

2025 | 2026

Health Emergencies in Large Populations (H.E.L.P.)



Credits

2 ECTS



Dates

11 May – 22 May 2026



Format

This is a face-to-face course that takes place at the University of Geneva



Language

English



Fees

- **Full price:** CHF 2'000
- **Partner rate (MSF, ICRC):** CHF 1'600 (20% discount)



Course Director

Dr. Jonathan Polonsky – Jonathan.polonsky@unige.ch



Short description

HELP is a two-week course on the provision of humanitarian relief during disasters, armed conflicts and other complex crises. It was created in 1986 by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the University of Geneva, to professionalise the delivery of humanitarian assistance during emergencies, and to promote professional ethics and humanitarian principles. There are complex issues that humanitarian personnel have to tackle, often during emergencies : What are the most effective means to protect the lives and dignity, and promote the health, of people affected by major climate change-related disasters or armed conflicts? What must be done to analyse a complex crisis, evaluate needs, assess the resources available and set priorities? What goes into planning and managing a response and, later, evaluating its effectiveness?

How should threats to public health be prevented or responded to, mental and social well-being promoted, and care provided in a way that is effective, sustainable, respectful and ethically sound? HELP courses have been held in various parts of Europe, Latin America, North America, Africa and Asia. Since 1986, over 5,000 health professionals and humanitarian aid workers from various organizations, academic institutions, Ministries and military services have attended the course.



Objectives of the course

At the end of the course, you will be able to:

- explore key concepts and principles underlying the provision of humanitarian assistance in health emergencies and major health crises, and the methods of providing such assistance;
- examine various aspects and approaches of health emergencies that can be adopted by all humanitarian organisations;
- assess various stages of the planning process: assessing needs, analysing the context, selecting priorities, setting objectives, mobilizing resources, drafting plans, and implementing and evaluating activities;
- contribute indirectly to more effective coordination in emergency operations.



Workload

Around 55-60 hours of work overall, including:

- problem-solving and participatory teaching and learning: analysis of situations and group discussions are key elements
- Various teaching methods are used: lectures by experts, selected readings, group work in problem-solving, simulations of crises, field visits, and presentations by the participants themselves.



Structure of the course

The course consists of a number of approximately 30 modules structured around broad themes:

- Humanitarian standards and international humanitarian law
- Health systems and healthcare services
- Data and field epidemiology
- Communicable diseases
- Non-communicable diseases
- Nutrition and livelihood support
- Public health engine
- Economic security



Audience

Professionals in the humanitarian sector who have field experience and hold decisions-making positions, in particular:

- People with strategic and managerial responsibilities,
- Health professionals, such as doctors, nurses or nutritionists;
- Public health officers and epidemiologists;
- Water and environmental engineers;
- Legal or policy advisers.



Admission requirements

1. a university qualification (Bachelor's degree or equivalent)
2. at least three years of relevant professional experience
3. excellent command of English

Application deadline and registration

