

# 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.**