January 2027
Madrid

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Programme Summary

Aid operations in emergencies is the subject of this one-week training course for country directors, programme heads and emergency coordinators at managerial level, ending in a first-fourteen-days response plan for one relief operation. Relief organisations often scale up fast with unclear command, overlapping partners and staff working in unsafe conditions. The programme moves from emergency decision structures to coordination, field safety, accountability to affected people and a finished plan. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this programme on aid operations in emergencies to mixed-organisation cohorts.

The Business Case

In a rapid onset emergency, decisions are taken with incomplete information while staff, donors, partners and affected communities all expect action. Organisations that settle command roles, coordination routines and safety rules before the event act sooner, duplicate less and expose fewer people to harm, which protects both the people served and the standing of the organisation.

- Response Time: Shortens as roles, triggers and surge routines are agreed before the event.
- Duplication Between Partners: Falls as coordination and information sharing follow one structure.
- Staff Incident Exposure: Narrows as field safety rules and check-in routines are applied.

Principles and Evidence Base

- Sphere Standards: Set the Humanitarian Charter and minimum standards in humanitarian response, applied to sector decisions in Sessions 2 and 3.
- Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability: Frames commitments to affected people, used for feedback and complaint routines in Session 4.
- ISO 22320 Emergency Management: Supplies the principles of command, control and coordination, applied to the decision structure in Sessions 1 and 2.

Intended Participants

- Country directors who carry accountability for a response and its staff.
- Programme and operations heads who plan surge, supply and sector activity.
- Emergency coordinators who run the first weeks of a response.
- Security and safety focal points who advise managers on field risk.

Typical settings include international relief agencies, national aid societies, health and water programmes and donor-funded recovery projects.

Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to construct a command and decision structure for a rapid onset response.
2. Participants will be able to prioritise sector actions against minimum standards when resources are short.
3. Participants will be able to evaluate coordination arrangements between agencies, partners and local authorities.
4. Participants will be able to diagnose field risks and set safety rules and check-in routines for staff.
5. Participants will be able to design feedback and complaint routes for affected people.
6. Participants will be able to justify a response plan to a board, donor or country office.

Programme Structure

Day 1: Aid Operations in Emergencies and Command

Who decides what in the first hours, and how is that written down?

- ISO 22320 Command Principles
- Emergency Activation Triggers
- Decision Rights Chart
- Situation Report Template
- First Seventy-Two Hours Checklist

Day 2: Needs, Priorities and Minimum Standards

Which needs come first, and what level of response is acceptable with limited resources?

- Rapid Needs Assessment Form
- Sphere Standards Sector Review
- Priority Ranking Matrix
- Surge Staffing Plan
- Supply and Logistics Pipeline Map

Day 3: Coordination and Partners

How do agencies, local partners and authorities share tasks without gaps or overlap?

- Stakeholder and Partner Map
- Coordination Meeting Rhythm
- Who Does What Where Matrix
- Information Sharing Protocol
- Donor Update Brief

Day 4: Field Safety and Accountability

How are staff kept safe, and how do affected people shape and challenge the response?

- Field Risk Assessment
- Check-In and Movement Rules
- Staff Incident Protocol
- Core Humanitarian Standard Commitments Check
- Feedback and Complaints Route

Day 5: First-Fourteen-Days Response Plan

Do the earlier tools form one plan that a board and donors can approve?

- Applying the Session 1 Decision Rights Chart
- Testing the Session 2 Priority Ranking Matrix
- Checking the Session 3 Coordination Matrix
- Reviewing the Session 4 Field Risk Assessment
- Completing the Response Plan and Board Note

Methodology

The programme uses a simulation built on a prepared file for a fictional rapid onset emergency, with situation reports, partner profiles, supply data and incident messages released in stages. Participants work in small teams in changing command roles, take decisions under time pressure and explain them to peers. The programme develops leadership of a response, not clinical or technical sector skills.

- Suggested activity: Setting up command and a decision log in the first hours of the simulated event.
- Suggested activity: Reconciling overlapping partner plans into a single coordination matrix.
- Suggested activity: Handling a staff incident message and a community complaint in the same shift.

Capstone Output

Each participant completes a first-fourteen-days response plan for one relief operation. It holds a command structure, activation triggers, priority actions against minimum standards, a coordination matrix, field safety rules and a feedback route. The plan is used at work to brief a board or donor and to align the country team and partners.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is an aid operations in emergencies course suitable for leaders new to emergency work?

Yes. Aid operations in emergencies is taught through a simulation, templates and short briefings. It assumes management experience in a relief or development organisation, but not earlier emergency command experience.

Which standards do aid operations in emergencies rest on?

Aid operations in emergencies rest on the Sphere Standards, the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability and ISO 22320 for command, control and coordination.

How is the plan from aid operations in emergencies training used at work?

You use the first-fourteen-days response plan to brief your board or donor, align your country team and partners, and set activation triggers for the next event.

How does aid operations in emergencies training differ from a general crisis course?

Aid operations in emergencies concentrates on relief command, partner coordination, field safety and accountability to affected people, while a general crisis course concentrates on corporate decision making and communication.