

Thinking about a career in the humanitarian sector but don't know where to start? Have all the positions you've seen needed a minimum of 10 years' overseas experience? Finding your first assignment overseas can be a daunting experience. RedR-IHE's Communications and Membership Officer, **Karen Wagstaff** has created this up-to-the-minute resource guide – and gives you some basic tips to help you get a head start.

How you could make a real difference — a **beginner's guide** to getting your **first assignment**

DOs and DON'Ts — a few pointers to help you get started

DO get some relevant experience and training

There are no standard career paths for working in the humanitarian sector but you will gain invaluable experience by volunteering through organisations such as the UK's Volunteering Service Overseas (VSO) or the Peace Corps in the US — or at the head offices of one of the many aid agencies.

Organisations such as the UN, World Bank and the EU offer internships and graduate schemes. Another typical next step would be to pursue a postgraduate degree in a related subject such as public health, international affairs/development studies or attend one of the many short-term courses on offer (see the Training and Development section).

DO learn a foreign language

The ability to speak another language other than English, such as French, Spanish, or Portuguese is a highly desirable asset. Depending on the location, some agencies will require working knowledge of a second language.

DO talk to people

Go to special career fairs and lectures and ask for advice. Some aid agencies regularly hold open days for potential volunteers — and/or participate in one of the discussion fora on the Aid Workers Network (www.aidworkers.net).

DON'T have high expectations

You will need to make a minimum commitment of six months for your first overseas assignment. You will also be confronted to working in difficult environments with little or no pay.

DON'T forget to think about your transferable skills

Before you start, identify what special skills and experiences you can offer, be it technical or personal — wanting to 'do good' is not enough.

And finally... Don't despair —

even if faced with countless rejections. Securing your first job will take some time but your dedication and commitment will eventually be rewarded. Good luck!

Career Q&A: What do aid agencies want?

With Rishi Ramrakha, Recruitment Services Client Manager for RedR-IHE

What qualities do aid agencies look for in a candidate?

Generally speaking, agencies look for technical know-how in a wide range of areas such as health, engineering, logistics, management and communications. Candidates must also be able to demonstrate that they are flexible, self-starters and ready to meet new challenges.

Anything else?

Yes, candidates must have strong interpersonal skills and be culturally sensitive as they will be working and living as part of an international team. They must also sympathise with the aims and objectives of the organisation.

Is overseas experience essential?

Most aid agencies require a minimum of two years' previous humanitarian experience. But organisations that offer voluntary or low-paid placements such as Médecins sans Frontières, Merlin, Médecins du Monde or GOAL, will have more flexible criteria. You will need a minimum of two years' professional experience for these organisations.

Do you have any other practical tips?

When applying for jobs, take time to reflect on your main selling-points and tailor your application towards humanitarian work. Don't forget to highlight any relevant personal, professional and academic experience you have. If you lack experience then volunteering is an excellent way to get 'hands-on' experience and find out more about the sector. Attending an introductory course in Humanitarian Aid will also help you.

List of major sending agencies

There are hundreds of multilateral, governmental and non-governmental organisations providing humanitarian aid. Most humanitarian organisations advertise positions on their own websites, through websites such as Alertnet or ReliefWeb, or work with specialist agencies such as RedR-IHE (including advertisements through its monthly *Jobs and Courses* publication).

Action Against Hunger: www.aahuk.org

The aim of Action Against Hunger is to save lives by combating hunger, diseases and those crises threatening the lives of helpless men, women and children.

American Refugee Committee: www.archq.org

The American Refugee Committee (ARC) works for the survival, health, and wellbeing of refugees, displaced persons, and those at risk, and seeks to enable them to rebuild productive lives of dignity and purpose, striving always to respect the values of those served.

CAFOD: www.cafod.org.uk

CAFOD is the overseas development and relief agency of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. Its mission is to promote human development and social justice within the Christian framework.

CARE International: www.careinternational.org.uk

CARE International is a global humanitarian organisation, working with over 30 million disadvantaged people each year in 72 of the world's poorest countries.

Catholic Relief Services: www.catholicrelief.org

Catholic Relief Services reaches out to people in more than 99 countries and territories around the world to alleviate human suffering and promote peace for poor and disadvantaged people.

Christian Aid: www.christian-aid.org.uk

An international aid and development agency of the churches in the UK and Ireland, Christian Aid supports local organisations, which are best placed to understand local needs, as well as giving help on the ground through 16 overseas offices.

Christian Outreach Relief and Development (CORD): www.cord.org.uk

CORD is a UK-based relief and development agency, dedicated to rebuilding the lives of individuals and communities that have been displaced and damaged by conflict.

Concern: www.concern.net

Concern enables poor people to achieve major improvements in their lifestyles which are sustainable without ongoing support working with local and international partners.

GOAL: www.goal.ie

Irish relief and development agency dedicated to providing aid to street children and refugees and the poorest of the poor in the Third World.

HelpAge International: www.helpage.org

A global network with a mission to work with and for disadvantaged older people worldwide to achieve a lasting improvement in the quality of their lives.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC): www.icrc.org

More than 1,200 people, both specialised staff and delegates, are currently on field missions for the ICRC across the globe. This work is backed up by some 9,000 local employees and supported and co-ordinated by around 800 staff at its Geneva headquarters. For British citizens see also www.redcross.org.uk

International Rescue Committee (IRC): www.theirc.org

The IRC provides relief, protection, and resettlement services for refugees and victims of oppression or violent conflict.

Islamic Relief: www.islamic-relief.com

International relief and development organisation, working towards alleviating the poverty and suffering of the world's poorest people, irrespective of race, creed, and religion.

Médecins du Monde: www.medecinsdumonde.co.uk

Médecins du Monde is a medical, humanitarian organisation which, for over 20 years, has relied on the commitment of volunteer health professionals to come to the aid of vulnerable people in the world.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF): www.msf.org

MSF is an international humanitarian-aid organisation that provides emergency medical assistance to populations in danger in more than 80 countries.

Mercy Corps International: www.mercycorps.org

Mercy Corps alleviates suffering, poverty and oppression by helping people build secure, productive, and just communities.

Merlin: www.merlin.org.uk

Merlin is a UK-based, non-profit, non-partisan charity which provides lifesaving health care for people in crisis and disaster situations around the world.

Oxfam: www.oxfam.org.uk

Oxfam is a development, relief and campaigning organisation that works with others to find lasting solutions to poverty and suffering around the world.

Save the Children: www.savethechildren.org.uk

Save the Children fights for children in the UK and around the world who suffer from poverty, disease, injustice and violence.

Tearfund: www.tearfund.org.uk

Tearfund is an evangelical Christian relief and development charity working through local partners to bring help and hope to communities in need around the world.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): www.unhcr.org

The UNHCR provides a world view of the plight of refugees.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF): www.unicef.org

UNICEF works for children's rights, their survival, development and protection, guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Humanitarian registers

Mango: www.mango.org.uk

Mango runs a register of carefully selected finance professionals who work with Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) all round the world.

Peaceworkers UK: www.peaceworkers.org.uk

Peaceworkers UK runs a database of people interested and potentially available for work in the areas of conflict prevention, crisis management and peacebuilding.

RedR-IHE: www.onlinejobs.redr.org

RedR-IHE recruits for over 50 different humanitarian agencies for a variety of different positions ranging from programme managers to health specialists. All qualified, experienced and dedicated humanitarian and development professionals are invited to register with us for free.

Volunteering

Peace Corps (for US Citizens only): www.peacecorps.gov
More than 178,000 Peace Corps Volunteers have been invited by 138 host countries to work on issues ranging from AIDS education, information technology, to environmental preservation.

Raleigh International: www.raleigh.org.uk
Raleigh International is a youth and development charity getting young people involved in environmental and community projects around the world.

Skillshare International: www.skillshare.org
Skillshare International works for sustainable development in partnership with the people and communities of Africa and Asia.

United Nations Volunteers: www.unv.org
The United Nations Volunteers programme supports human development globally by promoting volunteerism and by mobilising volunteers. Every year some 5,000 UN Volunteers from more than 150 different nationalities actively support the programmes in the United Nations and its specialised agencies.

Voluntary Service Overseas: www.vso.org.uk
VSO is an international development agency that works through volunteers in over 40 countries across the developing world.

Note. Other volunteering opportunities can be found on the World Service Enquiry website or through Action without Borders (see our website section.)

Training and development

There are an increasing number of short-term and academic courses on offer. Further training opportunities can also be found on ReliefWeb (see useful websites). The following selection of relevant courses should be read in tandem with the comprehensive, sector-wide **RedR-IHE Courses Calendar** (new edition out at the beginning of September 2005). Contact Sarah Broadley (e-mail: sarah.b@redr.org) at our London office for a free copy.

Academic courses

Coventry University: www.coventry.ac.uk
Runs undergraduate and postgraduate courses in disaster management.

Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine: www.liv.ac.uk
There are seven major externally funded programmes in the School at present. These cover a range of areas but focus on malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS — three serious communicable diseases. Also offers a Diploma in Humanitarian assistance and — from September 2005 — an MSc Humanitarian Programme Management programme in partnership with Bioforce and Mango.

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine: www.lshtm.ac.uk
Offers a wide range of training courses on HIV/AIDS, Malaria, TB and reproductive health.

The Water, Engineering and Development Centre (WEDC): <http://wedc.lboro.ac.uk/index.php>
WEDC at Loughborough University in the UK offers a variety of postgraduate and short-term courses designed to meet the needs of experienced professionals involved (or intending to become involved) with the planning, provision and management of infrastructure and services around the world. Similar courses are available at Silsoe College in Cranfield University — www.silsoe.cranfield.ac.uk/iwe/

NOHA: European Master's in International Humanitarian Action; www.noha.deusto.es

The Joint European Master's in International Humanitarian Action is an inter-university, multidisciplinary postgraduate programme that provides high-quality, academic education and professional competencies for personnel working or intending to work in the area of humanitarian action.

Short and long-term courses

Bioforce Development Institute: www.bioforce.asso.fr
Bioforce is a centre for professional training and human resources management, specialising in international aid. Most courses are taught in French.

Mango: www.mango.org.uk
Provides practical, financial management training for NGO staff.

Merlin: www.merlin.org.uk
Provides training courses in the health, management and support aspects of disaster-relief work.

RedR-IHE: www.redr.org
RedR-IHE runs an extensive range of training courses for relief workers of all disciplines. The courses are widely recognised by humanitarian-aid agencies and can also count towards formal schemes of Continuing Professional Development.

Electives

'Whereas the [elective] period could be a valuable chance to gain an in-depth experience of health and healthcare in developing countries, students' experiences are actually highly variable' (from *ihmec website*, see below).

Read more about the opportunities, pitfalls and factors to take into account when considering a medical elective in the South in back issues of *The British Medical Journal* (www.bmj.com), www.studentbmj.com, and *The Lancet* (www.thelancet.com)

Charities Advisory Trust:

www.charitiesadvisorytrust.org.uk
The Medical Student Electives (MSE) programme provides medical students in the West the opportunity to see an integrated health programme in a poor rural community in Mysore. Seeks to 'provide a back-to-basics, low-tech, approach to medicine, with the emphasis on preventative care.'

The Electives Network:

www.electives.net
Medical students can obtain detailed, elective-planning information. Resource set up by the Medical Defence Union (MDU) and currently only available to UK and Irish students. See also the student section of the MDU website: www.the-mdu.com/studentm

Engineering Without Borders UK:

www.ewb-uk.org
EWB UK places students with international partners in developing countries. Placements are open to students and recent graduates (up to 4 years from graduation) who are UK residents. Non-UK residents may find the details of their national EWB group at: www.ewb-international.org.

International Health and Medical Education Centre, University College London:

www.ihmec.ucl.ac.uk
The IHMEC International Health elective offers interested students a programme designed to prepare them for the elective and to help them learn from their experiences.

Medicstravel:

www.medicstravel.co.uk
Set up to help doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, theatre staff, radiographers and other health professionals arrange work and electives overseas. It also lists NGOs and recruitment agencies around the world. Site created by Dr Mark Wilson, author of *The Medic's Guide to Work and Electives around the World* (Hodder Arnold H&S, 2004.)

Websites

These websites are packed with practical information and job vacancies.

Aid Workers Network: www.aidworkers.net

Aid Workers Network links relief and development field staff to share support, ideas and best practice.

Alertnet: www.alertnet.org

A free, web-based news and communications service run by the Reuters Foundation. Contains many job and training listings.

BOND: www.bond.org.uk

The UK's largest network of NGOs working in international development and development education. Includes a comprehensive vacancy listing.

Charity jobs: www.charityjobs.co.uk

Charity jobs is one of the leading UK websites for jobs in the voluntary sector. Sign up to receive weekly e-mail digests.

DevNet Jobs: www.devnetjobs.org.

Find opportunities in International NGOs, UN, Funding, Multilateral Agencies, Foundations, Non-Profits, Charities, Consultancies, and Government institutions.

Eldis: www.eldis.org

Eldis is an internet-based information service: filtering, structuring and presenting development information via the web and e-mail.

The Guardian Jobs: <http://jobs.guardian.co.uk/>

The Guardian's recruitment section. Sign up to receive weekly jobs bulletin and register to your profile online.

Idealist.org: www.idealist.org

Idealist is an American portal run by Action without Borders for everyone interested in non-profit organisations and issues, non-profit careers, and volunteering.

OneWorld.net: www.oneworld.net

Brings together the latest news, jobs and views from over 1,600 members, promoting human-rights awareness and fighting poverty worldwide.

People in Aid: www.peopleinaid.org

People in Aid is an international network of development and humanitarian-assistance agencies.

ReliefWeb: www.reliefweb.int

ReliefWeb is the world's leading on-line gateway to information (documents, job vacancies and maps) on humanitarian emergencies and disasters.

World Service Enquiry: www.wse.org.uk

Contains information and advice about volunteering or working overseas in the developing world. Publishes *Opportunities Abroad* — a monthly listing of current vacancies.

Publications

Davis, J. and R. Lambert, *Engineering in Emergencies — a Practical Guide for Relief Workers* (Second edition, ITDG Publishing, 2002.)

All the critical information you need to implement an effective response in the aftermath of an emergency, covering both technical topics such as water and sanitation as well as managerial skills and personal effectiveness.

Development Action

Returned Volunteers' Association bulletin that provides information on current development issues and volunteering opportunities. Contact: retvolact@lineone.net

Development in Practice is Oxfam's peer-reviewed journal, offering practice-based analysis and research concerning the social dimensions of development and humanitarianism. See www.developmentinpractice.org

The Health Exchange and Jobs and Courses

RedR-IHE's quarterly magazine — written for humanitarian practitioners, by practitioners. Accessible, lively and highly practical articles and features on policy and best practice. See www.redr.org/london/index.htm and contact Sarah Broadley (sarah.b@redr.org) for a free sample copy and subscription details.



‘Organisations that offer voluntary or low-paid placements such as Médecins sans Frontières, Merlin, Médecins du Monde or GOAL, are more flexible’

Ehrenreich, J.H., *The Humanitarian Companion — a guide for international aid and human rights workers* (ITDG Publishing, 2005).

Helps humanitarian workers, and those training them, prepare both practically and emotionally.

Overseas Development Institute's (ODI) Humanitarian Practice Network's reviews and papers, journals and books. See www.odi.org.uk/publications/humanitarian.html

Parker, J., *Water under the Bridge* (Watershed, 2003).

A book written by a Western woman living and working as an Afghan woman.

Sanyasi A, *Extreme Emergencies* (ITDG Publishing, 2004).

The first comprehensive guide to help international humanitarian agencies prepare for extreme, man-made disasters.

UK Department of Health, *International Humanitarian and Health Work — Toolkit to Support Good Practice* (Crown Copyright, 2003).

Useful resource for all health practitioners. Copies can be downloaded through the UK's Department of Health's website: www.dh.gov.uk

Vaux, T., *The Selfish Altruist* (Earthscan, 2001).

Very experienced practitioner's personal perspective on the challenges of humanitarian-aid provision.

Wroe, M. and M. Doney, *The Rough Guide to a Better World* (Rough Guides, 2005.)

Simple but not simplistic guide to how the world can be a better place for everyone. Contains information about volunteering. Get your free copy at: www.roughguide-betterworld.com

