

Section two: how ActionAid responds to emergencies



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Section 02

KEY POINTS

- Our emergency response is guided by ActionAid's ***Policy on the security of communities in emergencies, which expects that ActionAid must respond to all emergencies that affect the lives and livelihoods of the communities we work with.***
- **Alert levels** are used to categorise emergencies and determine the scale of response.
- **Our standard operating procedures (SOP)** guide response in red and orange alert disasters.
- Primary responsibility for response lies with the **ActionAid member or country programme in the affected country.**
- **Emergency response must take priority** over other programmes.
- **International Humanitarian Action and Resilience Team (IHART)** provides support on emergency preparedness (in 24 priority countries), and response and resilience building in all countries. In case of emergencies, IHART co-ordinates the International Secretariat support to the affected member/country programme.
- **Upon request of member/country programme, EFAST** member(s) can be deployed within 48 hours to fill specific skills gap(s).
- An Emergency News Officer (under **RACE**) can be deployed to provide immediate communications support and feed daily updates to ActionAid's communications network.

About this section

This section explains how ActionAid's emergency response is structured and the roles that different parts of the organisation play. It describes the types of emergencies that ActionAid is mandated to respond to, and the system we use for categorising emergencies according to their impact.

It is designed to provide context to the subsequent sections, which describe in detail what is required at each stage of an emergency response.

ActionAid's emergency response structure

ActionAid's *Policy on the security of communities in emergencies* commits the organisation to respond to disasters that affect the communities ActionAid works with (see **Annex 1**). In these situations, whatever the scale of the disaster, an ActionAid response is mandatory, and must take priority over existing programmes. ActionAid is a federated organisation, with authority and responsibility delegated to global affiliates. This means that the primary responsibility for responding to emergencies lies with the ActionAid member or country programme in the affected country. Member/country programme staff, together with ActionAid partners, will lead and deliver ActionAid's emergency response.

Other parts of the organisation support the member/country programme in different ways:

International Humanitarian Action & Resilience Team (IHART)

IHART is part of the ActionAid International Secretariat and exists to provide technical and practical support to members/country programmes on emergency preparedness, response and resilience building. IHART's main functions are:

- **Capacity-building:** providing capacity-building for members/country programmes on emergency preparedness, and supporting the development and implementation of country and LRP level preparedness plans.
- **Policy:** co-ordinate the policy and influencing work around response, preparedness and resilience building.
- **Co-ordination:** during emergencies, IHART acts as the hub for co-ordinating information flow between the affected member/country programme and the wider organisation.
- **Supporting response, linking it to resilience building and longer term change processes:** in medium-large scale emergencies, IHART will deploy an International Programme Manager/Co-ordinators from the IHART team to support the member/country programme to respond and build resilience. The Head of IHART and other IHART staff will provide support and advice remotely. Additional surge capacity support can be provided through the EFAST and RACE systems (see below).
- **Fundraising:** during emergencies IHART co-ordinates fundraising efforts across the organisation, acting as the focal point for communication between fundraising affiliates and the affected member/country programme. Outside of emergencies, IHART supports members/country programmes to secure funding for disaster preparedness activities as well as strategic humanitarian policy engagements.

Emergency Fast Action Support Team (EFAST)

ActionAid recognises that during times of emergency it is crucial that we have the right skills available to support responses. The EFAST system facilitates a process in which members of ActionAid staff with skills and experience in emergency response are deployed from their normal positions to support another country programme. A commitment has been made to maintain at least 100 EFAST members on the roster at any given time.

Staff on EFAST who are deployed from the roster work alongside local staff and partners to implement high quality emergency response programmes, ensuring our approach promotes the dignity and participation of affected communities at all times. EFAST members continue to work in their present positions once added to the roster, but are available for either short-term deployments (maximum of four months in a year) at 48 hours' notice, or for a longer term deployment post-emergency (for up to one year) at a week's notice. In both cases deployees will return to their regular jobs at the end of the deployment.

Each EFAST member is recruited into one of 19 sectors covering different aspects of emergency response: accountability, communications, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, early recovery and livelihoods, finance, food and non-food items (NFIs), fundraising, human resources, IT, logistics, monitoring and evaluation, needs assessment, policy, project management, protection, psychosocial support, shelter and water/sanitation, women's rights and RACE (Rapid Action Communications in Emergencies), news and digital focus.

More information on RACE, which is a specialised sub section within the EFAST roster, is included in **Section 3: communications in emergencies.**

The EFAST roster is managed by IHART, who are responsible for recruitment, capacity-building and supporting EFAST members before, during and after deployment. Specifically, EFAST members undergo a formal recruitment process and, if shortlisted, applicants are invited to basic emergency response training. This training covers core modules relating to emergency response such as needs assessment, women's rights and accountability. Successful applicants receive a formal confirmation form where they commit their availability for the roster. Line managers and Country Directors are also required to sign this document, to give their advance approval for deployments. EFAST members then undergo a medical health check-up and mental health resilience briefing to ensure they are fully prepared to travel. EFAST members are also assigned a peer support person for their sector who acts as a mentor to build their capacity both during and between deployments. HR systems for deployments have also been established to ensure appropriate insurance, adequate remuneration and safety and security procedures for deployees.

The EFAST deployment policy can be accessed here:
<http://goo.gl/3szmww>

Additional information on EFAST systems can be found on the EFAST Hive page:

<https://hive.actionaid.org/IHART/E-FAST/SitePages/Home.aspx>

National EFAST

In addition to the global EFAST roster managed by IHART, members/country programmes are encouraged to develop national EFAST rosters to cover a range of skill sets they have identified as potentially requiring support during emergencies. These are likely to be similar to the global EFAST skill sets, but may be adapted to the specific country context based on likely disaster threats and the capacity gaps of ActionAid staff and partners. The member/country programme is responsible for recruiting and training national EFAST members, ensuring an understanding of ActionAid's approach to disaster response and familiarity with the member/country programme's agreed preparedness plan. They are also responsible for covering all costs relating to the recruitment, training and deployment of national EFAST members.

International Secretariat

In the event of a major emergency, all parts of the International Secretariat will provide support to the affected member/country programme. For example:

- International Fundraising staff will work to secure emergency funding.
- The International Communications Team (ICT) will work with a designated communications-in-emergencies lead country (usually ActionAid UK) to raise the profile of the emergency globally, and if necessary will deploy RACE members to provide emergency communications support.
- International HR and Finance will ensure that appropriate processes are in place to facilitate the allocation/delivery of necessary human and financial resources.
- The staff security function will provide support to members/country programmes to update risk assessments and security plans, and give security advice for EFAST deployments.

ActionAid's commitment to emergency response

ActionAid is mandated to respond to emergencies that happen in countries where ActionAid has an operational presence, if the communities that ActionAid works with are affected. This is set out in ActionAid's *Policy on the security of communities in emergencies* (see **Annex 1**), which states:

“ Both in its own strategy and through external linkages and commitments, ActionAid has committed itself to playing a significant role in emergency response work. ActionAid emphasises its solidarity with people living in poverty and exclusion and, in so far as possible, it strives to do all it reasonably can to ensure that the communities it works with are secure from the threats posed by emergencies.

The policy requires that:

- All members/country programmes respond to all emergencies that affect the lives and livelihoods of the communities that we work with.
- If members/country programmes do not have adequate capacity or resources to develop preparedness plans or to respond effectively, they proactively request and are open to receiving support from IHART, including through the deployment of EFAST members.
- If members/country programmes are unwilling to respond to orange or red alert emergencies, the Country Director provides written justification for non-response, and this is approved in writing by national boards (where they exist) and the CEO of ActionAid International.

In summary, **all members/country programmes are obliged to respond, and emergency response must take priority over other programmes.**

In exceptional circumstances, ActionAid may respond to emergencies in countries where the organisation does not have existing programmes. The CEO is responsible for taking this decision, which would depend on the scale of humanitarian need, ActionAid's capacity to respond, institutional risks and opportunities of responding/not responding etc. Further details are set out in the *Policy on the security of communities in emergencies* in **Annex 1**.

ActionAid disaster alert levels

ActionAid uses a system of alert levels to categorise emergencies and determine the scale of appropriate response.

- **GREEN** means the situation is normal.
- In **YELLOW** alert emergencies, the response is delivered by the member/country programme alone, with support from IHART as requested. Additional support from the wider federation is not required.
- In **ORANGE** alert emergencies, IHART provides significant support to the member/country programme, and additional support will be provided from other parts of the organisation as required.
- In **RED** alert emergencies, the emergency response becomes the number one priority for the entire organisation and IHART plays a coordinating role.

These alert levels are described on the next page; subsequent sections of this handbook will explain in detail the roles that different parts of the organisation are expected to play for each of the alert levels. **Annex 2** summarises the organisation's standard operating procedures (SOP) during **RED** and **ORANGE** alert disasters.

Alert level criteria

GREEN

ActionAid member/country programme decides on alert level.

- Normal – situation normal.

National

- Preparedness – in consultation with IHART (see Preparedness, **Section 6**).

International

- Technical support for preparedness planning and capacity-building.
- Recruitment, management and capacity-building of EFAST.
- Monitoring trends.

Alert level criteria

YELLOW

ActionAid member/country programme decides on alert level.

- Portion of country/population affected (less than 20,000 people).
- ActionAid communities are affected.
- Attention on the disaster is from local to national.

National

- Emergency response starts in member/country programme by country team.
- Situation reports updated.

International

- Information flow through IHART.
- EFAST mobilised on request of member/country programme.
- Disaster Preparedness and Response Funds released if appropriate.

Alert level criteria

National

International

ORANGE

Based on its assessment, IHART recommends alert level to Director of Country Co-ordination.

- 20,000-50,000 people affected nationally including communities that ActionAid works with.
- Some global or regional media interest.
- Declaration of national emergency by government **OR**
- IHART and/or government, or other humanitarian actors define the situation as significant.

PLUS in addition to the above criteria, IHART assess that the capacity of the member/country programme to respond effectively is overwhelmed.

- Emergency response starts in affected member/country programme by country team.
- Situation reports updated daily or weekly.

- Alert level declared by Director of Country Co-ordination on recommendation of Head of IHART.
- IHART co-ordinates international support from the federation.
- Oversight Group appointed by Director of Country Co-ordination and meets regularly as per the ToRs with a focus on strategic and not just operational issues (see below).
- EFAST mobilised by IHART in consultation with the country.
- Disaster Preparedness and Response Funds released if proposal is approved.
- IHART International Programme Manager deployed if assessed by IHART to be necessary.
- Very High Dependency Units and other affiliates who have fundraising capacity fundraise through institutional donors and major donors.

Alert level criteria

National

International

RED

Based on its assessment, IHART recommends alert level to CEO

- Over 50,000 people affected nationally including communities ActionAid works with **AND**
- Significant global media interest **OR**
- Declaration of national emergency by government **OR**
- IHART and/or government, or other humanitarian actors define the situation as critical.

PLUS in addition to the above criteria, IHART assess that the capacity of the member/country programme to respond effectively is overwhelmed.

- Emergency response starts in affected member/country programme by country team.
- Situation reports updated daily or weekly.

- Alert level declared by CEO on recommendation of Head of IHART in consultation with Director of Country Co-ordination.
- Crisis becomes top priority for all units and constituents of the federation.
- IHART co-ordinates international part of the federation.
- Oversight Group appointed by CEO and meets regularly as per ToRs and focus on strategic issues, as well as operational effectiveness of the response. IHART mobilises EFAST in consultation with country.
- IHART International Programme Manager deployed.
- Disaster Preparedness and Response Funds released if proposal is approved.
- Very High Dependency Units and other affiliates who have fundraising capacity fundraise through institutional donors and public appeals.



FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

ActionAid’s Policy on the security of communities in emergencies: **Annex 1**

ActionAid’s standard operating procedures (SOP) for red and orange alert level emergencies: **Annex 2**