



Communities of humanitarian thought:

The case for change in a time of crisis

May 2021

About the British Red Cross

For over 150 years, the British Red Cross has helped people in crisis, wherever and wherever they are. We are part of a global voluntary network, responding to conflicts, natural disasters and individual emergencies. We enable people in the UK and abroad to prepare for and withstand emergencies in their own communities. And when the crisis is over, we help them recover and move on with their lives.

As we look ahead to the future impact we can make, our Strategy 2030 will transform how the British Red Cross helps people in crisis. We will focus on three urgent humanitarian issues where we can make a real difference: disasters and emergencies, health inequalities and displacement and migration.

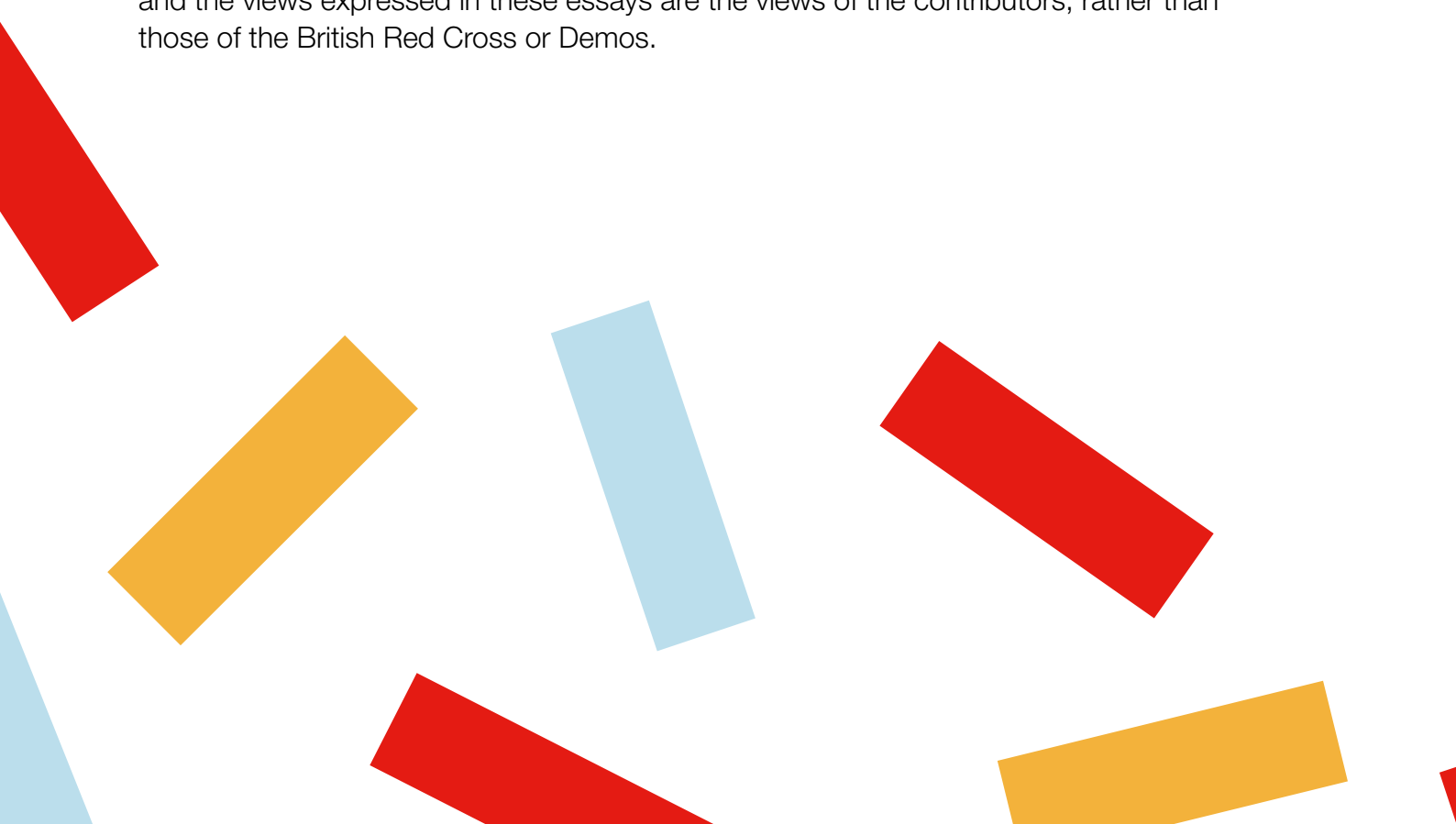
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About this essay collection

This essay collection brings together leading thinkers from different sectors, outlining what they see as the current challenges across these urgent humanitarian issues and, crucially, what they see as the opportunities for policy change.

We are extremely grateful to all those who have taken the time to contribute to this collection. We have sought to include a diversity of opinion and experience from a range of disciplines and across the political spectrum, bringing together volunteers and staff, people with lived experience and leading sector figures to share their views. A wide range of voices play a part in shaping government policy, and contribute towards constructive debate on the future we want to see.

The purpose of this collection is to provide a platform for thought, ideas and discussion, and the views expressed in these essays are the views of the contributors, rather than those of the British Red Cross or Demos.



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To build back stronger after Covid-19, we need to put more trust in people and communities

Foreword by David Bernstein, Chair of Trustees at British Red Cross

It has been my great privilege to have served as the Chair of the British Red Cross for nearly eight years, a deeply trusted humanitarian institution that celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2020. It has been said before, but this past year has been like no other, and the Red Cross has been there to help the most vulnerable in the face of the global pandemic, both at home and overseas.

In its lifetime, the Red Cross has responded to many cataclysmic events that have shaped our nation's psyche: two World Wars, the Aberfan mining disaster, the Lockerbie bombing, the 7/7 bombings, the Manchester arena attack, the Grenfell Tower fire, and more. The Red Cross is a part of our history and so many of our lives – indeed, my own uncle Joe worked alongside Red Cross teams in his role as an interpreter at the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1945.

The British Red Cross also works with other national Red Cross societies around the

world to respond to international disasters, including the devastating Boxing Day Tsunami in 2004 and recently, the Australian bushfires and the Beirut port explosion in 2020. My own time on the governing board of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) showed me the extraordinary humanitarian feats this global movement can accomplish by pulling together across borders.

The central role the Red Cross has played around the world in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic highlights that the organisation is as essential now as it ever has been.

Covid-19 has dominated our thoughts and actions over the past year. As we start to look beyond the pandemic, we have been handed an unparalleled opportunity to reimagine our future and build back stronger. This includes pulling together to overcome major challenges, both those created by the pandemic and those which have sadly been exacerbated by it.

David Bernstein



With such a long history of supporting people through crisis, what has the Red Cross learnt, that can help steer and shape our preparation for and response to future crisis?

Something that inspires me about the Red Cross is the enormous difference it makes to people as they experience some of their darkest hours. Its volunteers and staff are embedded in local communities all over the UK, and bring dignity, power and options in moments of personal or societal crisis.

The Red Cross practices kindness in action.

Its work begins with an assumption that individuals and communities know best what they need to get through any crisis they face. Ask someone what they need, right now, and give it to them. What you're really giving

is trust. What you're really saying is, this is tough but we can get through this together.

We believe that to build back stronger after the Covid-19 pandemic, we need to put more trust in people and communities.

Think back to those first days of UK lockdown, as support systems sprung up in neighbourhoods across the country, delivering incredible acts of kindness and connection to those in need of help. In this crisis, the communities of this country have not proved wanting. As we move forwards, we should look to and work with local people to find fresh answers, try new things and make ourselves stronger for the future.

Building local resilience is critical. While the Red Cross is perhaps best known for its emergency response to disasters and extreme weather events, the worldwide

movement also supports communities across the globe to prepare for and recover from major shocks and knocks. Because while some crises are unexpected, many are years in the making and years in recovery.

Take an issue that is now absolutely critical: tackling climate change. While much of the public conversation on climate change looks to the future, we must help communities deal with the devastating impact climate change is having, right now.

From the family who can't put food on the table because their crops have been washed away, to the family made homeless because their house has been destroyed by a major weather event, the Red Cross is there, working to help communities protect themselves from the harshest impacts of climate change, both in the UK and around the world.

We need to see real global commitment and investment in supporting communities to deal with the impacts of climate change today. The Red Cross is leading the way and has played a key role, alongside a number of countries, the UK government and the Met Office, in launching a major initiative to make 1 billion people around the world safer from disasters by 2025. The Risk-Informed Early Action Partnership includes hugely innovative areas, including getting cash to people in advance of a significant weather event hitting their community.

Wherever you are in the world, building resilient communities will save lives and protect communities from harm.



To mark the charity's 150th anniversary, this collection of essays brings together a diverse and impressive range of expert voices looking towards tomorrow. They explore how we address three burning issues of our time that are central to the British Red Cross's new Strategy 2030: Health inequalities; Displacement and migration; and Disasters and emergencies.

Individually, these essays suggest practical solutions to individual challenges across these themes: Kim Leadbeater emphasises the importance of addressing loneliness and building togetherness as we recover from Covid-19; Sir Iain Duncan Smith states the importance of greater protections for survivors of modern slavery

in the UK; and Nimco Ali calls for more power and funding to be put in the hands of African women to eradicate female genital mutation once and for all.

Together, these essays provide a powerful vision for what we want our future to be – one that places people at its heart and is built on connectedness and resilience.

The crises we are currently facing haven't taken us by surprise, but rather are long-building, protracted crises that are having an ongoing detrimental impact on individuals and communities and which we have the opportunity to tackle head on.

One thing is for sure: we must tackle them together.





The work of the British Red Cross touches on many different areas of humanity

Introduction by Seema Assadullah, Service support worker at British Red Cross

The Red Cross has been part of my life for as long as I can remember. It was my childhood friend, as a little girl growing up in Afghanistan at a time of war. I used to see the Red Cross medical centres and the hope they gave to local communities. When someone in my family was unwell, the usual ways of accessing medication and healthcare were limited, but the Red Cross was always there for us. Their medical centres made a huge difference to our local community.

Once I was living in the UK, my childhood experiences encouraged me to start volunteering for the British Red Cross in three different roles from early 2018.

The Red Cross had given me so much, and I wanted to give back.

My time volunteering, helping and supporting other people was a very good experience for me, and also provided a place for me to develop my own skills and strengths. While volunteering at the British Red Cross I found there was a place for me. The organisation's purpose is to support people, and make sure they are heard. It is built on people who care, who are patient with people and show empathy. In my role as a community connector working to tackle loneliness, I learned the importance of listening to people, of reassuring them, and of putting yourself in their place. That has helped me a lot.

The British Red Cross celebrates the power of kindness, and it supports people that do this, too – both staff and volunteers.

As a volunteer, my co-ordinator saw that I worked hard and truly cared about the people I was supporting. She in turn helped me to grow, and I later became an employee, working as a Support Worker in the organisation's Independent Living Service. In this role I spend a lot of time with different people, helping them to overcome difficult periods in their lives. When people come out of hospital they receive medical and psychiatric support, but to really recover often they need more than that. I help them to access support around their housing, benefits or mental health. These are things that can have a worrying effect on their recovery if they aren't in place. My active listening skills and patience have always helped me build a strong rapport with the service user. My ability to speak multiple languages has also allowed me to connect with different communities.

The British Red Cross is a humanitarian organisation. This shows in the way that it treats people as human beings, whatever their background. The work that I do, together with my colleagues across the organisation, ensures people's voices are heard. We listen, we show empathy, and we build rapport with them.

Our work is about ensuring that people in different types of crisis have everything they need to recover, and that people aren't left to deal with their problems on their own.

It touches my heart to see how people work together to make this happen.

But not everyone knows what the Red Cross does, beyond its work on conflict. The work of the British Red Cross extends far and wide, and touches on so many different areas of humanity. The issues discussed in these essays are so important, and they show just how far our work reaches. I hope this collection helps people to understand the importance of this amazing work, and the changes that are needed to bring about a kinder world for everyone.

I will never forget the horrible face of war, but will always remember the generosity and kindness of the Red Cross.

Seema Assadullah





Chapter 1

Health inequalities

Our support is so valued by the people who receive it

**Introduction by Blessed Okpeki,
British Red Cross volunteer**

I have volunteered at the British Red Cross's Mobility Aids Service – the biggest national provider of short-term wheelchair loans – for five years. Volunteers like me help people stay independent by providing them with wheelchairs. This service helps the British Red Cross in its mission to ensure people in the UK receive the care

and support they need without falling through gaps in the health system.

I started volunteering with the British Red Cross at a difficult time in my life. I had recently moved to Belfast where I knew no one and was struggling to find my feet. When I saw an advert for British Red Cross mobility aid volunteers in a library I applied straight away. I wanted to do something to keep me busy and give me purpose.

The British Red Cross is now like family; everyone I've met has been so good to me. The experience has helped me so much too – I have learnt a lot, both from helping people and from the people I volunteer alongside who have supported and encouraged me.

As volunteers, we're often the first point of contact for someone who is reaching out for help. People can be very distressed when they first call; they might have recently had an accident or health crisis that has restricted their mobility and left them reliant on other people. These are always emotional calls, so as well as making sure we get the right details and understand what service they need, we will listen to whatever the person is going through.

It means a lot when I see that we have brought joy into people's lives. In our office, we keep all the 'Thank You' cards that people have sent us pinned to the wall. Looking at these cards reminds me of the impact volunteers have on people's lives, and it means a lot that our support is so valued by the people who receive it. The essays in this chapter all speak about very vital and relevant issues that I have also seen through my own volunteering. Patricia Hewitt's essay says that our healthcare system needs to focus on treating the whole person and prioritise keeping people out of hospital. From my volunteering, I understand the importance of ensuring people have the support they need to stay well within their communities. The second essay, by Kim Leadbeater, is focused on loneliness, an issue of great interest to me. My experiences of moving to a new city where I knew no one leads me to agree that addressing loneliness and building connections must be a key part of the response to Covid-19. In the final essay, Ceylon Andi Hickman writes about the

Blessed Okpeki



need to better support the mental health and wellbeing of young people in the UK, especially young girls. I agree that people must be supported to speak up about how they are feeling and should not be ashamed to say when they are struggling.

Volunteering for the British Red Cross gave me the motivation to get up every day, even in my darkest times. Before becoming a volunteer, I'd never thought about the need for mobility aids or how people would struggle if they weren't able to access this support.

I hope that after the pandemic, we will continue to show kindness to each other, to build connections and to support those who might otherwise struggle on their own.

I'm so proud of the part I have played in this work. I'm grateful for the opportunities the British Red Cross has given me, and so pleased that I have been able to help others in return.

Building on the unexpected benefits of Covid-19: The power of local communities

**Rt Hon Patricia Hewitt,
Independent Chair of Norfolk
& Waveney Health and Care
Partnership, and former Secretary
of State for Health (2005-2007)**

On its own, Covid-19 would have been bad enough. But the epidemic that has caused such misery since early 2020 landed on top of two other deeply entrenched epidemics: chronic illness and health inequalities.

The first is a combination of non-infectious conditions – depression, anxiety, dementia, obesity, type 2 diabetes, chronic heart disease and so on – that disable and can even kill. Although these non-infectious conditions affect most developed countries (and, increasingly, poorer countries too), the UK stands out with, for instance, one of the highest obesity rates in Europe.

The second deeply entrenched epidemic is the shocking gap in the incidence of illness, disability, and life expectancy between different groups, depending on a person's age, their ethnicity, how deprived they are or where in the country they live. Within the developed world, the UK is one of the worst performing countries in terms of life expectancy, which improved over the last decade for the best-off, while actually falling in some of the poorest communities.

Well before Covid-19, the challenge facing our country was how to transform a health service designed to treat illness into one that was equally skilled at prevention.

In 1948, the NHS mainly saw working-age adults whose injury or illness needed one-off treatment. Today, the typical patient is in their late 70s or 80s, with multiple and often interconnected long-term health conditions. To put it simply, in the past you could treat the broken leg; today, you need to treat the whole person.

Each of these epidemics worsened the impact of Covid-19 and, in turn, each has been made even worse by it. The pandemic's impact on mental health, for instance, will last years, as will the effect of undiagnosed or untreated cancers and other conditions. But, in a rare silver lining, the pandemic has also accelerated many of the transformations needed to tackle chronic illness and reduce inequalities.

When Covid-19 struck, the first imperative was to prevent our hospitals from being overwhelmed. Within a few weeks, working together, the NHS, local councils, social care providers and voluntary organisations solved a problem that had defeated successive governments for decades: acute hospital patients, mostly elderly, medically ready for discharge, trapped in hospital for want of suitable care in the community. Almost every one of those patients was moved to a community home – many newly opened for that purpose – or returned to their own home with the support of expanded community nursing and social care teams. People worked together to meet the needs of an individual patient, regardless of professional or organisational boundaries; and, crucially, the voluntary and



Rt Hon Patricia Hewitt

community sector had much closer working partnerships, with each other as well as with local councils.

That transformation isn't just about protecting our hospitals during Covid-19. Above all, it's about keeping patients safe and restoring their health and quality of life. As the NHS medical director, Professor Steven Powis, reminds us: "A person over 80 who spends ten days in hospital loses 10 per cent of muscle mass, equivalent to ten years of ageing."¹

Long before Covid-19, the British Red Cross was working with hospitals to help them get people home as safely and quickly as possible. It might be something as simple as a volunteer to warm the house, make a cup of tea and pop in over the first few days, or provision of a wheelchair or commode. Or it might involve talking to the patient and perhaps other family members for a thorough assessment of someone's needs, followed by three months' volunteer support as the patient regains their independence.

But helping people come home from hospital is only part of the story. Far more

could be done to reduce the number of people needing to go to hospital in the first place. That, too, needs the wider community to play our part.

When it came to Covid-19, the government quickly realised that the NHS couldn't do it alone. All over the country, people rushed to support their family, friends and neighbours. WhatsApp groups sprang up, often connecting people who'd lived in the same street for years without ever really meeting. In England alone, three quarters of a million people responded to the call for NHS volunteers within the first four days.² And in each part of the country, the statutory Local Resilience Forum mobilised all the key players: local government, the NHS, emergency services, the wider public sector, local businesses and, crucially, voluntary organisations like the British Red Cross with decades of experience responding to personal and community crises.

There is a beautiful African proverb: "It takes a village to raise a child".

Well, it takes a village to support each of us to remain healthy, happy and independent for as long as possible. Your GP or hospital, however brilliant, can't cure loneliness or a damp home, low-paid work or polluted city air – although the effect of all these stresses brings millions of people to their GP surgery or A&E every year.

We know what needs to be done. Take social prescribing, for instance. Instead of the repeat prescription for antidepressants or painkillers, your GP prescribes exercise and company. Instead of simply offering advice, the 'social connector' linked to the GP surgery takes the time to listen, to discuss the options – a walking group, a local gardening club, debt advice, a regular soup-and-sandwiches lunch – and perhaps takes you along as well. While innovations like this have been flourishing for years, today government funding enables every GP surgery to offer social prescribing.

Or take the 'escalation avoidance teams' where GPs, nurses, occupational therapists, social workers and paramedics all work together to prevent older people needing to go to hospital. Faced with a patient whose condition is deteriorating, a GP in the past might have had no alternative but to arrange for an emergency hospital admission. Now, they can increasingly rely on a multi-disciplinary care team responding within a couple of hours and arranging the necessary care at home. This approach, increasingly embedded within the NHS, echoes the British Red Cross's own work supporting people who are frequent attenders of emergency services, and who might previously have had a dozen or more A&E visits in a year, many of them leading to yet another hospital admission. This is another example of the way in which the voluntary sector can partner with the NHS to create innovations and spread best practice.

Although Covid-19 has put an appalling strain upon every part of our health and care system, including GPs, primary care and community teams, it has also accelerated many of these pre-Covid innovations. For years, NHS 111 has provided telephone and online out-of-hours advice and care. Now, the NHS 111 First service can offer an urgent clinical consultation by phone or video, while also booking patients in for an appointment – with A&E if necessary, directly with hospital outpatients or with their own GP surgery. All of this is designed to reduce unnecessary or risky visits to A&E and ensure patients get the right care at the right place.

As we look ahead to when Covid-19, like winter flu, becomes part of our normal lives, let's seize the opportunity to build on the pandemic's unexpected benefits – the friendships and connections in our neighbourhoods, the new volunteers, the team working and partnerships between public, private and voluntary sectors, and the digital transformation that delivered more change in weeks than most of the NHS had achieved in years.

There are three priorities if we are to do this.

First, we need to reinforce and build upon the 44 Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships that have been developed in England since 2016 (and all of which are now Integrated Care Systems), bringing together the NHS, local government, the voluntary sector and others to improve



health and wellbeing, reduce health inequalities and integrate care around the individual. A similar approach is being taken in each of the devolved administrations. The proposed NHS Bill that will put Integrated Care Systems (ICS) on a statutory footing is very welcome, although it needs to recognise that different areas have developed different structures to suit the particular needs of their communities, local government structures and geographies. And within each ICS, the local Health and Wellbeing Board(s) will play an important role, including providing democratic accountability to local residents.

Second, we urgently need a national plan for social care. In his first speech as Prime Minister, Boris Johnson promised “to fix social care once and for all”. But Covid-19 has again delayed the long-awaited white paper. During the first wave, when the NHS funded new social care provision, thousands of highly-skilled nurses and other NHS staff were released from complex and often protracted arguments

between families, councils and the NHS itself about whether a patient qualified for ‘continuing health care’ – free at the point of need – or only for social care, dependent upon a means test. NHS-funded social care for up to six weeks should at least ensure that patients continue to be discharged quickly from hospital. But much more is needed.

Before Covid-19, staff turnover in social care – whether in care homes or domiciliary services – was running at a horrifying 32.2 per cent, reflecting low pay, lack of career progression and, above all, the physical and emotional demands of care.³ If we are truly going to integrate health and social care around the individual, then we have to care for our carers. That means a more significant pay increase than the 1 per cent promised for NHS staff in the recent budget announcement, as well as aligning social care with NHS pay grades. More joint training should also be provided for NHS and social care staff and skills ‘passports’ that will enable people to pursue careers

across both the NHS and social care. At the same time, we need to recognise and do more to relieve the huge burden on the unpaid army of carers. All that, of course, needs funding, whether that comes through a wholly tax-funded service, a Japanese-style public insurance system for the over-40s, or a combination of public and private funding.

Third, we must cherish and support our voluntary and community organisations. We can't just assume that the Red Cross and thousands of other groups will be there when we need them. Yes, there has been an outpouring of good neighbourliness and volunteering. But just when the need for voluntary support was soaring, charity shops were closed and fundraising events were cancelled. In June 2020, independent charity Pro Bono Economics predicted that the UK's 170,000 charities would lose £6.7bn of income over the six months to December 2020, leaving one in 10 expecting to go out of business in that timeframe.⁴ At the same time, the sector itself has seen a wave of innovation as people transformed their ways of working and the support they provided. Funders, including philanthropic foundations and businesses as well as the public sector, often supported the

changes and reduced their own reporting demands. For the future, we will need voluntary organisations working with the public sector and other partners to sustain that innovation and reduce the bureaucracy that, all too often, has accompanied public sector commissioning from voluntary organisations.

As the NHS switches from decades of competition to a new era of collaboration, the same spirit of partnership is essential with the voluntary and community sector.

'Building back better' will need all of us to play our part. The people and places hardest hit by Covid-19 must get the most investment and support. Those who have suffered least will need to contribute more. Paying taxes, like voting, are the essential contributions we make as citizens. But, our country is also rich in the extraordinary number and variety of voluntary organisations. And, as the Red Cross knows and demonstrates every day, it is the contribution that millions of people make as volunteers and supporters that, quite simply, connects us as human beings. We will need all of that to meet the challenge of our three epidemics.

A country where no one feels lonely or forgotten

Kim Leadbeater MBE, Ambassador for The Jo Cox Foundation

In June 2016, my life was torn apart and changed forever when my sister Jo Cox MP was murdered. When something so horrific and unbelievable happens, everything you think you know and understand changes; my life is not and will never be the same.

But in those hardest of times, the support I received from so many people kept me focused and made sure I never felt alone. I am extremely fortunate that this support has continued, and as a result so has my determination to make a difference, on one thing in particular: bringing people together and building strong compassionate communities where everyone has a sense of identity and belonging, and no one feels lonely. This is inspired by my sister and our shared belief in humanity and the power of human connection.

Loneliness was an issue that was close to Jo's heart. She had her own personal experience of feeling lost and alone as a student at Cambridge University and had also felt the isolation of maternity leave and its juxtaposition with the pure joy of motherhood. When she was campaigning to be the MP for Batley & Spen, the area where we grew up and I still live, she observed that many people were keen to chat – often not really about politics, but just to have the pleasure of a conversation with a kind human being who offered a friendly ear. Many were lonely. Soon after becoming an MP, Jo set up a cross-party Loneliness Commission with her colleague Seema Kennedy MP. Jo's vision was that the Commission would run for one year and work with charities,

businesses and the government to turbocharge the public understanding and policy response to the loneliness crisis.

This work was taken forward by Seema and Rachel Reeves MP after Jo's murder in 2016. Under Seema and Rachel's leadership in 2017, the Jo Cox Loneliness Commission saw 13 organisations, including the British Red Cross, come together to highlight the scale of loneliness throughout the lifecycle and across all areas of society. The Commission met and listened to people who had experienced loneliness, including older people, younger people, employers and their employees, children and new parents, people with disabilities, refugees and carers.

This work culminated in the publication of the report 'Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time' at the end of 2017. The report called for national leadership, a national indicator to help better understand and monitor loneliness, an innovation fund and clear areas of responsibility for local government, businesses, communities and individuals, and we tasked the British Red Cross and Co-op to continue to drive these recommendations forward. They have done this through their work convening the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Loneliness, made up of MPs and Peers, and the Loneliness Action Group, which brings together government, charities, businesses and public sector organisations. The ultimate goal of the APPG is to make loneliness a bigger priority for the UK government.

In January 2018, former Prime Minister Theresa May responded overwhelmingly positively to the Commission's



Kim Leadbeater MBE

recommendations by appointing Tracey Crouch MP as the world's first Minister for Loneliness, committing to creating a Loneliness Fund and commissioning an England-wide strategy for loneliness.

This was followed by the launch of the first cross-governmental strategy to tackle loneliness on 15th October 2018, which set out a series of commitments to help all age groups build connections.

Highlights of the strategy included plans to build social prescribing into the NHS by 2023, the first ever 'Employer Pledge' to tackle loneliness in the workplace, a new Royal Mail scheme which saw postal workers check up on lonely people as part of their usual delivery rounds, and £1.8 million funding to increase the number of community spaces in England, and maximise the potential of those that were under-utilised.

Alongside the work of the Loneliness Commission, through the charity we set up in her name, in June 2017 The Jo Cox Foundation organised the first Great Get Together – a weekend of community-based activities to bring people together, inspired by Jo's life. A year to the day from Jo being killed, thousands of people came together in communities across the UK and beyond and united in a way which is rarely seen. Events, large and small, took place and the appetite

for human connection and togetherness was very clearly demonstrated.

In West Yorkshire I helped to organise a brilliant range of events, working alongside the volunteer group which came together in the aftermath of Jo's murder, made up of people from every walk of life, many of whom were strangers to our family at the time but are now the closest of friends.

These volunteers are a non-political group who on the surface may appear to have little in common. They were not trained in community organising, or in campaigning, and neither was I. We were – and we remain – a strange, somewhat dysfunctional family. But it works because we are bound by a common humanity and a common purpose: together, borrowing from Jo's powerful phrase, we call ourselves 'More in Common'.

Through Jo's foundation, we are now developing a network of 'More in Common' groups across the UK, consisting of people who believe in our vision of compassionate, well-connected communities with humanity and togetherness at their hearts.

The Great Get Together continues to go from strength to strength and our winter campaign, with a specific focus on loneliness and isolation, has been more important than

ever over the last year. The campaign has taken a holistic approach to loneliness by working with a variety of partners to continue to reduce the stigma around loneliness and encourage more widespread dialogue and greater understanding. This is vital going forward. We need to keep talking about loneliness and acknowledge that we are all vulnerable to feeling its effects at various points in our life. Sadly, we know this is needed now more than ever: as Dr Daisy Fancourt's Covid-19 Social Study has highlighted, loneliness has a disproportionate impact on young people, women and BAME communities, who during Covid-19 have all been hit hardest by loneliness, anxiety, depression and other mental health effects from enforced isolation.⁵

The coronavirus pandemic has shone a spotlight on the importance of human connection, which is why we set up the Connection Coalition in March 2020: "More than ever we are seeing that reciprocal relationships build solidarity and belonging, and prove that we have more in common than that which divides us".⁶ The Connection Coalition is a cross-sector network of organisations, charities big and small (including the British Red Cross), companies and groups united in our belief that we can build a better future for everyone by building strong relationships and connected communities. I believe that addressing loneliness and building togetherness have to form a key part of the road map out of lockdown.

Indeed, the British Red Cross says that "tackling loneliness should be built into Covid-19 recovery plans", and that "governments should ensure those most at risk of loneliness are able to access the mental health and emotional support they need to cope and recover from Covid-19."⁷

For me, the work I have been involved with both nationally and locally since Jo was killed has reinforced my lifelong passion for working with people to facilitate positive

health and wellbeing outcomes, and human connection is an important part of this.

Going forward, the issues of loneliness and human connection need to be addressed holistically.

Mental and physical health and wellbeing are a large part of this and we also have to consider the impact that grief, bereavement and economic struggles will have on many people this year. We need to take a cross-sector approach to addressing the problem, as well as thinking about what we can all do, professionally and personally, to build better and more connected communities where no one feels alone. Because if there is one positive thing about loneliness and social isolation it is that we can ALL help to address it.

It was welcome news that on 23rd December 2020 the government announced a £7.5 million funding package to help tackle loneliness over the winter period. Having set ourselves the ambition to turbocharge the debate around loneliness through The Jo Cox Commission, it has been heartening to see how many people have come to recognise its importance, with national newspapers, broadcasters, community organisations and others campaigning on it and making it a priority.

The excellent work of national charities such as the Red Cross goes from strength to strength and local community groups have worked tirelessly to keep people connected through lockdown.

So, we have to hope that if we continue with this multi-layered approach – top-down and bottom-up – of national government, local authorities, businesses, charities, community organisations and individuals all playing our part through acts of neighbourliness and compassion, that my sister's vision of a country where no one feels lonely or forgotten is within reach.

The nation's recovery efforts must include targeted, sustained and intensive mental health and emotional support for young people

Ceylon Andi Hickman, Head of Impact and Female Participation at Football Beyond Borders

If the Covid-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is that protecting our mental and emotional health must be a priority for the nation. Prior to the pandemic, the crisis in mental health and wellbeing was already widely accepted, with the amount of people reporting common mental health problems having increased by 20 per cent over the last two decades.⁸ But a number of recent reports have shown that Covid-19 has contributed to a significant increase in the number of people experiencing anxiety, depression and loneliness. Scores of people across the country are dealing with a combination of emotional and financial stress caused by Covid-19 restrictions, increased social isolation and, in the case of hundreds of thousands of people around the country, bereavement.

While the pandemic has been described as a leveller – affecting all of us, no matter our background – there is no doubt that it has affected some more than others. Those with a disability or long-term condition are particularly vulnerable to Covid-19, as are people from an ethnic minority background, and those living in the most deprived parts of the country.

The mental health impact of Covid-19 has also been disproportionate. While the rate of people reporting moderate to severe depressive symptoms doubled between March and June 2020, certain people were particularly affected, with younger people aged 16 to 39 one such group.⁹

Recent British Red Cross research has also found younger people aged 18 to 34 feel less able to cope with and recover from the impact of the pandemic.¹⁰

For those who were already struggling, the impact has been worse: Young Minds' summer survey of young people known to have a history of mental health needs found that 80 per cent of respondents agreed that the pandemic had made their mental health worse.¹¹

Before Covid-19, younger people were already accepted to be particularly vulnerable to feelings of depression, anxiety and loneliness. In 2007, UNICEF published young people's wellbeing rates in 21 of the world's richest countries. The UK was placed bottom of the list.¹² Our young people have been experiencing a mental health crisis for years, yet the political, social and economic significance of such a

Ceylon Andi Hickman



crisis has been ignored. And this is getting worse. With the knock-on impact of mental health on people's physical health – its links with early mortality and a range of physical health conditions from stroke to cancer¹³ – addressing this emotional crisis among young people is key if they are to go on and lead healthy, happy lives.

The poor mental health of our younger generation is the product of a range of systemic issues, including among many things increasing rates of poverty and resulting childhood trauma.¹⁴ This has been exacerbated by the dismantling of youth services, the underfunding of mental health services, and an increasingly performance-based education system.

Taken together, these factors mean that our young people are anxious, lonely, struggling with self-esteem and lacking the supportive relationships to guide them through adolescence.

The pandemic – much like its impact on so many other issues we face as a society – has exacerbated this for the most vulnerable. And as is the case with health inequalities generally, it has had a disproportionate impact on society based on how old you are, how deprived you are, and your ethnicity, among many other factors.

As well as this being a generational issue, it is of specific interest to me to assess through a gendered lens in my work at the education charity, Football Beyond Borders (FBB). We work with young people who are passionate about football but disengaged in education, to help them finish school with the skills and grades necessary to successfully transition to adulthood. In my role as Head of Impact & Female Participation, I am constantly seeking to understand how teenage boys and girls experience the world differently, and to design programmes according to these differences.

The evidence base on girls' wellbeing is significantly damning. The think-tank NPC's 2014 wellbeing survey of 7,000 young people in the UK found the scores for girls across all aspects of wellbeing decreased more sharply with age compared to boys. More worryingly, girls started with lower scores than boys: "Their self-esteem levels fall away badly, while boys' remain relatively stable. Girls start off happier with their friends, but by age 16 this has tumbled below the level for boys."¹⁵

Three years ago I worked with a 13 year old girl named Brionne on the FBB Girls Programme at her school in Croydon, London. In one of our very first sessions, we discussed the importance of 'sanctuaries', and I asked the girls to visualise their sanctuary however they wished on a piece of A3 paper. Ten minutes into the activity, Brionne's page was still blank. When I tried to explore this with her and provide prompts for things she could put down – "Where do you feel happiest? Who makes you feel safest?" – Brionne's answers were non-existent: there was no one in her life that made her feel happy and no space that felt safe, not even her bedroom. Later I discovered that Brionne's extremely low sense of self-esteem had resulted in her self-harming, falling out with the few friends she had and ultimately, moving schools.

It was by taking a trauma-informed approach that we were able to successfully support Brionne. Trauma-informed approaches are followed on the basis that people accessing care and support across the community, from food banks to healthcare, may well have experienced trauma in their past that continues to impact them and make such interactions extremely difficult. A trauma-informed approach uses this basis to create an environment in which people receiving

care or accessing support feel safe and can develop trust.¹⁶ At FBB, our staff know to expect that trauma may play a part in the girls' stories, and have been trained to approach the types of issues Brionne was experiencing safely. The trauma-informed approach allowed us to make a breakthrough with Brionne in a way that would have been much more difficult in the limited interactions she was used to having with adults, which was mainly in traditional classroom settings.

Brionne's story provides an example of how gender differences manifest in young people's response to trauma. The evidence shows that boys are more likely to demonstrate externalising behaviours, such as aggression or hostility, whereas girls are more likely to internalise their response, manifesting in anxiety and depression.¹⁷ There is a risk, then, that this trauma is invisible and unidentified by adults. Even worse, that it is dismissed as futile, or 'just a girl thing' – comments of the type I have heard my fair share of while working with teenage girls throughout my career.

The result of this is that inequalities are exacerbated: youth provision for boys becomes a priority because their response to trauma is evident and can lead to critical incidents such as exclusion, violence or crime. Recent analysis conducted by the Centre for Youth Impact of the Youth Investment Fund (a £40 million investment in open access youth provision by NLCF and DCMS) found that there is a bias towards boys' participation, with 57 per cent of participants male and 42 per cent female.¹⁸ I can speak to this from my own experience at FBB. Because boys are statistically more likely to be permanently excluded from school, school leaders are inclined to allocate their ever-diminishing funding pot to the boys. Much like their internalised response to trauma, girls take

their relationship to education into their own hands and tend to self-exclude at higher rates than boys. Put simply, whereas boys' trauma might lead them to flipping a chair or swearing at a teacher, girls' trauma is causing them to quietly remove themselves from school by truanting, early exiting or moving schools.¹⁹

Yet what both girls and boys need is the ability to have a trusted and consistent adult relationship in their life, and this is where the voluntary and community sector (VCS) plays such an important role. It has the power to bring people into and make them feel part of a community, showing

them their value, building their social and emotional skills and improving their mental health in the process. Girls' interventions that do just this do exist and have been growing over the past few years. Charities such as Goals for Girls, The Girls' Network and Sisterhood have been demonstrating how organisations can work in partnership with schools to centre and support the girls' experience. We need to design and fund more to ensure every girl has the support they need to reach their full potential. The FBB Girls programme is one of them, and has grown from including one girl in 2017 to over 200, with support from Sport England to grow further next year.



Taking into account the challenges girls like Brionne are facing, the first thing the FBB Girls programme aims to do is to help girls understand and love themselves for who they are. Our classroom Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum explicitly teaches the skills of self-awareness, self-regulation and responsible decision-making (among others), through interesting ‘hooks’ that align to the girls’ passions. For example, we recently used the popular 2020 film, *Rocks*, to conduct an art project with the girls on our programme evaluating decisions made by the teenage girls in the film whose lives so aptly mirror their own. This process of linking cultural references back to their own lives encourages them to assess why they make the decisions they do, who and what they are influenced by, and helps to develop a framework for responsible decisions in future.

These SEL skills are built upon on the football pitch. We see the football pitch as a safe space to demonstrate and learn from both positive and negative emotions: for girls we particularly focus on feelings of anger and frustration, freeing them from the damaging taboo that girls are not permitted to be angry and instead allowing them to safely express and explore it.²⁰ We develop the girls’ sense of self through accepting all parts of their identity: an uncommon phenomenon for a teenage girl to experience. It is important, then, that FBB provides the space, tools and trusted adults to help them accept it.

A trauma-informed approach – coupled with a lens of attachment theory and adolescent neuroscience – underpins our practice and programme design. A principle we guide ourselves on is that of Unconditional Positive Regard, developed

by the therapist and psychologist, Carl Rogers. It is the principle of showing complete acceptance and support to another human being. It is saying to the child, “you can mess up, but we’ll always be here, because you’re important and you matter.” For some of the girls with particularly difficult home lives, a safe and private space can be needed to develop trusting relationships with adults. At FBB, we provide this through culturally competent British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy-trained practitioners – known as ‘TWP’s’ (Therapeutic Wellbeing Practitioners) – to focus on rehearsing a relationship in a safe and supporting environment.

We know that investing in our young people’s social, emotional and mental health is inherently important in order for them to build better relationships, and to live longer and healthier lives. But the effective development of SEL also benefits their educational outcomes. The Education Endowment Foundation has proven that social and emotional interventions can have an average overall impact of four months’ additional progress on attainment, which again is linked to better health outcomes across a person’s life.²¹ We saw this firsthand. In 2019-20, 84 per cent of our female participants received a Level 4 or above in their English and Maths GCSEs, compared to the 56 per cent of disadvantaged young people nationally.²² As the nation searches for ways to heal the many scars of Covid-19, it is paramount that social, emotional and mental health support for young people is a top priority. We must see additional investment for this purpose into schools: being the place where young people should, going forward, spend the majority of their time and learn to develop into well-rounded individuals.

When girls have access to interventions that provide the support, relationships and space that they need to develop a sense of self, positive connections with peers and adults and become aware of their own abilities, the results are remarkable.

But to do this, the sector needs better data, training, support and investment.

Firstly, I echo Florence Eshalomi MP's call for improved data on teenage girls' experiences to ensure that girls' challenges do not remain hidden.²³ Improving the data is the first step to ensuring that interventions are targeted towards the girls and communities who would benefit most. Secondly, we must invest in a highly-skilled workforce for our young people, in our schools and healthcare system. In order for female practitioners to be culturally competent and confident in applying

trauma-informed approaches – much like FBB's Therapeutic Wellbeing Practitioners – they must have access to the training and support needed to undertake the deep emotional work our teenage girls require. Once the data and workforce is of a high enough quality, the interventions and support for these complex challenges that girls face will be targeted, tailored and impactful.

We know that when tackling poor mental health the earlier the intervention, the better. That said, the concept of 'early intervention' feels somewhat redundant in a context where almost every young person has faced the damaging impacts of the Covid-19 crisis. Emerging from the pandemic, then, it is critical that the nation's recovery efforts include targeted, sustained and intensive support for the young people whose mental health has been so badly impacted by Covid-19, yet who are the least likely to receive support, in order for them to successfully transition to adulthood.





Chapter 2

Displacement and migration

Creating a society where people seeking asylum can truly say they have found refuge

Introduction by Godwin Akinyele, VOICES Ambassadorⁱ

The afflictions that refugees and people seeking asylum are subjected to cannot be understood by anyone who has not walked in their shoes. And this list of afflictions is endless. When the act of seeking asylum is presented by some as a crime, we see the needless incarceration of helpless and hopeless people. We see hunger strikes in places of detention; modern slavery; and people falling into untold destitution for fear of being detained, prosecuted or deported

if they ask for help. These experiences are extremely worrisome and debilitating.

After my application for asylum a few years ago, I applied for accommodation and subsistence support, but it took 10 months for my application to be approved. In those 10 months, I survived on the support I received from the British Red Cross's destitution fund (£10 a week and food parcels). I received no support from the Home Office and I have never been given an explanation for the delays to my application.

ⁱ The VOICES Network, supported by the British Red Cross, is a nationwide association of people with refugee backgrounds providing a platform on which to share the challenges they face and raise those issues to decision-makers.

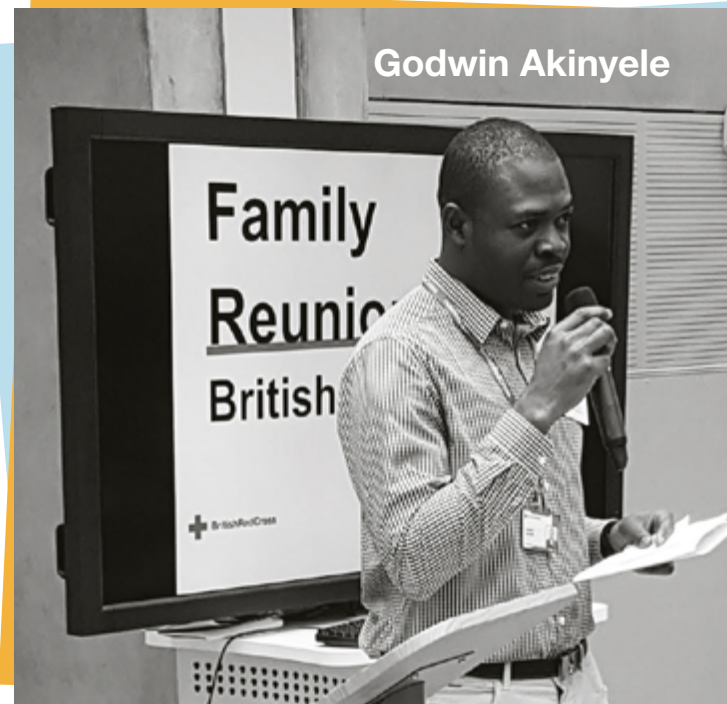
I know from personal experience that the asylum system in the UK is harsh. And I am yet to meet a person seeking asylum who is not struggling to survive or relying on the support of charities or others in the community. However, although it may be tough, it is better than what I and so many others have left behind. Those seeking asylum keep looking ahead to the day when it will finally be granted. But even then, once they are recognised as a refugee, they must face the further challenges that come with a period of transition and integration. Are these the best conditions the UK can provide for those who are trying to rebuild their broken lives? I think not.

The work of the British Red Cross in supporting refugees and people seeking asylum positions the organisation as first among its equals. Thousands of people have benefitted from the organisation's destitution funding, including myself.

From 2016 to 2017, when I could not access any statutory support and the institution saddled with that responsibility turned its listening ear away from my cry for support, the British Red Cross filled that void.

I started volunteering for the British Red Cross in 2017, because I wanted to spend my time doing something worthwhile. I had seen the way that the charity took care of me and so many other people, and I wanted to contribute as a way to give back to my new community. Volunteering with the British Red Cross has also given me the chance to access training and other opportunities which I hope will help me in the future.

As the Nigerian proverb goes, when the wind knocks down the trees in the forest, it is logical to clear the top of the pile first.



The essays in this chapter rightly investigate some of the trees that sit at the top of the pile of afflictions impacting those who are migrating or displaced. The first essay, by Alison Phipps, argues that refugee integration should start from the moment a person arrives in the UK, and not after their asylum application has been approved. The second essay, by Sabir Zazai, shines a light on the value that people seeking asylum can bring to the UK beyond their skills, and the importance of welcoming and nurturing them. The final essay, by Sir Iain Duncan Smith, recalls the enactment of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, and states what is needed now for the environment itself to discourage the practice of modern slavery, apart from criminalising it.

These are topics that are very close to the amazing efforts of the British Red Cross to create a society where people seeking asylum can truly say they have found refuge. And these well-reasoned essays and their empathic inspiration help us all to see beyond the surface of what people who are seeking asylum go through.

Welcoming New Scots into society from the day they arrive

**Professor Alison Phipps,
UNESCO Chair in Refugee
Integration through Languages
and the Arts, University of
Glasgow**

She's jumping, giggling, gleeful as only a two-year-old can be. "Abay, Abay" she shouts for me "Look at me! Look at me! Jumping in muddy puddles! Abay, Abay! Come in. Come in." And then there were two – a little human and a big human – jumping in muddy puddles, just like Peppa Pig in the East End of Glasgow.

There are few such signs of hope and normality as children at play. At first glance this seems so normal, and is so normal. Here we are all wrapped up in wool and under the January sky. It's the only way we can meet under lockdown.

"Abay" – that's me. That's her name for this expansive role I play in her little life. It means 'Granny' in Tigrinya. It means the world to me. But it also symbolises so much more. It is quintessentially a moment of perfect integration.

My granddaughter was born in the UK, to a refugee mother from Eritrea, my foster daughter, and she is a UK citizen. Her jumping in muddy puddles today would not have been possible without the work of the British Red Cross, amongst many others: when my daughter was a destitute asylum seeker aged 16, the Red Cross was one of the places she went for help.

My granddaughter today is a huge fan, like so many two-year-olds, of Peppa Pig. I watch as she lays down the foundations for a life that in later years will be filled with this common store of rich childhood memories that signify home, and were

made at home. Her mother has memories too, those of her teenage years which were forged with us: Edinburgh Zoo, BBQs in the garden, a residential on the Isle of Mull with her college mates, graduating with a degree in civil engineering. She has other older memories of life before Scotland: of backyards, fresh milk, places to swim, dances in the village and neighbours dropping in and out of each other's houses with berbera spices and coffee, and flora organza dresses.

And of being forced to flee.

So much attention is paid to the often short but agonising period in a refugee's life when they have to leave. Many refugees' experiences of fleeing are seen as epic, constructed into stories which aid agencies, researchers and the media find to be necessary and palatable. The more dramatic the story, the reasoning goes, the more likely that attention will be paid to it.

The other stories, of what it is like to rebuild your life in a country of refuge, of waiting for life to be liveable again, of being reunited with family and of integration, are less often told. The boredom, hard work, nappy changes, shopping, and the many forms to fill out. The last is a reflection of the systemic disbelief that is built into the asylum process: systems that are set up to say 'No' in a language even I struggle to recognise as my mother tongue.

There are also the joyous and emotional stories of newly arrived refugees being welcomed into communities. There is a refrain used repeatedly by Ministers of State and by refugee support organisations, that the UK has a 'proud history' of welcoming refugees. That in itself is disputable and disputed by academic historians, not least



**Professor
Alison Phipps**

when the figures for refugee settlement in the UK are compared to those in the majority refugee hosting countries of the world, countries with nothing even approaching our wealth or infrastructures – Pakistan, Uganda, Jordan, Sudan, Kenya to name but a few in the ‘top ten.’

But what about the less sexy stories that come after the initial welcome? And what about the real work of integration that takes place on both sides of that initial welcome? What about the everydayness of saying hello to people who don’t greet you, in the pouring rain? Of learning new languages, and discovering there is a system of municipal refuse collection. Of the discovery that when there is black ice you need shoes with good grip. Of finding TV programmes that over time will be part of a common story of living together, in a part of the world, that will make your integration as a human being into the ways of life common to you there. Of the new songs, the new stories and new routine of your morning walk to the bus stop. Of the having and holding of a house and home. Over years.

These are not stories the media will prize, but this is integration. These stories are part of my life, as I live the contours of refugee integration in the UK both personally and

professionally. “But what can you do?” – this is the everyday mantra of refugee integration.

Integration is a devolved responsibility. The Scottish Government is required to attend to the care of all migrants in Scotland. As the number one city for dispersal of people seeking asylum in the UK for over twenty years Glasgow, and therefore Scotland, has learnt hard lessons about hosting newly arrived populations.

Scotland was one of the first countries world-wide to develop an integration strategy, and it did so resting on the academic frameworks of Ager and Strang: insisting on integration for all from day one, and on integration as a multilateral task.²⁴ It is not something that can be reduced to the individual tasks of finding a house, learning a language, or acquiring an NHS GP, though these are vital to those newly arrived or new recipients of refugee status. Instead, it is the work of the people.

To emphasise this, the Scottish Government titled its 2018-22 refugee integration strategy and the committee which oversees this (of which I am Chair) ‘New Scots.’ It emphasises that integration

is a creative task of making room for others within our midst, of refugees making room for those who did not share the songs of their childhood, and, for those who sing songs about Peppa Pig and muddy puddles, of making room for new cohorts and generations of children and parents and grandparents.²⁵

From the emphasis on welcome as a constituent part of hospitality in all cultures of the world, I like to turn to the old Scottish idea of fostership.

Fostership is humdrum, ordinary, everyday but it requires generosity that goes, as Alistair McIntosh writes, beyond the bonds of blood and into the bonds of milk.²⁶

Were it not for this idea of fostership, my granddaughter would never have stood in muddy puddles shouting “Abay, Abay”.

Our refugee family of second cousins, sisters, uncles, aunts is spread across Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, Libya, Italy, Germany, Sweden and Canada. Staying in touch with them requires us to incorporate multiple means of communication – WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram – into ordinary life over many, many years. It is through these channels that we foster the relationships to our wider family, sharing the images of children slowly growing up, of new haircuts and braids, of implausible moments at zoos, or picnics by lakes in the far north.

These efforts to remain an integrated family, while living apart, are an experience that has become more familiar to non-refugee families under lockdown. Pandemic passports and weeks of quarantine are now bound, structurally, into the experience of separated families who – like my own – have no clue when they might ever meet again, separated as they are by so many bureaucratic immigration processes. Families like ours have no hope

of physically meeting beyond the long-term hopes of family reunion, laid out in the Refugee Convention and the operations of organisations like the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

“Abay!” “Abay!”

Every now and then, though, miracles happen. They are hard-wrought. The stories of miracles in religious and mythological literature are always accompanied by a great deal of drama and tales of defying nature, and established power. I can hardly bear to recall what it actually took for all my foster family in the UK to actually get the right travel documents, and the correct visas for us to be able to visit a safe third country in sub-Saharan Africa in 2012. A country where each of us, with our differing statehoods and histories, is actually allowed to be with a visa.

This first journey together was before there were any grandchildren, and after many years of struggle and waiting to be reunited with our extended foster family in a country which was, at the time, mutually safe, and mutually accessible. There have been subsequent journeys, and I can say that my granddaughter would never have met some of her other family members were it not for the Red Cross in Sudan working with refugees. Internationally, the Red Cross helps with refugee registration, food distribution and, as they did with my foster daughter, supporting people to trace their families who have become lost as they criss-cross the world, swept along by the randomness of where refugees end up.

Over the years this journey too has become more precarious, with warfare and conflict, mass refoulements of refugees from previously ‘safe’ third countries. In 2021 the social media apps still contain the greetings for peace, but they are muted, constricted and full of the fear of what is happening ‘back home’, and of what the long, long silences in the phones might mean.

“Abay!” “Abay!”

Survivors, elders, cousins, uncles, aunts and children run round in circles and shriek with delight as we arrive. The process of integration into our family begins with welcome. The words are written in misspelt English, in candles on the floor, surrounded by rose petals. In the days that follow under the warm, delighted embrace of this foster family of strangers, we begin to integrate as family and into the cultural life of refugees in limbo, living, not in a camp, but like the majority of refugees worldwide, in a large city in the expanding and highly precarious refugee quarters. The children drag us into their games – a pillow fight, dressing up in strange new clothes, and making up songs and chants, full of laughter.

Good integration is mutual, it's relational, it happens with the support of state and NGO structures, but it's about making new families, new communities.

In my long experience, those who are best at this kind of integration are refugees themselves, and the more policy-makers empower refugee and asylum-led groups to enable such work, the more successful and frictionless the integrating can become.

In Scotland, as opposed to other countries, integration occurs from day one of the asylum claim. People seeking asylum do not have to wait to integrate until years later, when they might receive their refugee status. People are part of Scottish society from the start, and this allows civil society in Scotland to learn together, about each other and about difference. This means that the deep suspicion which can build up during a fraught and often awful experience of gaining asylum, is mitigated with processes of building trust and relationships with institutions of the Scottish Government, with community and with

other people. The success of this approach is clear from public attitude surveys undertaken in Scotland. Of course, it is still possible to find hostility, but it is more muted, and the direction of the policy has been towards tackling hostility, and building up human rights education around asylum and refugee policy. To see this policy extended to other parts of the UK would be a positive step.

In the all too human processes of integration, repeated in every life of every refugee, these are the moments when we become whole, when the bureaucracy and the waiting and the agonised separations are replaced by the ordinary wonder of being alive and being with one another.

When we miss this – in our policies, strategic plans and fundraising drives – and when we forget that it is for life, for the possibility of grandchildren with their grandparents, jumping in muddy puddles, then we miss why the Refugee Convention is a sacred bond in modernity, beyond the bonds of blood. Into those of mud.

“Abay!” “Abay!”

“Come in!” “Come in!”.



Asylum is not a problem that needs to be fixed: We must acknowledge the huge contribution that refugees make to the UK

Sabir Zazai, Chief executive at the Scottish Refugee Council

Following the recent announcements made as part of the Home Secretary's New Plan for Immigration, we have justifiably seen growing discussion on the routes that migrants, and in particular people seeking asylum, take to come to the UK. It is difficult to ignore the fact that in many parts of public life, when 'safe and legal' routes are discussed, they are so often presented as a choice, with the implication that the people making the decision to leave their country have a number of options open to them.

This ignores so much about what it means to be a person seeking asylum, and the very limited options that in reality are available to people around the world when they are forced to leave their homes in search of safety.

I arrived in the UK on the back of a lorry in 1999, at the end of a very long journey that started in Afghanistan more than a decade earlier. The decision to leave Afghanistan was not an easy one – it was my home. And it took a long time to get to the point where it was even something I would contemplate.

After the war with Russia broke out in 1979, and in the fight for government control that followed between the various

factions of religious fighters, my family became internally displaced. We left everything behind – three generations forced to flee to a refugee camp on the border with Pakistan.

Much like the Covid-19 pandemic now, at first we thought the crisis we were facing would be temporary.

We were hopeful that in a matter of days or weeks the unrest would be over, and we would return to our family home. But weeks soon became months, and the months turned into years.

Watching media reports, it would sometimes be easy to think that people take decisions to leave their homes and travel to places like Europe quickly. But, in reality, that is far from the truth. The vast majority – 85 per cent – of the world's refugees live in a country neighbouring their own²⁷, waiting to go home. It is only when it becomes clear that going home isn't going to be possible, or when it becomes more dangerous to stay, that some people start to think about travelling further.

For me, my family was internally displaced for 10 years, waiting for peace. My preference then would have been to stay in my own country, but the situation in Afghanistan deteriorated and the Taliban



Sabir Zazai

were looking for people in my age group to fight with them. I faced the choice to either join them or flee the country, and I chose to flee. It was the hardest decision I've ever had to make, and I had to make it alone. There are no words that can describe the trauma of saying goodbye to your parents, not knowing if you will see each other again, if they will survive the war you are leaving, or if you will survive the journey you are about to make. All we could leave each other with was prayers.

I left Afghanistan looking for safety. It was a year before I reached the UK and there were many stages of that journey where I thought I could lose my life. It was neither safe nor 'legal', and this was made clear to me as soon as I arrived and I was put in immigration detention. But it's hard to know what a 'legal' route was supposed to look like for someone like me. It suggests there are options, yet there were no legal routes available to me to leave Afghanistan

– no embassy I could go to for a visa, and even if there was, there was no chance the Taliban would have granted me a passport. Even to this very day the British Embassy in Afghanistan does not operate a visa service. All applicants for family reunion or visitor visas must travel to Pakistan or India.

When I started my journey I didn't know where I would end up – leaving the danger of the Taliban behind was more important than my destination. When I did arrive in the UK, I felt hopeful. I didn't speak English, but I was familiar with the BBC, and I had heard that it was a country committed to human rights.

I came to the UK just after the new policy of dispersing people seeking asylum across the UK was introduced. Not long after I arrived, I was dispersed to Coventry and placed in asylum accommodation. There were five of us living in a two-bedroom house, and I slept on the sofa. There were

all sorts of infestations in the house, and many of the houses on our street were boarded up.

I was among the first people to go to Coventry under the scheme, and the asylum community was growing as we settled there, with places you could go for practical support and advice springing up all over the place. So much of what I have made of myself is thanks to the wider community of people that supported me when I arrived. Coventry gave me a home, an education, sanctuary and a warm welcome to rebuild my life in safety and dignity.

When I arrived, I spoke no English. I had completed seven years of school, in my own language. I doubt I'd have met the criteria to enter the UK through the points-based visa system we now have.

I had no skills, but what I had was greater than just skills.

I arrived with dreams, hopes and aspirations, and the incredible community around me enabled me to get to where I am now – by giving me access to a phone when I needed it, and helping me to learn English and to enrol for college. I relied heavily on that, along with the resilience that refugees and people seeking asylum are famed for.

After my asylum application was granted, I volunteered and worked in various places in Coventry, giving advice and support to other people who had come to the UK in search of safety. I became the Chief executive of the Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, a place that had welcomed me, and provided me with advice and

second-hand clothing. I remember vividly the day when I was standing waiting to be welcomed by the Board of Trustees as the new Chief executive, and reflecting that it wasn't that long ago that I had been standing in a queue waiting for Penny – one of the founding members – to advise me on something. It felt like I had gone full circle and I couldn't have done that without the goodwill and generosity of the community around me. This success story would not have happened had I been locked away in a detention centre, or in the infamous barracks, away from the community. Everyday integration happens in the heart of the community, in our post offices, bus stops, libraries and faith institutions.

More recently, I have moved 'north of the border', to become the Chief executive of the Scottish Refugee Council. From my experiences both as someone who themselves has gone through the asylum system and working with those seeking protection, I've seen what is achievable when systems help people to thrive and when communities are given the support they need to welcome people. I've also seen the harm that can be done when that doesn't happen.

The New Plan for Immigration is a vital opportunity for us to get the system right – to ensure that fewer people need to take dangerous journeys, that asylum decisions are made quickly and are right the first time, and that people get the support they need when they need it. For me, there are three key elements that need to come together to achieve successful reform of the system.

First, words matter – we need to change how we speak about asylum.

Asylum is talked about as if it is a problem that needs to be fixed, but the huge contribution that refugees make to the system is ignored. There is an emphasis on the cost of the asylum system – of migration detention, and asylum support and accommodation. But people seeking asylum bring huge value to the UK, and they want to work and contribute to their new communities. Almost all of those I lived and worked with in Coventry are active in their community, they have volunteered, and we all work now, as taxi drivers, business owners, teachers, doctors and nurses.

More and more, the public discourse on migration is focusing on ‘legality’. I find this deeply problematic when in many cases legal routes simply don’t exist. The proposals to turn people away who are affected by this aren’t fair, they aren’t based on reality, and they will severely disadvantage a very small number of vulnerable people who are trying to seek, and deserve, protection.

People arriving in the UK may need help when they first get here, but soon they will be turning their own, often bitterly difficult, experiences into hope and aspiration for others.



Second, we must make sure that routes to the UK remain open and accessible. Resettlement, family reunion and community sponsorship are extremely important and I am pleased to see a continued commitment to those. But these cannot be the only means to come to the UK, and they cannot replace the fact people have the right to seek asylum. Resettlement should not be seen as an alternative to a fair and effective asylum system, but rather something that complements it.

It is concerning that in the current proposals there is no clarity on how many people the government plans to resettle to the UK. The success of the Syrian Resettlement Scheme was, in part, due to the clarity of the UK government's target to give a home to 20,000 refugees over four years. A bold, ambitious new target should be set. There should also be a focus on ensuring not just that safe and legal routes exist, but that they are also accessible. In particular, women and children who are stuck in situations like I was, living in refugee camps, don't just need safe and legal routes but also the ability to access them. This means removing some of the practical barriers that currently exist.

Third, we must work together to advocate for a fairer and values-based asylum system, one that has our human values of common good at its heart, and whose foundations are built on the lived experiences of those that have sought protection, and the communities that welcome them. We need to hold the UK government to account on its commitment to a system that offers people

sanctuary and fairness. We must use the tools available to us – whether public campaigning or private engagement with Ministers – to make the case for why change is needed.

I've seen the value in collaboration ever since I arrived in the UK. When people are forced to flee their homes, it takes all of us to work together to restore their dignity and confidence, and to support them to rebuild their lives. In recent months, I've taken on the chair of the newly formed Asylum Reform Initiative, which brings together some of the largest organisations that work to support people seeking asylum with many others, to build a shared vision of what the UK's asylum system should look like. Working together, we can build an ever-growing and evolving movement of people and organisations from across society to build a system we can all be proud of. We must remember that immigration has and will always be an important part of our history, and offering people sanctuary is one of the most valuable contributions we can make to the world.

We must also remember that people seeking asylum are no different to any of us – they can be our future neighbours, colleagues, customers.

When they prosper, we all do well. Ensuring that the systems we put in place help to build people up rather than knock them down should be a priority for us all.

Survivors of modern slavery need rights enshrined in law – to ensure people can build new futures and prevent re-trafficking

Rt Hon Sir Iain Duncan Smith MP, former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (2010-16) and former Leader of the Opposition (2001-03)

While the UK has been a world leader in the drive to eradicate modern slavery, the problem has not gone away and political leadership is needed now more than ever, with cases in the UK likely to be on a far bigger scale than previous calculations have suggested. It is no secret that the crisis triggered by Covid-19 will also lead to a rise in modern slavery and human trafficking in the UK. The main drivers of slavery – unemployment, lack of opportunity and other vulnerabilities – are likely to intensify as we emerge from this pandemic, all of which increase the risk of exploitation and abuse.

In addition, the last year has meant that while police officers and local authorities were facing competing priorities and had limited resources, criminals, not prepared to lose profits, quickly adapted their tactics. Instances of exploitation and furlough fraud uncovered during the pandemic have shown the determination of traffickers to continue their abuse even as the country went into lockdown.²⁸ The economic impact of the pandemic has led to mass unemployment and increased poverty around the world, creating a

breeding ground for slavery and trafficking both globally and nationally, and this creates new challenges in how we work to eradicate it.

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 was groundbreaking in setting out Britain's response to this heinous crime and set a global precedent.²⁹

The Act consolidated separate crimes around trafficking, slavery, servitude and forced labour into a single offence and introduced severe punishments for perpetrators, including life sentences. The Act also introduced Slavery and Trafficking Prevention Orders, statutory guidance for public authorities on how to identify victims, and the Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner to coordinate the national response. There were huge steps forward in assessing the supply of products that involved slave labour, with the introduction of annual modern slavery statements for larger businesses who were required to outline their actions to eliminate slavery from their supply chains.

Since 2015 there have been several independent and government commissioned reviews on the impact of the Act, and in the last three years £13 million was made available to build police response capacity across England and Wales.^{30, 31}



**Rt Hon Sir Iain
Duncan Smith MP**

Beyond action taken at home, the UK has been a global leader in the push to eradicate modern slavery. In 2017, the government, with other states, launched the Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking during the 72nd meeting of the UN General Assembly.³² Last year, to coincide with the fifth anniversary of the Modern Slavery Act, the UK was the first government in the world to publish a Modern Slavery Statement, in line with the provisions of the Transparency in Supply Chains clause of the Act.³³

Based on a new police data analysis tool it is believed there could be at least 100,000 victims in the UK³⁴ – a figure 10 times higher than previously estimated.³⁵ There is a risk that the Modern Slavery Act has lured us into a false sense of security that our work in this area is finished. In fact, it has only just begun.

Although we have evidence that incidences of modern slavery are rising across the country, detection is, alarmingly, on the

decline. Last year, detection rates and referrals to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) decreased for the first time since 2016, by a 14 per cent drop in the first quarter of 2020 and by a further 23 per cent in the second quarter.³⁶ These numbers are still likely to represent just the tip of the iceberg as they only show the cases that were identified, and in the case of adults, where consent was given for a referral to the NRM.

Although 63 per cent of people³⁷ say they are more aware of the issue of modern slavery than they were five years ago, it is not just awareness, but a marked increase in prosecutions and convictions that is needed to pull up modern slavery from its root. Very few perpetrators of modern slavery face prosecutions and even fewer are convicted. In the year ending March 2019 there were 322 completed prosecutions for modern slavery-related crimes and 219 convictions.³⁸ Since March 2016, prosecutions have risen by only 9 per cent, while the number of victims identified and referred to the NRM has

increased by 119 per cent.³⁹ Prosecutions and convictions do not match the increase in modern slavery crimes, meaning too many criminals are acting with impunity.

It is survivors of modern slavery that hold the key to more successful prosecutions.

Their lived experience and eyewitness evidence will dismantle the organised trafficking networks and criminal gangs that drive many of the heinous incidences in the UK. It was the testimonies of two victims, who escaped and provided evidence to the police, that uncovered the largest-ever UK modern slavery ring, where 400 victims had worked for as little as 50 pence a day in squalid conditions.⁴⁰ However, survivors often require support and security to enable them to even consider assisting in the police process. Interview-based research by the British Red Cross in the report *First Steps to Safety?*, found that survivors of trafficking often need more time and support to make decisions about their future than the current system offers.⁴¹ For many victims who are trying to rebuild their lives, assisting the police is the last thing on their minds as they navigate the immigration and welfare system.

The Director of Prosecution Policy and Inclusion at the Crown Prosecution Service told the Home Affairs Select Committee in 2019 that the lack of sustained support for victims is a key factor in the failure to bring successful prosecutions.⁴² Promising pilots have shown that wrap around support gives victims the confidence and security to testify: all 62 survivors referred to a Home Office funded pilot in Leeds assisted the criminal investigation into prosecuting their perpetrators.⁴³

I believe we have a duty to protect modern slavery survivors, which is why the government should enshrine survivor rights in law to guarantee their access to support. Along with Lord McColl of Dulwich, I am the co-sponsor of the Modern Slavery Victim Support Bill⁴⁴, which would give victims in England and Wales a guaranteed right to support during the initial period when the NRM decision is being made, and for a further minimum of 12 months afterwards. Putting victims first and guaranteeing their access to provision is critical to gaining trust and unlocking crucial evidence against their traffickers.

The standard of evidence required for positive conclusive grounds – proving that a person really is a victim of modern slavery – is high, meaning vexatious claims are rooted out by the system. For those trafficked into the country, the provision provided by the Bill would include granting 12 months of discretionary leave to remain to give victims security, as well as the ability to plan ahead as they access vital services. The impact on immigration figures would be negligible as current NRM statistics show that just over 2000 victims with a positive conclusive grounds decision would be granted discretionary leave each year.

Now that we have left the EU, we have the opportunity to rethink our immigration policy as a nation and use it as a vehicle to protect and support the most vulnerable. Victims of modern slavery should receive statutorily required provision, which will not only reduce the risk of re-trafficking but also support survivors to build full and empowered futures. Victims' testimonies are key to dismantling organised trafficking networks and to bring perpetrators to justice. There is an opportunity for the UK government to provide this, and I hope they will seize it with both hands.



Chapter 3

Disasters and emergencies

I hope the community spirit we've seen will continue as we recover from Covid-19

Introduction by Robyn Wheeler, British Red Cross volunteer

I became a British Red Cross Emergency Response volunteer in 2018, because I wanted to help people who have had their world turned upside down by a crisis. From my experiences responding to emergencies on behalf of the British Red Cross I have learnt that, while emergencies come in

all shapes and sizes, the aim of helping the people caught in the middle remains the same. I am so proud of the work I am involved with, and that the British Red Cross supports everyone and anyone affected by an emergency. There is no judgement and so much compassion.

In both my volunteer and professional roles I have helped support at incidents ranging from power outages, gas leaks and unexploded World War Two bombs, to

the Grenfell Tower fire in London. In each case, people were suddenly told to leave their homes, sometimes in the middle of the night and without anything to keep them warm while they waited. My role as a volunteer is to make sure vulnerable residents are able to have warmth and have security, a place to go when their home has become unsafe and someone friendly to speak to.

People affected by emergencies can be shocked, stressed, and can sometimes struggle to understand what has happened. In the hectic aftermath of an emergency, British Red Cross volunteers, like me, are there to provide reassurance to these people. In my case, this has meant everything from making cups of tea to sitting and talking with someone who had just lost their house to a fire. We cannot treat every incident the same, so I make sure I focus on each person's needs and what they are going through in that moment.

It is humbling to see the difference that we can make as volunteers.

Although I focus on responding to emergencies in the UK, the Red Cross movement's same principles of helping anyone and everyone also apply around the world. Volunteers are often the first people to respond to emergencies because they are from the affected communities. Across the world, the Red Cross is there to support people's basic and human needs following a crisis.

The essays in this chapter pull together different perspectives on the Red Cross's work responding to disasters and emergencies around the world. The first essay, by Tobias Ellwood, says that we need to look at the UK's international



Robyn Wheeler

development and foreign policy, to make sure that Britain is a force for good in the world. The essay suggests that this can be achieved through the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Foreign Policy and Development. The second essay, by Nimco Ali, focuses on the global movement to end female genital mutilation (FGM) and how empowering African women could be the answer to ending it once and for all. The third essay, by Nisreen Elsaïm, stresses the importance of ensuring that all countries around the world have an equal opportunity to contribute to, and influence, climate change negotiations, with a particular emphasis on the role of young people.

We have seen just how important community and volunteers are over the course of the last year. Looking ahead at a world recovering from the pandemic, I think this will be just as important. I hope we will continue to work as a community to help each other when we need it most, driven by the power of kindness. This is why I am proud to volunteer for the British Red Cross.

It is time to ensure Global Britain is a force for good

**Rt Hon Tobias Ellwood MP,
Chair of the Defence Select
Committee**

It could be said that the world had a bad day at the office in 2020. We saw a shifting world order with threats to democracy, humanitarian crises such as increasing risk of famine as well as the considerable humanitarian and economic impacts of Covid-19. This pandemic has not helped an already unstable situation and may well be an indicator of the future risks of hitherto unknown pathogens that could further destabilise the world as we know it. Faced with such uncertainty, an increasing number of countries are retreating from global exposure, becoming more siloed and protectionist.

The coming years will be bumpy, as we begin to repair and rebuild our post-Covid world. The international to-do list on foreign affairs, defence and humanitarian issues is growing. This includes reviving global organisations, such as the United Nations and World Trade Organisation; updating the Geneva conventions to include cyber-attacks and space weapons; securing a viable climate change agreement and supporting countries to adapt to climate change; and designing a unified strategy on how to handle authoritarian countries. These are issues that need considerable focus, at a time when the world must also potentially endure another difficult global recession, and will continue to face increased humanitarian need.

At this precarious point in history, the UK must look up and out, it must endeavour to build back better, to seize this opportunity to set out a bold and ambitious agenda for its role in the world and to tackle these global challenges.

Now is the time to make good its commitment to a Global Britain as a force for good and provide the global stewardship that the world needs. To turn this sentiment into reality, we cannot promote Global Britain on the one hand whilst stepping back from our international commitments and reducing our aid budget on the other.

The UK's history, international reach, and soft and hard power credentials suggest we are well placed to continue to play an influential role on the international stage. Brexit may have led to a state of flux in our relations with some of our allies, but with its conclusion there is now an opportunity to step forward and re-engage in our fast-changing world. We must confirm what our global ambitions are, what post-Brexit trade opportunities we wish to pursue and what threats we are likely to encounter. We must provide a platform for those who are not currently heard, and seek to address the crippling humanitarian needs of millions of people across the world. A robust cross-departmental strategy must be put in place to support our ambitions.



**Rt Hon Tobias
Ellwood MP**

I welcome the comprehensive ambition set out in the government's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Foreign Policy and Development (Integrated Review). I believe it is now critical as we develop the detail, to show a Britain that acts as a global leader and steward. We must invest in soft power including reversing the temporary November 2020 cut of the aid budget to 0.5 per cent. The risks of not doing so are great, with increasing instability internationally and the vacuum of our absence being open to exploitation by others, as the UK's influence on the global stage diminishes. We must fulfil our legal obligation to restore and continue to protect our 0.7 per cent aid budget in a timely manner.

As the UK assumes presidency of the G7 group of nations in June this year, we have the chance to once again present our thought leadership credentials by identifying improved programmes of international

support. Failure to address the demise in stability, and build resilience to crises, will lead to significant negative consequences in the long run. We must start now and over the coming years to work with other international leaders, such as President Biden, to commit to building alliances. This will give a clear sense of purpose to what the West stands for, believes in and is willing to defend. On areas of conflict for instance, I believe that the UK should offer to host a UN summit exploring political options for peace in Yemen. The UK also has an important role to play on climate, which is one of the most serious long-term humanitarian, economic and security threats facing Britain and the world. We are set to host the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow in November, and will play a key role in facilitating and securing ambitious global commitments to tackling the current and future impacts of climate change.

In recent years, the UK has led the way in efforts to secure a global deal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, while domestically the government's Energy Act aims to decarbonise the UK's energy sector. These efforts mean that Britain is on track to meet the 2050 target to reduce emissions of all greenhouse gases by 80 per cent. The UK has also led by example in its work internationally, building coalitions with ambitious targets to support the communities that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change to adapt and build resilience. With COP26 only months away, now is not the time to take our foot off the pedal.

As part of the ongoing pandemic response, the UK must continue to show global leadership on international vaccine equity.

The UK's vaccination programme has been a phenomenal success to date. Yet we know there is no point in being a vaccinated island. The UK has the means to help nations that lack an advanced public health system like the NHS to vaccinate their people, and we must do so. The UK's involvement in COVAX, Gavi and other efforts to encourage global vaccine disbursement should be applauded, as should the proposal made by the UK at the UN Security Council for a coordinated effort for vaccine distribution. I believe we can go even further.⁴⁵ Just as we stepped forward during the Ebola crisis, so too should we allocate overseas funds to assist practically with the international roll-out of vaccines to developing countries.

So, I encourage this government to build on the Integrated Review and make sure that we illustrate our commitment to building prosperity around the world.

This hinges on maintaining the humanitarian funding envelope as well as leading by example on key global issues such as tackling famine, forced displacement and sexual and gender-based violence.

I am proud of the leadership that the UK has shown to date, supporting the UN and national governments to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG) around the world.⁴⁶ We know VAWG can be more frequent, and more severe, during humanitarian emergencies and so the moment is now to make these renewed commitments.

Our world is becoming ever more volatile and unpredictable. The pandemic has accelerated the atomisation of our international society. The UK has a track record of stepping forward when other nations hesitate. It's time for us to once again summon that Churchill spirit and make this our Fulton, Missouri moment. Time to ensure that Global Britain is a force for good.

Invest in African women as agents of change in the global movement to end FGM

Nimco Ali OBE, Co-Founder of The Five Foundation, The Global Partnership To End FGM

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is a devastating form of violence, and a severe human rights abuse, which has affected over 200 million women and girls around the world. It can have extreme medical consequences such as fistula, infertility, problems urinating, menstruating or giving birth. It can also have lifelong psychological consequences, and can even kill as we have seen on many occasions in recent years.

As an FGM survivor myself – and a women’s rights activist for over a decade – I have seen how those who achieve the most in terms of changing hearts and minds are always from affected communities. Violence against women is sadly a global pandemic but it needs to be ended locally, from the roots up. The top-down approach can disempower women and reduce the potential for grassroots-based women’s groups to build up their own skills and capabilities.

My FGM happened in Djibouti when I was 7 years old. I was betrayed back then directly – but I was failed again a second time as I was not given the support or understanding I needed from my teacher back in the UK when I told her what had happened. While FGM itself could have killed me, my life was put in jeopardy again at age 11, when I had a serious kidney infection, at which point I was also de-infibulated, which means

some of the damage caused by FGM was undone. Since then I tell people that I have survived FGM – and I have made it my mission to do all I can to end it in this generation.

We have achieved a lot in the last decade, particularly in the UK, but there is still much more to do. 70 million girls are at risk of FGM between now and 2030 – so we need to get this right. High population growth in areas of the world where FGM is most prevalent means that we are working uphill all the time. For the most part, the route to success means changing who we fund – and in what way. We have heard time and time again how foundations and other donors are trying to listen and ‘do better’, but in reality this has not always happened. To be blunt, we have also seen that donors are happy to use African women on the covers of their reports, but when it comes to directly funding the groups they represent, they too often look the other way.

In the wake of Covid-19 – which has exacerbated sexual and other forms of violence and discrimination against African women and girls – let’s use this as a once in a lifetime opportunity to build back better. Not only has the entire wellbeing of the African continent been put into jeopardy due to an untreatable virus, weak healthcare systems, and a lack of basic hygiene products, such as antibacterial wipes and other items that the Western world often takes for granted. The global pandemic has also put additional pressure

Nimco Ali OBE



in particular on African girls who have found themselves increasingly out of school and at heightened risk of experiencing FGM and early 'marriage' right across the continent, from Somalia to The Gambia.

Since FGM is often the first time a girl is told that she is not enough, preparing her for a life of violence and discrimination, we need to stem the tide from the beginning. But to break this cycle forever we need to empower women themselves and ensure they have economic justice and independence. This will help to accelerate an end to FGM – a major challenge, particularly considering it has been happening for over 4,000 years. We need to ensure that we do not find ourselves in a similar place in decades to come, which is likely to happen unless we change how we have done things in the past.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that FGM costs \$1.4 billion in immediate and lifelong medical complications in 29 high prevalence countries⁴⁷, yet only \$1 is available in funding for each woman or girl affected, and very little funding reaches the frontlines,

where actual change is happening. At this urgent juncture we need high net worth individuals, foundations and corporations to trust and directly fund African women, so we can collectively shift the dial on ending FGM, child marriage and other forms of violence, while addressing economic injustice and fueling Africa's future prosperity. When this happens at scale, entire countries can benefit from investment in women and girls, who are empowered to fully contribute, with less fear of being held back by the violence and discrimination committed against them.

To address these challenges I co-founded The Five Foundation, The Global Partnership To End FGM, with Brendan Wynne in 2019. We are in the process of building the strongest ever global partnership to end FGM and already have 70 leading civil society partners – including the British Red Cross – to drive this work forward in various locations. With the Red Cross, we hope to collaborate to build connected, resilient communities, which really position African individuals at the centre of all our work.

In practical terms, The Five Foundation has made sure to have taken the time over the last 18 months or so to really listen to frontline groups such as Safe Engage Foundation and Msichana Empowerment Kuria in Kenya, which have both been working to protect girls in a remote region where 3,000 recently underwent FGM and were marched down the streets. We have also re-granted significant funding to nearly two dozen grassroots groups and hope to do much more in years to come as the global partnership is scaled up – particularly in Africa.

I want donors and supporters to realise that trusting African women as agents of change and funding their activism means we can change social norms, reduce violence and lift ourselves, our families and our communities out of poverty and into prosperity.

When this happens on a countrywide level, the valued contribution of women and girls – including as leaders – is fully recognised and realised. I know the British Red Cross has experienced similar challenges working in emergency situations around the world, where women are often de-prioritised and cast aside – the real experts who are rarely supported as change-makers and peacemakers in their own right. Fueling frontline community activism and economically empowering women is the best way of making sure Africa can realise its long-promised development potential.

We, at the Five Foundation, hope to continue to work with the Red Cross as part of the global movement to end FGM and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence and injustice. The sheer scale of its network, as well as its focus on kindness and building a more sustainable future for all of us, means we are much stronger together. This is particularly urgent as we find ourselves in a climate emergency, where economically developing countries are likely to bear



Photo © The Five Foundation/Alice Aedy

much of the brunt. As we know, women and girls in Africa are particularly affected. Unpredictable weather patterns and food insecurity have meant that already precarious and challenging contexts – including in agriculture where most of the labour is from women – have been exacerbated by the climate crisis. In these scenarios, women and girls often face increased violence and discrimination too, as their basic right to safety and protection from violence decreases. They are more likely to be treated as commodities – to experience sexual violence, FGM, or to be sold off into ‘marriage’ – to help families escape poverty.

In terms of the focus and success that we at The Five Foundation can bring to the table, we have an unparalleled track record of working with local anti-FGM groups as well as heads of state and major international media to influence dramatic

change on this issue. In January 2021 we were pivotal in getting the United States to sign a strong FGM ban, while last Summer, Sudan banned FGM as a result of our activism in a country where nearly 9 out of every 10 women have been affected. It was covered by hundreds of media outlets including the New York Times. We have engaged international media on various FGM cases in Egypt, Kenya and around the world, including a recent case of a father who tricked his three daughters into FGM in Southern Egypt, which helped ensure that country’s government passed amendments strengthening its ban in early 2021. The Five Foundation’s co-founders have also led much of the recent progress on the issue in the UK over the last decade, including major media engagement and changes to law and policy, most recently ensuring the inclusion of FGM in the Children’s Act.



Photo © The Five Foundation/Alice Aedy

As it stands, the African continent finds itself in an increasingly precarious position. We have an urgent need to recover from the global pandemic, which has caused devastation, and which has also exposed critical gaps in how international aid is distributed and the need for increased support at the local and national level. It has shone a light on the areas where the system is simply not working. Grantees are often not physically present on the ground to do the urgent and essential work that's needed at this time, leaving underfunded local and national women's groups to do all the heavy lifting, often with limited funding support.

With less than a decade to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals – along with an urgent need to recover from the pandemic – we need to trust and empower women's rights organisations and strengthen movements to deliver the structural changes needed to shift the dial on ending FGM and other forms of violence. At this moment of global change, where the United States has elected its first woman of colour as Vice President and Black Lives Matter has become a global mantra, we need to prioritise funding women as the solution to so many of the world's major problems, including male violence.

We can only achieve gender equality in Africa if we trust African women and show empathy, understanding and responsiveness, by putting funding and power directly in their hands to be able to build a safer, more peaceful, more democratic and more prosperous future for the entire continent – and, consequently, for the entire world.

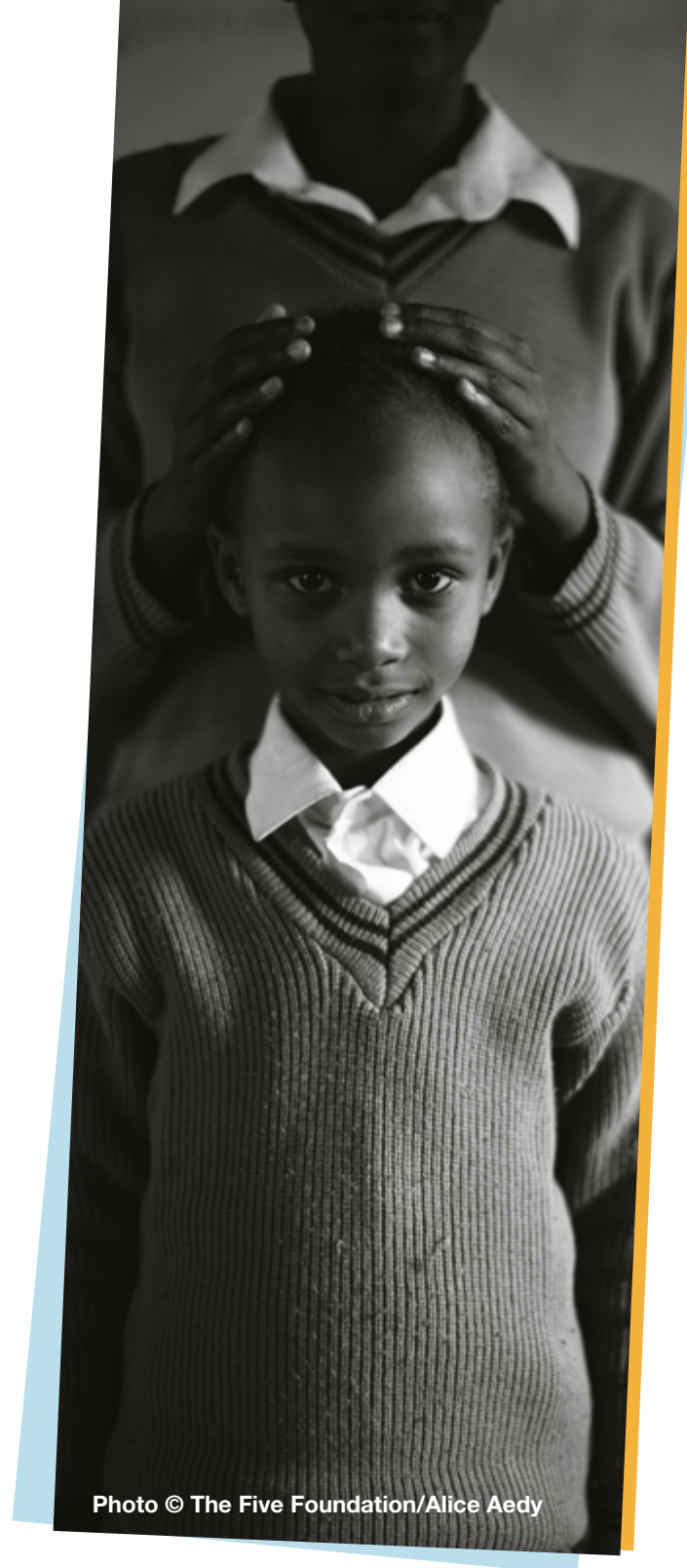


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Prevention is better than cure: Youth and civil society as safeguards and drivers of climate action

Nisreen Elsaim, Chair of the UN Secretary General's Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change

There is no denying that the time to act on climate is now. In 2020, climate-related disasters had a devastating impact on people all over the world, from locust swarms in East Africa to bushfires in Australia. If the impact on people's lives and livelihoods was not enough to move us to act, surely the financial impact must be? The cost of the 10 most devastating climate events in 2020 was over \$140 billion⁴⁸, and the people and places that were affected will be recovering for years to come.

Environmental activism runs in my blood; I am the third generation of female environmental activists in my family – my grandmother and my mother were environmental activists when they were young. Yet, I didn't start through them. At University I attended a lecture on climate change, given by Dr Ismail El Gizouli, who went on to become Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). His talk showed the links between climate change and the things I was seeing first-hand in Sudan, and presented the facts so well and so clearly that I had to take action.

In a country like Sudan, where the large majority of our economy depends on

natural resources, you see the impact of climate change everywhere you look. Flooding is one example. We used to have a reliable rainy season with moderate rain over a four-month period, from May to August. But now the rains come later and last for a shorter period, but they are much more intense. In July 2020 we experienced the worst flooding in 100 years, with more than 800,000 people losing their homes.⁴⁹ My grandmother's house just escaped being flooded, by the grace of being on higher ground than the rest of the houses, but many members of our family and her neighbours were affected. As well as being evacuated and having to live in temporary camps, there were problems in getting people food and clothing. Many people also got sick when the drinking water became contaminated.

In some ways, this shouldn't have been a surprise. A lot of people I know are farmers, and I see them suffering from the growing irregularity of the seasons. When so much rain comes in such a short space of time, it's almost impossible to make use of it. Water harvesting projects in a place like Sudan don't work well because it's very flat and very hot, and it cannot be done naturally. So the rainwater drowns the fields, meaning farmers can't harvest their crops and they can't sow new seeds. Since the floods last year, many farmers have had a season without growing because the land has been so waterlogged.



Nisreen Elsaim

Although 2020 was the worst flooding we have seen in a long time, problem flooding became common in Sudan from 2013. In 2020 the transitional government welcomed collaboration with youth groups and supported people affected by the flooding, but in 2013 the government response was not sufficient. The voluntary response was incredible.

Nafeer is a traditional Sudanese word that has been used for centuries, and it describes people coming together to solve a problem. This is something that has always existed in our communities, but in response to the floods in 2013 the tradition was mobilised and became a youth-led social movement, called *Nafeer*. Young people came together and planned how to help citizens. Rescue teams were created, helping people that were stuck in their houses and villages. Huge stores were set up to accept and distribute food and clothes donations. A system was also developed for collecting data on a very large scale – to help understand who was being impacted and how, through satellite imagery and studies on the ground.

In Sudan, the impacts of climate change are difficult to ignore. But a lot of countries are still in denial.

Global leaders are still talking about achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, as if that will be a huge achievement. But 2050 is too far away.

The leaders saying this now won't be in power long enough to see this commitment come through.

Young people are special in this regard, and a key part of the climate movement. We don't limit our sensitivity to climate change on a calculation about how much it will cost, or the limits it will place on the economy. Our calculation is instead based on the impact of our current way of life on nature, and on having a healthy future for ourselves and the next generation after us. Younger people don't have the same conflict of interest. We know there will be no jobs on a dead planet.

I am pleased to see that young people are starting to get more of a seat at the table when it comes to climate change. This is evident in the UN setting up the Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change, of which I am Chair. Also, it is progressive to have a young woman like me addressing the UN Security Council on matters of climate change.

There are other signs that also make us hopeful. We are seeing growing numbers of people joining the climate movement around the world, and this will create pressure on governments and the private sector to shift towards being more sustainable. Civil society is also playing a growing role, with active efforts to increase the role they will play in COP26 in Glasgow later this year.

These things are positive signs that the global community is starting to take the climate more seriously, and open to listening to people. But we also need to walk the walk when it comes to tackling the causes and impacts of climate change. We are spending a lot of time debating the difference in impact between a temperature rise of 1.5°C and 2°C. The way things are going, we will reach a 2°C increase by 2040, if not 2030. Some countries may only be moderately impacted by that, but many countries, including Sudan, will be highly affected by increasing temperatures caused by climate change. In Africa,

regions within 15 degrees of the equator are particularly at risk, with the projected temperature increase higher than the global average, and expected to happen at a faster rate.^{50, 51}

We need to act now. This takes a collective effort.

The countries that are most committed to addressing the problem of climate change often aren't the biggest emitters, they're the ones who are most impacted by climate change but don't have the resources to finance their national adaptation plans (NAPs). Investment in adaptation is the key to stable, climate-resilient communities. Guaranteed finance for climate adaptation plans is much needed, to make sure the necessary support and resources reach different local communities and help them to protect themselves against climate change. Since 2015 African countries have submitted more than 50 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)ⁱⁱ,



ii Under the Paris agreement, every country that is signed up has set a target for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, referred to as nationally determined contributions (NDCs), with the goal of limiting global heating to below 2°C.

outlining their objectives to reduce national greenhouse emissions in line with the Paris Climate Agreement. But in many countries there is no finance to implement these plans, and we still don't have a definition of climate finance. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change is built on us having shared responsibilities around climate change. There is still a lot to be done to turn these intentions into action.

COP26 provides a big opportunity to bring the global community together and take necessary action. There are some major things we need to get right. I particularly want to see progress on Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) – Article 12 of the Paris Agreement – which focuses on increasing public awareness, training and international cooperation. This article recognises the importance of the work done by young people and civil society, and is very dear to my heart. Having a financial mechanism to ensure this work can continue is essential.

Another priority must be to reach agreement on how we can support developing countries and their economies – Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. We need to identify the most effective ways of lowering emissions, implementing plans and providing access to finance, to help produce a wave of green development.

These are big issues that require proper, inclusive debate, with all countries represented equally at the negotiation table. This is not currently happening. At the COP conferences there are many negotiations going on at the same time, and you can spend seven hours in a meeting room debating major decisions on climate action, sometimes staying up until 3am negotiating. The more resources a country is able to invest, the bigger their delegation can be, and the more actively they can participate in and influence the debate.

We need to see more investment going to less developed countries, to build capacity and ensure they are able to attend negotiations and are properly represented.

This question of participation is particularly important at the current time, when a global pandemic has created debate about whether COP26, scheduled for this November, should go ahead, be postponed or be moved online. I believe that holding COP26 negotiations remotely inherently disadvantages countries in the Global South, where technology, infrastructure and different time zones forbid us from participating most effectively in online negotiations. The COP26 Secretariat should be exploring how to hold negotiations where all parties can fully contribute, regardless of the current context. Because the climate crisis impacts all of us, and we all deserve a seat at the table. And because while we all have different perspectives on and experiences of climate change, it is only by coming together that we can negotiate a more sustainable world.

To me, a more sustainable world is one where we spend more money on preventing the climate crisis than we do on the humanitarian aid required after the climate emergencies have happened. It means that we speak the truth, admit there is a problem, and seek the right solution.

It means that we support the communities that need it most, even if that isn't going to benefit us personally, but in the name of the global good.

Climate action is all about ensuring the continued existence of this planet, and continuing to have humanity living on it. This is a moral obligation that rests on all of us.



Calling for change in a time of crisis

Zoë Abrams, Executive director of communications, advocacy and strategy at British Red Cross

The ideas explored in this collection of essays remind us that, among the devastation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, positive change can happen. In the last year, we have seen the best of humanity. From Red Cross volunteers eager to help people get home safely from hospital despite the threat of Covid-19, to those offering to help their shielding neighbour with food shopping, people across our communities have shown, more than ever, the power of kindness.

During this time, we've all been struck by people's willingness to learn, reflect and improve. Like so many of our partners, my colleagues and I at the Red Cross have challenged ourselves to answer what can sometimes feel like difficult questions.

Was the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on certain communities inevitable? Could we have done more to help? Are we set up in a way that effectively meets the needs of the most vulnerable? What do we need to do to recover and protect our communities against future shocks?

No single organisation can solve the issues exposed and exacerbated by Covid-19.

The British Red Cross will continue to try to fill the gaps, support people to recover and prevent them falling into future crisis. But where we can't fully meet people's humanitarian needs ourselves or with our partners, we will advocate for change.

We know change doesn't happen overnight – however we also know seismic events like Covid-19 have the unique ability to galvanise attempts to shift the status quo.

The path to recovery will no doubt be long but to get there we need to take smart, decisive steps. In the coming months, the British Red Cross will be calling on UK governments to drive real change for people in, or at risk of, crisis across a range of priority areas:

- **Eliminate the gaps in health and social care**

Our health and social care system must better meet people's holistic needs, focusing on person-centred support which is better at preventing people from falling through the gaps between services. To start this process, the Health and Care Bill for England must do more to address inequalities in health and social care, including by looking at services in a joined-up way and investing in care and support in the community (particularly where it is lacking the most). Social prescribing link workers should also continue to be rolled out – not just across primary care but within acute settings too.

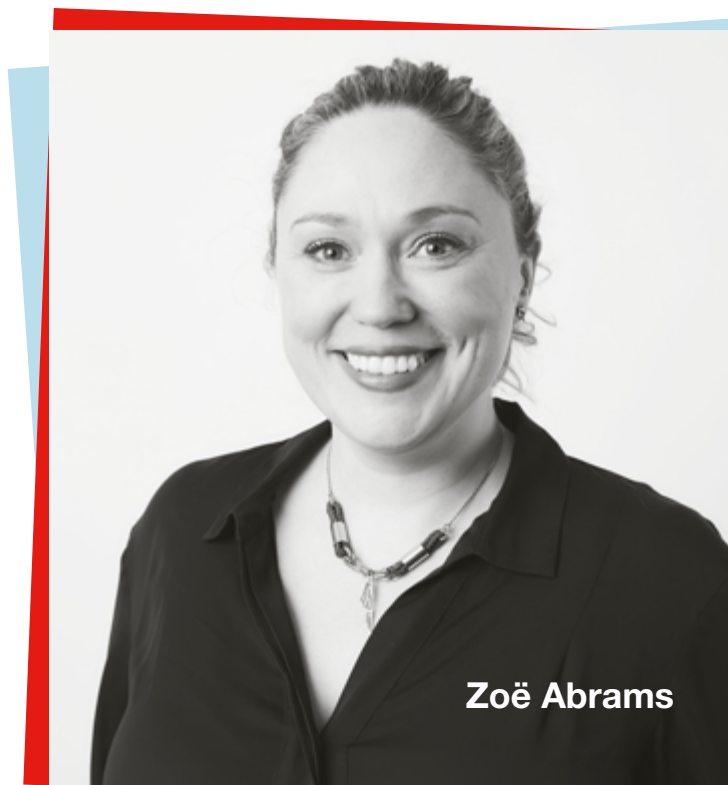
- **Ensure humanitarian needs are met in emergencies**

We'd like the upcoming review of the Civil Contingencies Act to introduce a clear statutory responsibility for national government and category one responders to fully meet the humanitarian needs of their communities. This should include a duty to provide assistance so nobody goes hungry, without shelter or without psychosocial support during and after a crisis. The planned National Resilience Strategy will also be key in ensuring UK communities have the connections they need to withstand future crises. Our emergency response systems also need to adapt to the increased global

risk of climate and extreme-weather emergencies by ensuring disaster risk reduction is climate smart and by investing in adaptation as well as mitigation. Relatively simple changes, such as improving effective early warning systems and using seasonal forecast data, can prevent emergencies from becoming disasters.

- **Move towards cash-based assistance in emergencies**

With a strong presence both across the UK and internationally, the British Red Cross sees the potential to learn from best practice around the world. This year in the UK we have seen the benefit of supporting people through cash and vouchers assistance, rather than goods in kind. We know from our work overseas this is a more cost-effective approach that not only ensures a more dignified response, but also allows people to get hold of what they personally need as quickly as possible in an emergency. We



Zoë Abrams



continue to call for a greater, long-term investment in local welfare assistance schemes and for these schemes to use a cash-first approach to help ensure people facing serious financial hardship can afford essentials, such as food, toiletries, and warm clothes.

- **Provide safe and legal routes for people seeking asylum**

It is the government's responsibility to ensure that people experiencing displacement feel safe, are able to live with dignity and have choices on their journey. This should include looking first at domestic policy, ensuring there are safe and legal routes to seeking asylum in the UK, and that the end-to-end experience of a person in the asylum system is efficient, fair and humane. The Sovereign Borders Bill offers an opportunity to look again at making improvements to the whole system, rather than looking at specific challenges in silo. We will be advocating for a number of core principles, including people's right to claim asylum and the inappropriateness of a two-tiered system based on mode of arrival; and the right for all to a safe home and freedom from destitution.

- **Uphold international law and principled humanitarian action**

As the government outlines its vision for the UK's global role as part of the Integrated Review, it must commit to upholding and promoting international law and principled humanitarian action. The UK should ensure that those most in need are put first, and that the focus of humanitarian action is on the world's most vulnerable communities.

The steps outlined above are the first of many that will take us into our next 150 years.

We are determined to look back on this pandemic and know we truly did our best to work towards a more resilient, compassionate future. We look forward to working with decision makers across the UK in the weeks, months and years ahead to make this a reality.

Now is the moment to secure the change we want to see in the world

Afterword by Mike Adamson, Chief executive at British Red Cross

This has been a tough year for all of us, with millions around the world affected by illness, bereavement, financial hardship and the repercussions of social isolation, as a result of Covid-19. But the greatest challenges we face may yet be ahead of us.

Since the start of the pandemic, the British Red Cross has reached more than 1.5 million people in the UK. Yet we know there are many people who have been left behind and will feel the effects of the crisis for years to come.

Responding to the coronavirus has been one of the most significant operations in our 150-year history and it is vital that we start to apply the lessons we have learned. Now is the time to take stock and outline our vision for a more resilient future.

At the British Red Cross, we have many years of experience responding to disasters – from large-scale major emergencies, to personal crises. This is our core purpose. Yet the sheer scale of the Covid-19 response, its protracted nature, and the vast levels of unmet humanitarian need have been challenging for us all. The pandemic has revealed every stress and strain in the system, its impact reaching every crack and crevice and laying bare structural inequalities and flaws.

The effects of the coronavirus have rippled through society, exacerbating existing issues and exposing new ones. We need to reflect collectively, from a place of compassion and kindness, on the truths exposed by the pandemic, and use what we now know to inform future strategies for dealing with crises.

The British Red Cross has 150 years of experience responding to crisis and we know that we can achieve so much more when we work together collectively. The experience of 2020 has galvanised our partnership working and sharing of ideas with others who have also been responding to this crisis. Now we must keep collaborating and make this way of operating our new normal.

The essays in this collection bring together a diverse range of views and perspectives from people in the UK and around the world, from a range of disciplines and across the political spectrum. Their essays capture the themes of a challenging year and put forward the solutions to some of the topics that are most relevant to the work that we do. These essays show that for all the challenges we currently face, we have an opportunity to work together and build back better.

Mike Adamson



All of us – from politicians and policymakers to communities and civil society – must learn from what has happened.

Better and earlier support would have been vital for those who were disproportionately affected by this crisis because of health inequalities and financial insecurity. Refugees and people seeking asylum faced greater – sometimes unimaginable – challenges during the pandemic. That so many contributed to the community responses in the areas they now call home shows precisely why we need fair and humane reform of immigration and asylum processes, and why we cannot treat anyone like second class citizens.

We need to recognise the importance of more connected communities. We know that people who are more connected socially are better able to cope with, and recover from, crises.

Contingency plans must be put in place for people who live alone, have limited support networks or are at risk of abuse at home. During the pandemic we have also seen too many people lacking access to the internet or mobile technology, meaning they have struggled to stay in touch with others through periods of lockdown. We need to connect our communities up better in both our everyday and online worlds.

Many of society's structures and systems have found themselves wanting. We live with under-pressure health and social care systems designed to meet the needs of a different era, emergency response structures that all too often fail to meet the needs of those most vulnerable to risk, and a flawed and inefficient asylum system. But these essays show these issues are not insurmountable.

As well as exposing the major challenges we face, this year has also shone a light on our many strengths. As we've all seen, everyone has a part to play during an emergency and we need to harness the community spirit we've seen thriving during the Covid-19 response and ensure that, going forward, everyone can benefit from it.

Voluntary and community sector organisations have played a huge role. The British Red Cross has worked closely with charities to offer support through community-based responses, working with people on the ground, those with local knowledge and expertise. More than 1,000 of our volunteers have signed up to assist FareShare, the food distribution charity, almost doubling the organisation's existing number of volunteers. Others worked in partnership with St. Mungo's to support homeless people. As 30 million people have received the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine through the biggest vaccine roll-out the UK has ever seen, our volunteers continue to support at several NHS vaccination centres, working alongside St John Ambulance. By working together we're helping to create a safer world where we can be with our loved ones again, without fear of becoming sick.

We still need to do more, building on lessons from the Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership, which brings together a range of organisations within the sector with the aim of improving coordination at national and local levels before, during and after emergencies. Working more collectively in the future, we can have an even greater impact where people live, making sure no one is left behind. We can share our data-informed insight to help identify those most vulnerable to risk and work harder to ensure those delivering community-based support are as diverse as those communities themselves. It is imperative we are representative of and trusted by the people we support.

Trust is key for all of us because, if we are to play a role in supporting communities to prepare more effectively for crisis, we will need them with us. For over 150 years, the British Red Cross has helped people in crisis, whoever and wherever they are. Our commitment to putting people at the heart of solutions is always important, but is particularly crucial when addressing sometimes controversial or uncomfortable challenges, such as climate change adaptation, vaccine equity, asylum issues or sexual and gender-based violence.

We must shape the way we respond to the crises of tomorrow as we recover from the one we face today.

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A message from our partner, Demos

150 years since the British Red Cross was founded, the UK has faced one of the biggest crises in our history. The challenges facing the UK as we move forward can seem daunting. But we share the British Red Cross's vision of a world which not only responds to emergencies effectively and compassionately, but one which strengthens resilience through building more connected communities. As such, we were delighted to have the opportunity to work together on curating this collection of essays: pieces that highlight where those challenges lie, but most importantly, map out pathways forward – lessons that policy and practice need to learn if the UK is to succeed in building back stronger.

We hope this collection, bringing together people with different experiences and different visions for the future, can act as a contribution to and a catalyst for bold policymaking, driven by collaboration and rooted in consensus.

Polly Mackenzie

Chief executive, Demos



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