Developing your skills as a humanitarian? 
Early career vs lifelong learning

What are the different ways that humanitarians can upskill?

Since the 1990s, professionalisation of the humanitarian sector has led to the proliferation of training courses, including academic degrees, and short courses offered by a huge number of different providers in a wide range of formats. These short courses are part of a wider trend - all over the world, and across all sectors, the way people learn is changing. People need to upskill regularly in order to keep up with the pace of technological change and are unlikely to do the same job throughout their lives. Changing workplaces are creating a global talent shortage, focussed around four areas (see next page). We put together some reflections on early career (academic) training and lifelong learning for humanitarians, and their complementarities.

Humanitarian Masters courses worldwide

The map below shows humanitarian courses worldwide, as identified by the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership (CHL). There has been a fourfold increase in English speaking Master of Humanitarian Assistance (MHA) courses in the last ten years. Interestingly, there is currently little consistency in terms of content between the various courses, so it is important to research which topics will be covered before applying.

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<tr>
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<td>USA</td>
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Early career academic training

Where can this be accessed?

Research by the Centre for Humanitarian Leadership (CHL) (Stibral, A.A., Zadeh-Cummings, N. & Clarke, M. Mastering humanitarianism? A survey of postgraduate humanitarian courses. High Educ (2022)) suggests there are 26 humanitarian Masters courses worldwide. The majority of courses are located in the Global North. In some parts of the world, courses focusing on humanitarian aid are unavailable. Instead, there are courses focusing on particular specialisms such as Disaster Management, Public Health or Agriculture and Livelihoods.

What will I learn?

There is no standard curriculum, but the majority of humanitarian courses enable students to take time to understand the profession and its history in the context of wider global social and political trends. Almost all include a research component, allowing students time to delve into a topic of interest, perhaps an issue they have encountered at work. Academic courses on Disaster Management, Public Health etc look more practically at how to become a specialist in these areas.

How will it help me progress in the sector?

UN agencies require a masters degree for most roles, from a World Higher Education Database (WHED) Portal listed university, though other organisations often don’t. In a busy sector driven by urgency, academic study is a way to take time out to think critically and strategically about humanitarian work.

Search for global postgraduate courses:
findauniversity.com
studyportals.com
findamasters.com
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Four reasons why humanitarians need to upskill on an ongoing basis

- **Humanitarian crises**: Increasing frequency and changing nature of crises – e.g. as a result of climate change or protracted conflict.
- **Developing technologies**: New technologies leading to new threats, or to opportunities to deliver humanitarian response in new ways.
- **New approaches**: The emergence of new approaches to delivering humanitarian support, for example cash transfer programming or disaster risk financing.
- **Updating knowledge**: The need to regularly refresh knowledge in key areas such as safeguarding, safety and security, by providing practical insights into the work humanitarians do.

The new career learning path: continuous lifelong learning

- **The traditional learning path**: the majority of organised learning takes place at the start of a career with no significant qualifications gained thereafter, with a few later peaks during minimal employment or career changes.
- **The new career learning path**: learning takes place on an almost continuous basis, with peaks when organisations dramatically change their way of working (for example in response to new tech developments) and the need to learn in order to adapt in between.

Research has identified these four skills areas which will be essential for any role, as we move into the digital age:

- **Cognitive**
  - Planning and ways of working
  - Critical thinking
  - Communication
  - Mental feasibility
- **Interpersonal**
  - Mobilising systems
  - Developing relationships
  - Teamwork effectiveness
- **Self-leadership**
  - Self awareness
  - Self management
  - Entrepreneurship
  - Goals achievement
- **Digital**
  - Digital fluency and citizenship
  - Software use and development
  - Understanding digital systems

**Where are you on your lifelong learning path? What will you learn next and how will you adapt to the changing world of humanitarian work? We hope you enjoy the journey.**

For more information please visit [https://hpass.org/](https://hpass.org/) or contact [info@hpass.org](mailto:info@hpass.org)