



National Audit Office




REPORT

Responding to sudden-onset humanitarian crises

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

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Responding to sudden-onset humanitarian crises

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

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Gareth Davies
Comptroller and Auditor General
National Audit Office

4 June 2026

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Key facts

£86.8mn

cost of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's (FCDO's) Humanitarian Crisis Response Department (HCRD) supporting responses to 12 sudden-onset crises (excluding staff costs), 2023-24 to 2025-26

19

number of sudden-onset crisis responses supported by HCRD, December 2021 to October 2025

608,000

estimated number of people supported by HCRD through core relief items, such as tents, hygiene kits and other items, November 2022 to October 2025

- 280** FCDO posts in 180 countries and territories, which are responsible for preparing to respond to crises, as at February 2026
- 59** FCDO humanitarian adviser roles across its global network, as at March 2026
- 72 hours** time within which the UK search and rescue team arrived in Turkey following the earthquake in February 2023
- 178** FCDO deployments of contracted specialist humanitarian professionals to support crises, November 2022 to October 2025
- £75 million** FCDO allocation to its Humanitarian Crisis Fund for 2026-27, which can be drawn on when response costs are not affordable from existing budgets
- £52 million** UK contribution to the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund, the second largest contribution in 2025

Summary

1 The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) leads the UK government's response to humanitarian crises overseas, including those caused by conflicts, natural disasters, extreme weather events, and diseases. Some crises occur suddenly, such as earthquakes, and are known as sudden-onset crises. Others emerge over time and can become protracted crises which require long-term support, such as those due to drought or conflict. Each crisis can require a different response, depending on factors including its location and the immediate impact of the crisis. FCDO responds to these crises through its overseas network of 280 posts, supported by geographical directorates and central teams. Before FCDO was created by the merger in 2020, this work was done by the Department for International Development (DFID).

2 FCDO's Humanitarian Crisis Response Department (HCRD) coordinates efforts to respond to sudden-onset humanitarian crises centrally, providing guidance and support to posts and regions. Most responses are managed between HCRD and teams in posts or regions. When a crisis overwhelms normal structures, FCDO can enter crisis mode to coordinate a response that may involve humanitarian, political and consular components. Since 2021, HCRD has supported 19 sudden-onset humanitarian responses.

3 Most of the cost of FCDO's crisis responses is counted as UK Official Development Assistance (ODA). The ODA budget is due to reduce from 0.5% to 0.3% of Gross National Income by 2027. However, FCDO aims to maintain a leading humanitarian role, prioritise spending on crises such as Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan, and support multilateral organisations that respond to humanitarian emergencies.¹

¹ Multilateral organisations refer to international organisations such as the World Bank, United Nations agencies and international charities, supported by multiple donors. Bilateral spending is earmarked spending where the donor has specified where and on what the ODA is spent, and is usually to specific countries, regions, or programmes.

Scope and purpose of the report

4 This report examines whether FCDO responds effectively to sudden-onset humanitarian crises. Such crises require rapid decisions on whether and how the UK should intervene, and a surge of funding, staff and specialist capabilities to provide a response. These demands can place pressure on FCDO's capacity and funding, creating risks to value for money, at a time when FCDO is reducing its spending and workforce. In this report, we examine:

- FCDO's strategy and approach to sudden-onset humanitarian crisis response;
- FCDO's humanitarian capacity and core capabilities needed to continue responding; and
- the cost, speed and impact of FCDO's responses and the extent to which it evaluates and learns lessons from previous crises.

5 We do not examine FCDO's management of long-term ODA programmes, or foreign policy or consular responses which do not have a significant humanitarian dimension.

Key findings

Strategy and approach to responding to humanitarian crises

6 **The global humanitarian situation has worsened in recent years.** Conflict and climate shocks are causing more frequent and complex crises around the world. The United Nations estimated that the number of people requiring urgent humanitarian assistance and protection as a result of crises increased from 168 million in 2020 to 239 million by the end of 2025. This is increasing pressure on the global humanitarian system. However, global humanitarian funding has fallen, in cash terms, from \$19.5 billion in 2020 to \$16 billion in 2025. Many of the world's major donors have reduced their aid budgets. In 2025, the UK announced its aid budget would reduce from 0.5% to 0.3% of Gross National Income by 2027. This will mean the ODA budget is around £9.2 billion in 2027 (paragraphs 1.3, 1.4 and Figure 1).

7 FCDO has a long history of responding to humanitarian crises and continues to prioritise this work. We reported on DFID's response to crises in 2016 and found that it had responded to over 30 humanitarian crises between 2011 and 2016.² When it decides to provide support, FCDO responds to sudden-onset humanitarian crises in several ways, including assistance through its network of posts overseas. Between late-2021 and 2025, HCRD supported posts' responses to 19 sudden-onset humanitarian crises, including responses to floods in Pakistan and Libya and a disease outbreak in Rwanda. In the context of its reducing aid budget, FCDO has committed to prioritise spending on humanitarian crises, global health and climate. For 2026-27 to 2028-29, the UK plans to spend approximately £1.4 billion a year in places with the highest humanitarian need (paragraphs 1.5 to 1.9 and Figures 2 and 4).

8 FCDO responds to crises by drawing on capabilities in its central team, its partners, and across its overseas network. FCDO's network of 280 posts in 180 countries and territories can respond themselves to relatively small-scale crises. For larger crises, FCDO can enter crisis mode, enabling a coordinated response led by the responsible geographic or thematic area, supported by the Crisis Management Department (CMD), with HCRD working on the humanitarian part of the response. HCRD also supports posts with medium- to large-scale crises through a range of capabilities. This involves HCRD's own humanitarian expertise and capabilities, including search and rescue and medical services delivered by its partners, and the Humanitarian Crisis Fund (HCF) which is a fund of last resort for such crises. FCDO allocated £100 million to the HCF in 2025-26 and £75 million in 2026-27. FCDO also responds to humanitarian crises through contributions to multilateral organisations and global funds. HCRD provides training and guidance to posts, but there have been challenges for some posts to fully understand or use HCRD's services (paragraphs 1.12 to 1.16, 1.19 to 1.21 and Figures 4, 5 and 6).

² Comptroller and Auditor General, *Responding to crises*, Session 2015-16, HC 612, National Audit Office, January 2016.

9 FCDO has a high-level aim to maintain the UK's humanitarian rapid response capability but lacks a strategic assessment of its critical capability requirements.

The UK Humanitarian Framework (2022) set out FCDO's ambitions for humanitarian preparedness and response. Since then, the government has made commitments to maintain its leading humanitarian role and to prioritise bilateral support for crises such as Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan, as well as supporting multilateral organisations responding to humanitarian emergencies. FCDO allocates ODA funding to individual countries based on factors including humanitarian need, global health, climate vulnerability, fragility and geopolitics. HCRD intends to maintain global coverage of sudden-onset humanitarian crises and has processes that guide its decision making on when and how best to respond. Reduced funding increases the risk that FCDO will not be able to deliver effective and timely humanitarian responses. In this context, while FCDO does review its capability requirements for major programme contracts before it renews them, it has not yet carried out an overall assessment of the humanitarian capabilities required across the organisation to meet its objectives (paragraphs 1.5, 1.6 and 1.16 to 1.18).

Humanitarian capacity and response capabilities

10 FCDO's ability to respond to sudden-onset humanitarian crises has been affected by organisational pressures on its humanitarian capacity, including the impact of the 2020 merger and FCDO's ongoing transformation programme.

Our report on the 2020 merger of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and DFID identified some benefits of improved cooperation between foreign policy and humanitarian efforts, such as in Ukraine. FCDO has found that humanitarian preparedness and response is not prioritised consistently, and HCRD is working with CMD to fully integrate humanitarian response into FCDO's wider crisis response. The FCDO2030 transformation programme will also affect FCDO's workforce, with headcount reducing by up to 25%. As at March 2026, FCDO had 59 humanitarian adviser roles across its global network. Reduced geographic humanitarian capacity poses a key risk to its ability to meet its aims. Our case studies reflect this, with all six posts involved either experiencing a lack of capacity or a risk of future lack of capacity. FCDO has set out a high-level framework for skills it needs and is developing a workforce strategy. This will need to include an assessment of FCDO's critical humanitarian capacity requirements across its overseas network (paragraphs 1.14, 1.15, 1.17, 2.2 to 2.7 and Figure 7).

11 FCDO has an effective model of using a specialist supplier to provide rapid response capabilities, including deployments, early warning information and expert logistics support. The Humanitarian Emergency Response Operations and Stabilisation (HEROS) programme is delivered primarily by a supplier, Palladium International Ltd. HEROS provides FCDO technical and operational expertise, including early warning analysis, deployable humanitarian expertise and specialist logistical support during crises. Palladium supported FCDO with 28 responses between 2023 and 2025. This included providing 74 early warning risk briefs, 178 humanitarian deployments, and core relief items (such as tents and hygiene kits) to support an estimated 608,000 people. An independent evaluation of the HEROS programme in 2023 reported that the main stakeholders considered that HEROS was critical for enabling effective and timely responses to crises (paragraphs 2.7 to 2.11 and Figures 8 and 9).

12 FCDO uses proven specialist capabilities, other government departments and multilateral organisations to enhance its humanitarian responses across a range of contexts. Through HCRD's Emergency Deployments Team 2 programme, the UK government can deploy emergency medical and search and rescue capabilities to respond to humanitarian crises. For example, in 2024, the UK Emergency Medical Team supported the Rwanda government to curtail the Marburg virus disease outbreak, and in 2023 the UK International Search and Rescue team rescued eight people following the Turkey–Syria earthquake. FCDO coordinates with other government departments and agencies. For instance, during the Hurricane Melissa response in Jamaica, the Ministry of Defence provided military engineers to support urgent repairs and distributed hygiene kits. FCDO also funds multilateral organisations, including the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and global pooled funds, including the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), to which FCDO contributed £52 million in 2025 (the second largest contribution that year). These contributions can enable larger-scale responses when compared with bilateral assistance, provide reach in places with little or no FCDO presence, and release funds within hours of crises occurring. As budgets reduce, FCDO expects to rely more on such organisations and pooled funds to respond to small- to medium-scale crises (paragraphs 2.12 to 2.14 and Figures 11 and 12).

13 HCRD is actively working to improve FCDO's preparedness for humanitarian crises and the resilience of countries affected by emergencies. Preparing for, strengthening resilience to, and anticipating humanitarian crises can be more cost-effective than responding once a crisis has occurred. FCDO sees this as increasingly important. Its crisis doctrine, which sets out the fundamental principles for responding to overseas crises, has "90% preparation" as a key principle of its crisis management approach. HCRD supports FCDO's country posts to be prepared through risk analysis, early warning, preparedness training, and access to rapid support through partners. When responding to the Bangladesh floods (2024) and Hurricane Melissa (2025), FCDO's preparedness played an important role in enabling a fast and effective response. HCRD also works with its partners to build emergency response capability in some affected countries, such as Ethiopia and Malawi, strengthening resilience to future crises (paragraphs 2.18 to 2.21 and Figure 12).

Monitoring performance, costs and impact

14 FCDO is able to respond to sudden-onset humanitarian crises in a timely manner. Timeliness is often critical to saving lives and increasing the value for money of a response. It can also reduce the risk of emergencies becoming protracted, and therefore the scale, duration and cost of the response required later. We have seen in our case studies that FCDO's range of capabilities can respond quickly, whether delivering core relief items, or deploying expert personnel or emergency response teams. In the Turkey–Syria earthquake, the search and rescue team was deployed within 72 hours of the earthquake, while deployment of a team within three days of Hurricane Melissa in Jamaica meant that the UK was one of the first responders. FCDO has maintained timely responses despite operational challenges. These include difficulty in obtaining information in rapidly evolving contexts, and continuity of staff at overseas posts (paragraphs 3.2 to 3.4 and Figure 12).

15 FCDO does not centrally track the full costs of responding to sudden-onset humanitarian crises, which means it cannot judge the relative cost-effectiveness of its responses. FCDO had to undertake in-depth work with posts to provide us with financial data on HCRD-supported responses, as its accounting system is not configured to categorise spending in the way needed for this purpose. The data showed that the cost of HCRD-supported responses, from the Humanitarian Crisis Fund and from reprioritised budgets, for 2023-24 to 2025-26 was £86.8 million (responding to 12 crises). This decreased from £36.5 million in 2023-24 to £8.5 million in 2025-26 (excluding FCDO staff costs). This lack of comprehensive cost data means FCDO does not have a complete picture of overall spending on sudden-onset humanitarian crises or the cost-effectiveness of its capabilities. This limits FCDO's ability to assess value for money and to make informed trade-offs between different response options (paragraphs 1.20, 3.8 and Figure 6).

16 There are gaps in FCDO's central performance information, which limits its ability to evaluate the performance and outcomes of individual crisis responses.

In sudden-onset crises, the need to prioritise speed can mean FCDO puts less emphasis on capturing information on performance and results. HCRD does monitor the performance of its partners using performance frameworks and annual reviews. These are useful management tools, although they do not focus on how well FCDO responded to individual crises. In late 2023, HCRD introduced indicators for measuring aspects of its responses to crises, including the number of beneficiaries reached. It has collated data for eight of the 11 crises that it responded to since then. It also runs lessons learned exercises covering operational processes for individual responses, and there are examples of FCDO applying lessons in subsequent responses, such as faster deployment of a humanitarian field team during the Hurricane Melissa response. However, while HCRD is responsible for the core capabilities, it does not have a complete view of the results of the responses to crises, which FCDO's regions and posts are more likely to have. External reviews of HCRD's programmes also found that data limitations made it difficult to draw conclusions about results achieved. Previous ODA cuts resulted in reductions in monitoring, evaluation and learning budgets, and further cuts increase the risk of these activities being constrained. Without better monitoring, data and evaluation, FCDO's ability to demonstrate the value for money of its response work and make effective decisions on where to prioritise resources will be constrained (paragraphs 2.11, 3.5, 3.6, 3.10, 3.11, 3.14 and 3.15).

17 FCDO's responses to humanitarian crises have had clear benefits, including through the rapid delivery of aid, deployment of expertise and influencing of other humanitarian organisations. Although impacts are not aggregated centrally, we have seen examples of these through our case studies. We have also seen the positive influence that FCDO has on other humanitarian organisations. FCDO took a leading role in the response to Hurricane Melissa in Jamaica and has been an advocate for anticipatory funding in the United Nations CERF. It also influenced local organisations and the government in Bangladesh to strengthen national needs assessments and disaster-management response processes (paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7).

Conclusion

18 FCDO has strong operational arrangements in place for responding rapidly and effectively to a range of humanitarian crises. It maintains and uses deployable capabilities and partnerships which enable it to quickly mobilise expertise and relief items and to achieve positive humanitarian impacts.

19 FCDO is now operating in a context of increasing humanitarian demand and significantly constrained resources, which means that it will increasingly have to prioritise its responses in future. It has a high-level vision for its rapid response capabilities, with a focus on preparedness and resilience. FCDO lacks, however, a strategic assessment of its future needs for humanitarian capabilities, as well as consolidated performance and cost information. Without addressing these limitations, particularly as resources tighten, FCDO risks undermining its ability to maximise the long-term effectiveness and value for money of its crisis response function.

Recommendations

20 The following recommendations are aimed at strengthening FCDO's ability to respond to sudden-onset humanitarian crises.

- a** FCDO should complete a strategic assessment of the resources it needs to deliver rapid, effective humanitarian responses under reduced ODA budgets. This should identify which capabilities should be prioritised for funding and set out how FCDO's organisational transformation is expected to affect capacity and effectiveness, particularly across the overseas network.
- b** FCDO should strengthen how it communicates its offer and training for overseas posts, ensuring that posts clearly understand the capabilities available to them through HCRD and how to access the support effectively. FCDO should ensure it has arrangements to assure itself that posts understand and apply this offer and training.
- c** FCDO should prioritise its own preparedness activities and building the resilience of affected countries in high-risk geographies to respond to crises. It should track progress in these geographies against stated objectives for preparedness and resilience.
- d** FCDO should define and monitor a set of central performance indicators for sudden-onset humanitarian crisis response, covering speed, quality, capability deployment and results. It should require these metrics to be applied consistently across humanitarian crisis responses, by a combination of HCRD, geographic regions and posts – depending on responsibilities for responding to each crisis.

- e** FCDO should explore options for improving the quality, completeness and usability of its cost information for humanitarian crisis response. It should then make practical improvements, enabling it to routinely assess value for money. Better cost information should be used to inform its decisions on the overall size and use of the HCF.
- f** FCDO should improve how it identifies, disseminates and implements lessons from humanitarian crisis reviews, with an increased focus on the outcomes achieved. The process should involve HCRD, geographic regions, posts and CMD where appropriate. HCRD and CMD should ensure these lessons are used to inform future planning, programme design, guidance, and humanitarian crisis response delivery across FCDO.

Part One

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's strategy and approach to responding to humanitarian crises

1.1 This part of the report sets out the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's (FCDO's) approach to responding to humanitarian crises. It covers:

- the UK's role in the humanitarian system;
- FCDO's strategic approach;
- how FCDO decides to respond to a sudden-onset humanitarian crisis;
- FCDO's operating model; and
- funding FCDO's sudden-onset humanitarian crisis responses.

The UK's role in the humanitarian system

1.2 FCDO is responsible for the UK government's response to humanitarian crises worldwide. These are commonly caused by conflicts, natural disasters, extreme weather events, and diseases. Sudden-onset humanitarian crises are often caused by a single event, such as an earthquake, while other crises emerge slowly and may become protracted, lasting for months or years, for example due to drought or long-term conflict.

1.3 The global humanitarian situation has worsened since our previous report on the topic in 2016.³ Climate change and rising conflict have led to more frequent and complex crises. In December 2025, the United Nations (UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that 239 million people required urgent humanitarian assistance and protection, up from 168 million in 2020.⁴ OCHA estimated that only 35% of funding needs for response plans in 2025 were actually met by donors (**Figure 1**), meaning millions of people did not receive the help they needed. Global humanitarian funding has also contracted, with OCHA reporting a fall, in cash terms, from \$19.5 billion in 2020 to \$16 billion in 2025. Many of the world's major aid donors, including the United States, have reduced their aid budgets.

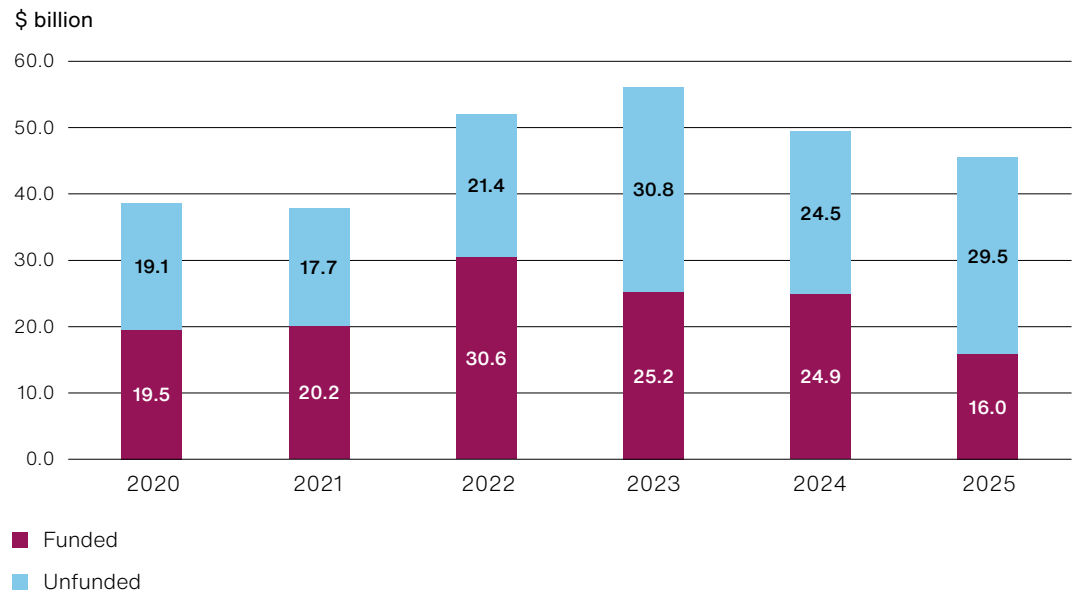
³ Comptroller and Auditor General, *Responding to crises*, Session 2015-16, HC 612, National Audit Office, January 2016.

⁴ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Action, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2026*, December 2025 (viewed on 9 April 2026). The methodology for calculating the number of people in need may change between years.

Figure 1

Global humanitarian funding gap, 2020 to 2025

The proportion of global humanitarian funding needs met by donors decreased from 51% in 2020 to 35% in 2025

**Notes**

- 1 The total humanitarian funding requirement is a needs-based estimate produced by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, on behalf of the humanitarian community, including the requirements for collective response plans. Data accessed 20 May 2026.
- 2 Most funding for these plans comes from voluntary contributions from donors such as governments and multilateral organisations.
- 3 Figures cover all types of humanitarian crises, not just sudden-onset crises.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' data

1.4 Under UK legislation, the government has a duty to spend 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) on Official Development Assistance (ODA) each year, and to lay a statement of explanation before Parliament if this target is not met.⁵ The UK met the 0.7% target between 2013 and 2020, before the government reduced the ODA budget to 0.5% from 2021 in response to the economic impact of COVID-19. In 2024, the UK spent £1.5 billion on bilateral humanitarian assistance, an increase of £0.6 billion from 2023, reflecting rising global need. In 2024, FCDO also provided £2.8 billion of ODA funding to multilateral organisations, some of which covered humanitarian aid.⁶ However, in 2025, the UK announced its aid budget would reduce from 0.5% to 0.3% of GNI by 2027, lowering the potential total aid budget to around £9.2 billion compared with £15.4 billion if ODA was retained at 0.5%.

5 *International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015*. International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Act 2015, accessed 9 April 2026.

6 Multilateral organisations refer to international organisations such as the World Bank, United Nations agencies and international charities, supported by multiple donors. Bilateral spending is earmarked spending where the donor has specified where and on what the ODA is spent, and is usually to specific countries, regions, or programmes.

FCDO's strategic approach

1.5 The UK Humanitarian Framework (2022), published during the previous government, set out how FCDO would deliver the UK's ambitions for humanitarian preparedness and response. It stated that FCDO would maintain UK rapid response capability for crises and set out objectives, including to strengthen continuous monitoring for new crises.

1.6 In 2025, the Development Minister set out priorities for ODA spending, committing to prioritising spending on humanitarian crises, global health and climate. This included the UK remaining a leading humanitarian actor, bilateral spending on humanitarian crises including Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan, and supporting multilateral organisations that respond to humanitarian emergencies. FCDO is also shifting its approach to development in four ways by:

- moving from being a donor to an investor;
- helping countries build their own public institutions;
- providing more technical assistance; and
- working through local partners and civil society.

1.7 In March 2026, the government planned to spend around £1.4 billion ODA annually for 2026-27 to 2028-29 in places with the highest humanitarian need. FCDO allocates bilateral ODA funding to individual countries based on humanitarian and development need, global health, fragility, geopolitics, irregular migration, UK growth and climate vulnerability. For sudden-onset crises, FCDO aims to remain globally focused but will take into account its capabilities within affected countries and risks. FCDO recognises it needs to ensure that, as part of its decision making, its intervention criteria are better enforced before it centrally supports a response to a sudden-onset crisis.

1.8 FCDO responds to sudden-onset humanitarian crises through its overseas network of country posts, bilateral aid, funding multilateral organisations, and working with a range of partners such as other government departments and non-governmental organisations. The UK is often also a part of international response efforts coordinated by the UN. FCDO's Humanitarian Crisis Response Department (HCRD) leads FCDO's approach to responding to sudden-onset humanitarian crises centrally. As at November 2025, HCRD had 27 full-time equivalent staff across its four teams (risk and funds, preparedness, capabilities, and programme management).

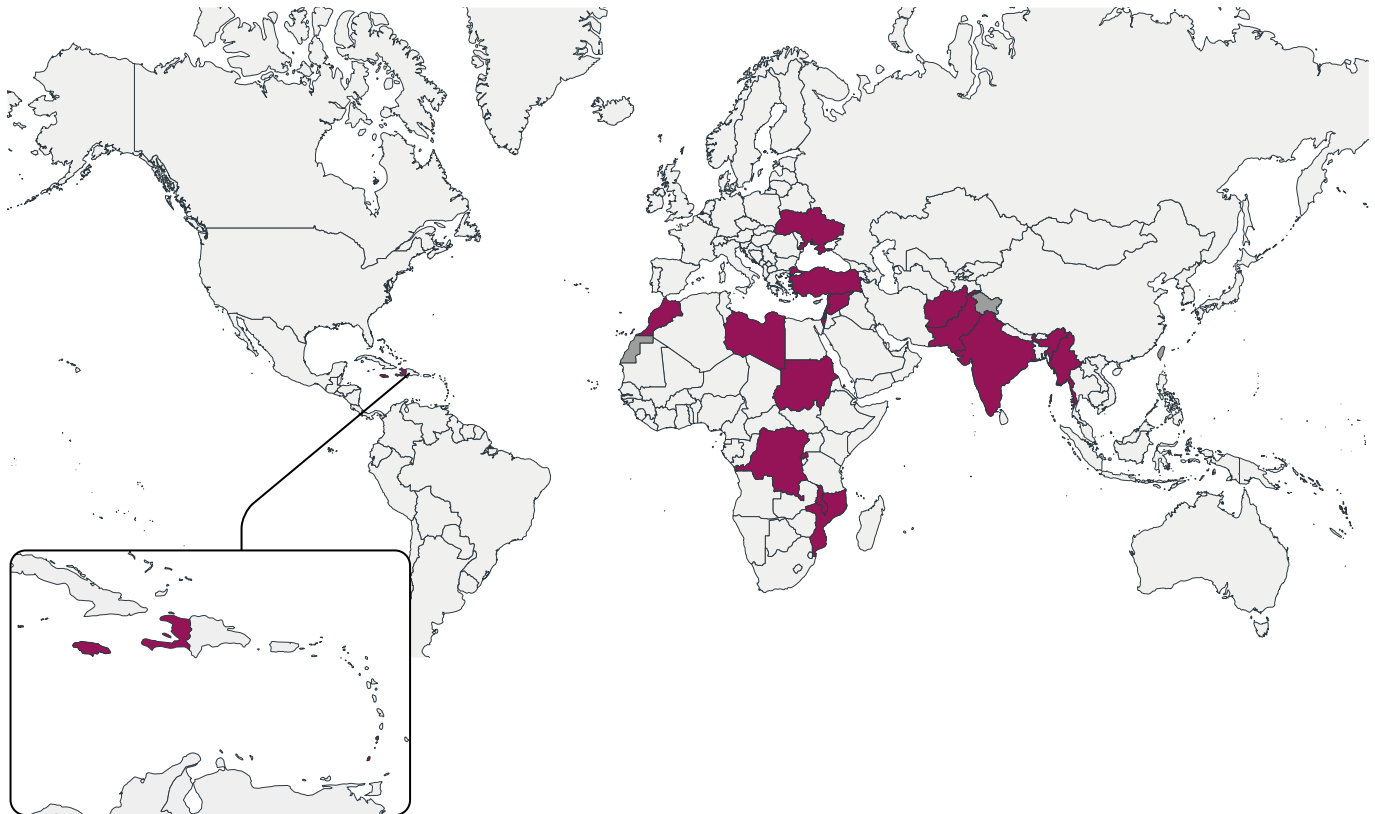
1.9 Our 2016 report found that the then Department for International Development had responded to more than 30 humanitarian crises between 2011 and 2016.⁷ Since the end of 2021, HCRD has supported FCDO posts in responding to 19 sudden-onset humanitarian crises (**Figure 2**). These crises have included conflicts, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and volcanic eruptions, each with its own contextual challenges (**Figure 3** on pages 18 and 19).

⁷ Comptroller and Auditor General, *Responding to crises*, Session 2015-16, HC 612, National Audit Office, January 2016.

Figure 2

Countries where the Humanitarian Crisis Response Department (HCRD) supported responses to sudden-onset humanitarian crises, 2021 to 2025

HCRD has supported 19 sudden-onset humanitarian responses across the world since December 2021



■ Countries where HCRD has supported a humanitarian response

■ Disputed territories

Notes

- 1 This map does not necessarily represent the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status. It has been designed for information purposes only and should not be considered an authority on the delimitation of international boundaries.
- 2 HCRD is a team within the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) that leads on UK responses to sudden-onset humanitarian crises.
- 3 This figure does not include small- and medium-scale crises responded to directly by posts using their own resources.
- 4 The 19 crises supported between December 2021 and October 2025 were: the Afghanistan crisis (2021), the Tonga volcanic eruption and tsunami (2022), the Ukraine conflict (2022), the Pakistan floods (2022), Cyclone Freddy in Malawi (2023) and in Mozambique (2023), the Turkey–Syria earthquake (2023), the Sudan conflict (2023), the Morocco earthquake (2023), the Libya floods (2023), the Israel–Occupied Palestinian Territories crisis (2023), Hurricane Beryl (affecting Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, and the Cayman Islands) (2024), the Israel–Lebanon conflict (2024), the Marburg virus disease outbreak in Rwanda (2024), the Vanuatu earthquake (2024), conflict escalation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2025), the Myanmar earthquake (2025), India–Pakistan escalation (2025) and Hurricane Melissa (Haiti and Jamaica) (2025).

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office data

Figure 3

Case study examples of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) responses to sudden-onset humanitarian crises

FCDO faced different challenges responding to each of the case study crises, but it was generally able to respond quickly and effectively

Case study	The crisis	FCDO response	Challenges faced by FCDO
Ukraine: onset of the war in Ukraine (2022)	In February 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine caused civilian casualties and mass displacement, as well as widespread destruction of critical infrastructure, including homes, schools and hospitals. Humanitarian needs escalated rapidly, with heightened risks of food insecurity, water shortages and disease outbreaks.	FCDO had carried out proactive contingency planning before the invasion. As it did not have existing humanitarian programming or in-country capacity, it had to create a new programme to respond rapidly. This included the deployment of a range of experts to support the response. FCDO also engaged other government departments in the response, including the Ministry of Defence (MoD) on civil-military coordination and other departments on the delivery of substantial in-kind aid.	Sustained pressure on FCDO's Ukraine humanitarian team and unfilled vacancies meant that it had to rely on the Humanitarian Emergency Response Operations and Stabilisation programme and other contractors. The limited experience of some FCDO staff meant crisis expertise was concentrated in a few senior individuals.
Turkey-Syria: earthquake (2023)	In February 2023, two major earthquakes struck south-east Turkey near the Syrian border. Over 55,000 people died, and around 300,000 buildings were damaged.	FCDO managed the humanitarian responses in Turkey and Syria separately, which was in accordance with FCDO policy. It rapidly redeployed unspent funds from existing budgets, which ministers approved. FCDO provided a £43 million support package across both countries. FCDO responded rapidly in challenging contexts, deploying humanitarian expertise, its emergency search and rescue and medical teams, delivering core relief items (CRIs) and coordinating with MoD.	In Turkey, the response required careful management of political sensitivities with the government. FCDO also did not hold the requested field hospital at readiness, leading to further delays and cost to the deployment. In Syria, the response was shaped by pre-existing humanitarian needs and constraints of operating in an active conflict zone. Managing responses across two countries and posts also added complexity to coordinating and tracking funding across country responses.
Bangladesh: floods (2024)	In 2024, Bangladesh faced one of its most severe and prolonged flooding emergencies in recent years. Beginning in June and worsening later in the year, the floods affected more than 14 million people across a vast area.	FCDO used an existing in-country programme to fund four flood-related responses in 2024, including £380,000 for the most severe flood. Funding was channelled through Start Fund Bangladesh, a rapid response pooled-fund, and support was delivered by local partners. This approach enabled rapid and localised responses.	The 2024 floods showed how posts can respond to frequent but unpredictable crises. In Bangladesh, climate change is increasing the complexity of flood risks, while political unrest and violence have added operational and security challenges for staff.
Rwanda: Marburg virus disease outbreak (2024)	In September 2024, Rwanda experienced its first recorded outbreak of Marburg virus disease, a rare and severe disease with no approved treatments or vaccines.	FCDO deployed 16 medical experts over two months to support the response. The team provided support for intensive care, operating theatres, infection control and prevention, and emergency medical services across health facilities. The outbreak was contained and declared over by 20 December 2024.	There was a risk of FCDO's experts becoming infected. There were challenges with obtaining information, which made it harder for FCDO to understand the scale and nature of the crisis.
Jamaica: Hurricane Melissa (2025)	In October 2025, Hurricane Melissa, the strongest storm ever to make landfall in Jamaica, affected an estimated 1.5 to 1.6 million people, around 55% of the population.	FCDO allocated £2.5 million in initial emergency funding, followed by a further £5 million two days later. It also mobilised expertise and support through its partners, deploying humanitarian expertise, medical teams, delivering CRIs, and using a Royal Navy vessel to support the response.	Owing to a constrained funding environment, some humanitarian organisations were unable to mobilise or sustain operations for as long as they usually would. There were challenges with monitoring the distribution of FCDO-funded core relief items.

Notes

- 1 FCDO's Humanitarian Crisis Response Department supported responses in four of the five case studies that we considered, with the exception of Bangladesh.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office documents and interview notes

How FCDO decides to respond to a sudden-onset humanitarian crisis

1.10 FCDO's crisis doctrine sets out the fundamental principles that it will apply when responding to crises overseas. These principles inform the humanitarian intervention criteria, which HCRD may use to assess a sudden-onset humanitarian crisis and inform any recommendations to ministers on whether the UK should respond. Decisions also take into account wider foreign policy considerations. The criteria consider:

- the underlying vulnerability of the population;
- the affected government's capacity to respond;
- the severity, scale and impact of the crisis;
- requests or appeals for assistance;
- actions of other donors;
- UK government commitments; and
- UK media and public interest.

1.11 Since September 2023, FCDO has applied the intervention criteria 30 times. Of these, action was recommended for 13 crises, consideration of action was recommended for another 14, and no action was recommended for the other three.

1.12 FCDO uses the crisis doctrine, intervention criteria and process guidance when deciding how best to respond, but the delivery of a bilateral response depends heavily on the context of the crisis and the affected country requesting international assistance. FCDO must consider foreign policy and risk factors when deciding what an effective response would involve and therefore relies on existing or deployed expertise in-country. HCRD provides training and guidance to posts on its central offer. However, some of FCDO's post-crisis reviews have identified that posts need a clearer and earlier understanding of HCRD's offer and capabilities and how best to use them to ensure that they can respond effectively.

FCDO's operating model

1.13 FCDO has a decentralised approach for responding to humanitarian crises, with an overseas network of 280 posts in 180 countries and territories (as at February 2026). As at 31 March 2025, FCDO had 17,326 employees. Of humanitarian spending in 2024-25, 90% was bilateral. Most small- to medium-scale crises are managed at post level, with limited need for HCRD involvement (**Figure 4** on pages 22 and 23). For medium- to large-scale humanitarian crises, led by geographic or thematic directorates, HCRD can provide posts with expertise and deployable support.

1.14 HCRD engages the overseas network to improve humanitarian preparedness and sudden-onset crisis response. However, for this to be effective, posts need to prioritise this work. In some cases, where posts have limited humanitarian capacity, HCRD has had to remain involved beyond the four-week timeframe set for its formal involvement in a crisis, reducing HCRD's readiness and agility to respond to new crises.

1.15 For crises that overwhelm normal policy and operational delivery structures, FCDO can enter crisis mode where it activates its formal crisis structures in the UK. Crisis mode can be used to coordinate responses that may involve humanitarian, political and consular components. FCDO has found that humanitarian preparedness and response is not prioritised consistently in these structures, but HCRD is working with FCDO's Crisis Management Department to integrate this work.

1.16 Where posts and regions cannot deliver a response on their own, HCRD provides a range of capabilities (**Figure 5** on page 24). These include:

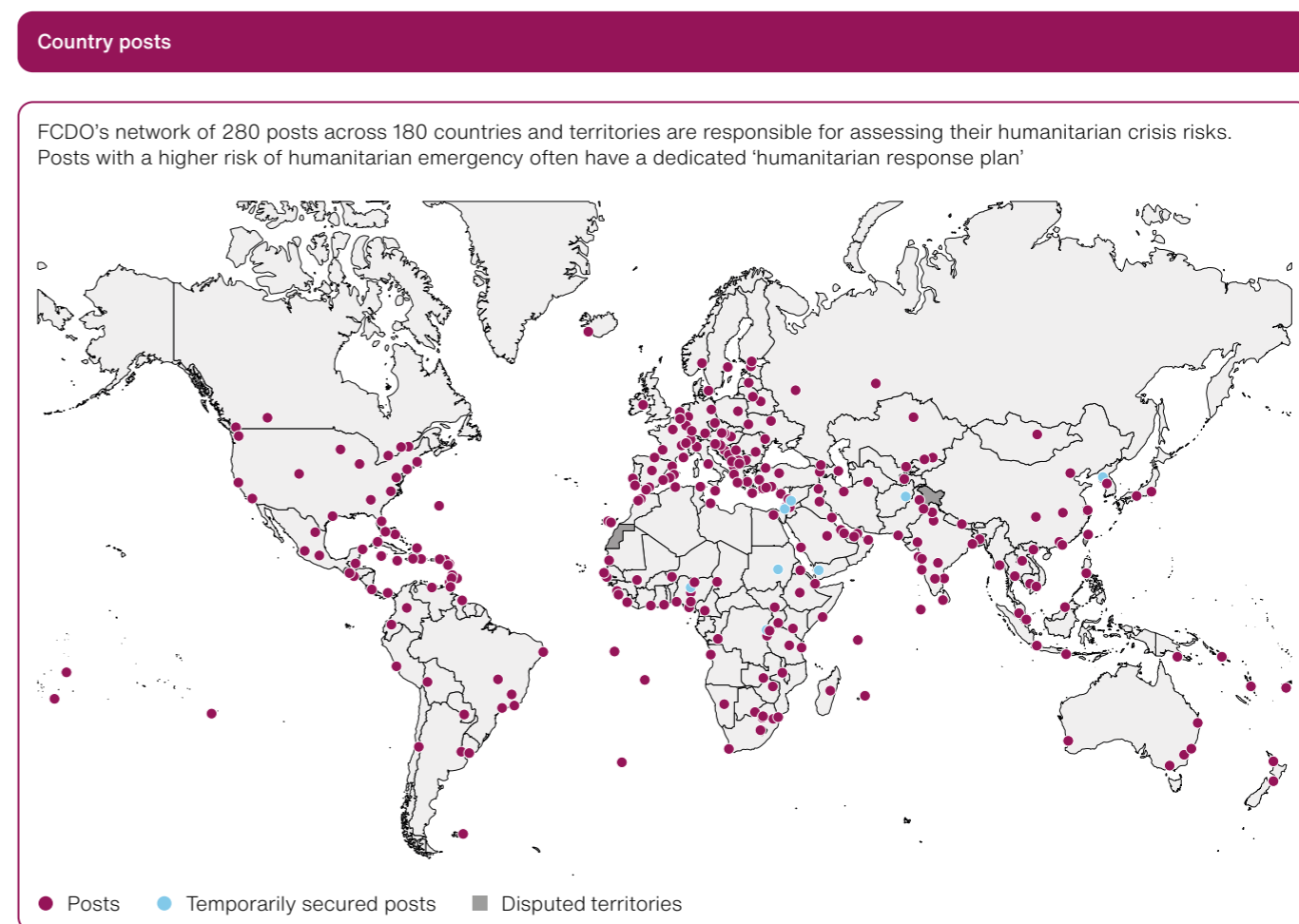
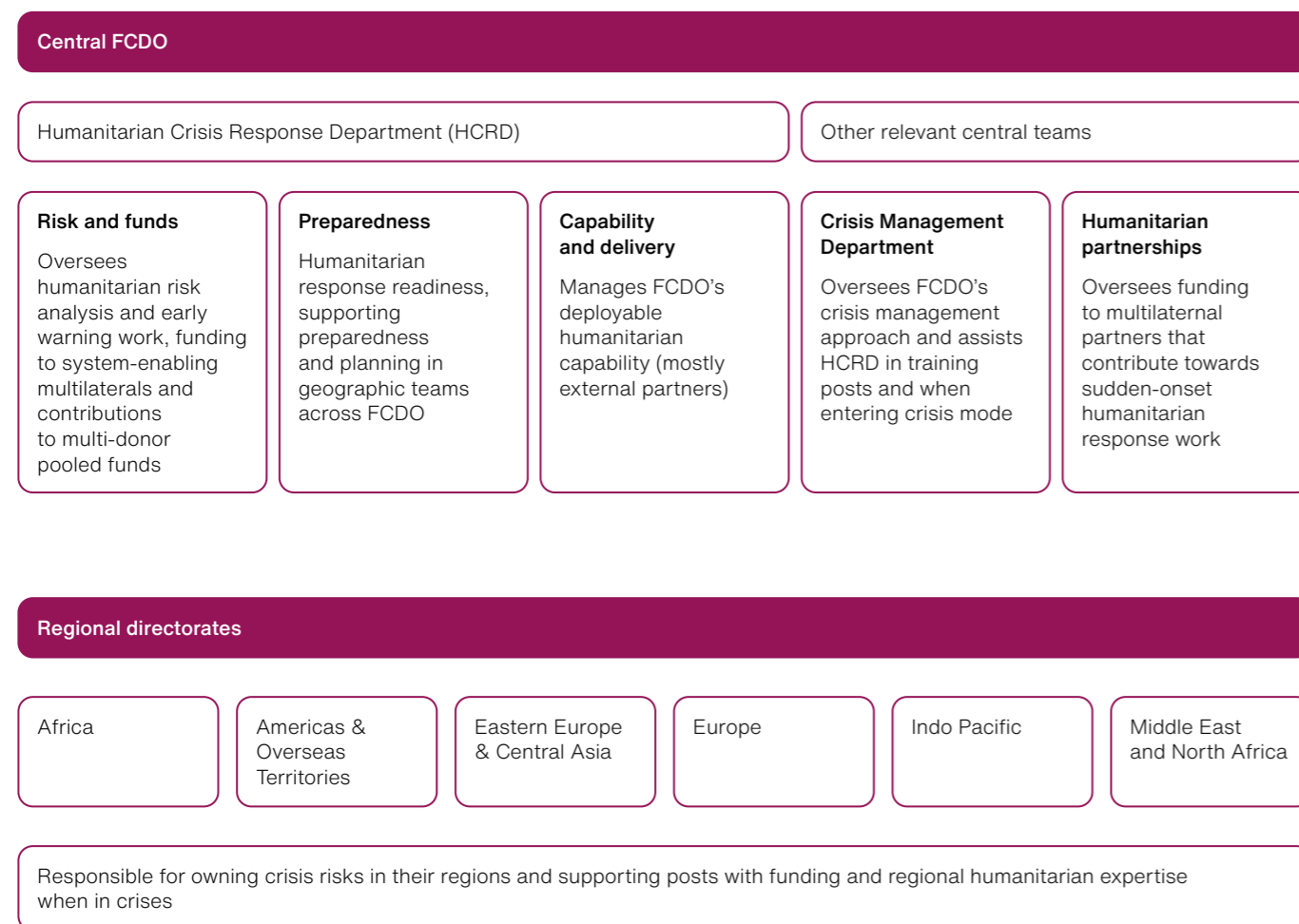
- allocating UK-based humanitarian crisis roles;
- deploying HCRD personnel to support posts, including policy and programme team support; and
- deploying specialist external capabilities, including the UK Emergency Medical Team, UK's International Search and Rescue team, and sending core relief items.

1.17 FCDO recognises that reduced funding increases risks to delivering effective and timely response to sudden-onset humanitarian crises. To meet its objectives, it intends to maintain a range of capabilities in headquarters and across its overseas network. It has identified areas where it will adjust its approach, with greater reliance on multilaterals and pooled funding for small- and medium-scale crises, and more centrally led responses for larger crises.

1.18 FCDO does review its capability requirements for major programme contracts before they are renewed. However, FCDO does not have a strategic assessment of the critical humanitarian capacity and capabilities it will need across the organisation in future. As it becomes smaller with less funding, this creates a risk that FCDO does not have the best mix of capabilities to meet its objectives.

Figure 4
The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office’s (FCDO’s) organisational structure in responding to humanitarian crises, February 2026

Central teams within FCDO, regional directorates and posts have responsibilities for responding to sudden-onset humanitarian crises



Notes

- 1 The map does not necessarily represent the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status. It has been designed for information purposes only and should not be considered an authority on the delimitation of international boundaries.
- 2 Posts are UK Embassies, High Commissions, delegations, Missions and Consulates. Some posts share a location: for example, international organisation delegations may be in the same place as Embassies.
- 3 While central FCDO teams presented above are primarily responsible for sudden-onset humanitarian response, this diagram is not exhaustive of other FCDO teams that contribute to such responses.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office data

Figure 5

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office’s (FCDO’s) capabilities for responding to sudden-onset humanitarian crises

FCDO’s Humanitarian Crisis Response Department (HCRD) provides capabilities to support readiness for, and responses to, sudden-onset humanitarian crises



Early warning and analysis

Through Palladium International Ltd, FCDO has 24/7 access to an on-call duty officer who monitors and analyses global events with potential humanitarian impacts.

Palladium provides early warning and analysis products, including the humanitarian early warning note informed by media monitoring. HCRD also receives and shares climate-related risk information from the Met Office.



Procurement and delivery of aid supplies

FCDO maintains a stockpile of core relief items (CRIs) in three warehouses around the world through its contract with Palladium. Items include tents, blankets and solar lanterns, which can be delivered worldwide using a range of modes of transport including air and sea.

FCDO also holds enabling equipment such as mobile offices, aircraft handling equipment and vehicles, and can source other items from suppliers through Palladium.



Expertise and staffing

FCDO can deploy HCRD and Palladium staff to posts to support an existing humanitarian team or establish one. It also supports posts with preparedness and crisis training.

Through Palladium, HCRD can deploy experts via dedicated rosters including humanitarian advisory experts, Standby Partnerships which surge short-term specialist staff into United Nations agencies, and surging staff to support United Nations’ needs assessments during crises.

HCRD can also provide civil–military expertise where the UK deploys military capabilities, particularly where these offer capabilities unavailable through civilian alternatives or where these can be delivered more quickly or effectively.



Deployable teams

Through the Emergency Deployments Team 2 programme, FCDO can deploy the UK’s International Search and Rescue (ISAR) team and the UK Emergency Medical Team (EMT). The ISAR team is an FCDO-funded urban search and rescue capability, classified by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. It has a total capacity of 250 personnel and flood response capability.

The EMT is an FCDO-funded rapid medical response capability, classified by the World Health Organization, with a roster of almost 1,000 frontline medical experts. It can deploy tailored teams and specialists according to need, including a medical assessment team ahead of a full deployment.

Notes

- 1 Palladium International Ltd provides FCDO with most of its rapid response capabilities, delivered through its Humanitarian Emergency Response Operations and Stabilisation programme.
- 2 The Emergency Deployments Team 2 programme enables the UK to offer emergency specialist capability to respond to humanitarian crises, including the UK EMT and the UK ISAR.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office documents

Funding FCDO's sudden-onset humanitarian crisis responses

1.19 FCDO does not pre-allocate large budgets for sudden-onset crises. Instead, it first reprioritises existing regional and post budgets. If this funding is insufficient, FCDO can use its Humanitarian Crisis Fund (HCF) which is a fund of last resort for sudden-onset crises.⁸ FCDO allocated £100 million to the HCF in 2025-26 and £75 million in 2026-27.

1.20 The total cost of HCRD-supported responses to sudden-onset humanitarian crises from 2023-24 to 2025-26 was £86.8 million (for 12 crisis responses). This decreased from £36.5 million in 2023-24 (for four crisis responses) to £8.5 million in 2025-26 (for two crisis responses) (**Figure 6** overleaf). These figures exclude responses to crises managed entirely at post level, which HCRD did not support, FCDO staff costs and the costs of HCRD-managed programmes. FCDO does not hold aggregate information on the costs of its response to these other crises.

1.21 FCDO also funds local and multilateral organisations, and global pooled funds that enable rapid response and delivery of humanitarian aid on its behalf. This includes organisations like the Start Network, which provides rapid funding to local humanitarian organisations, and local non-governmental organisations which FCDO posts already work with. Changes to ODA might affect the availability and cost of these capabilities. Organisations told us that uncertainty over the timing and scale of ODA allocations makes planning difficult and can weaken the wider humanitarian system's ability to respond, and affect relationships. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact has also found that unpredictable funding has affected planning and increased administrative overheads and operational costs.⁹

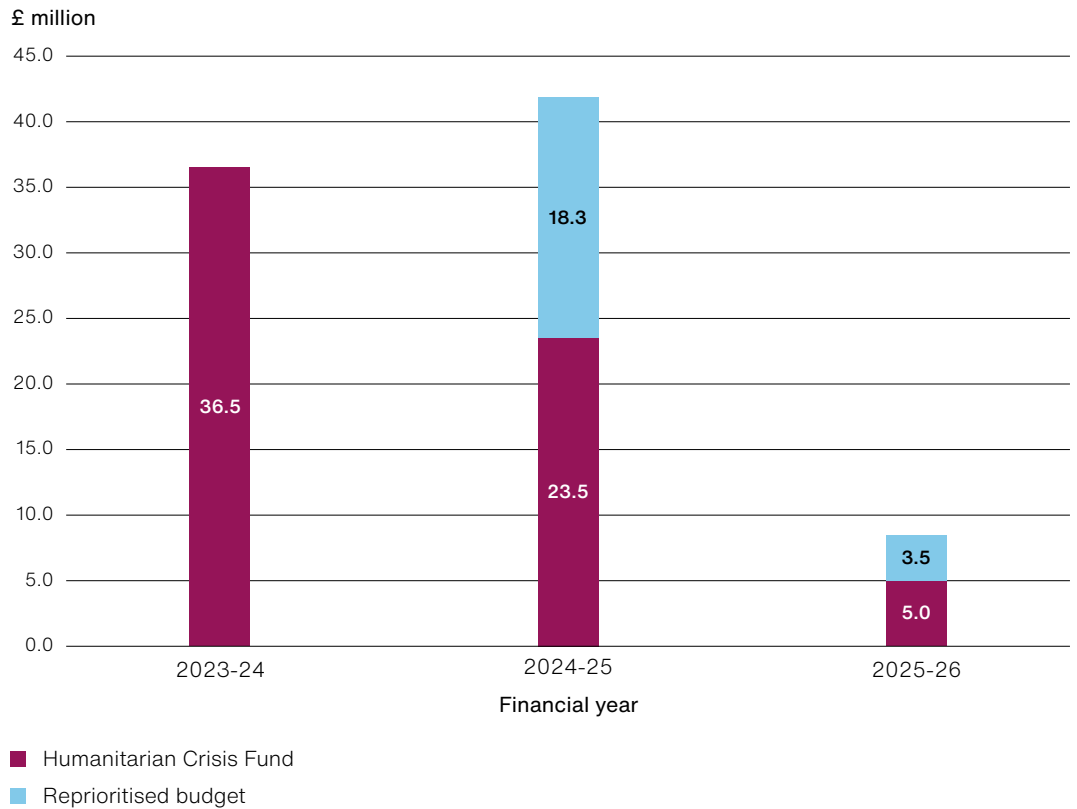
⁸ Before 2026-27, this was known as the Humanitarian Crisis Reserve.

⁹ Independent Commission for Aid Impact, *UK aid to Sudan*, October 2025 (viewed on 13 November 2025).

Figure 6

Cost of Humanitarian Crisis Response Department (HCRD) supported responses to sudden-onset humanitarian crises, 2023-24 to 2025-26

The cost of HCRD-supported responses to sudden-onset humanitarian crises in a year has decreased from £36.5 million (2023-24) to £8.5 million (2025-26)



Notes

- 1 Figures include only responses supported by HCRD, a team within the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office that leads on UK responses to sudden-onset humanitarian crises. This does not include all uses of the Humanitarian Crisis Fund.
- 2 Spending for 2025-26 is provisional.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office data

Part Two

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's humanitarian capacity and rapid response capabilities

2.1 This part of the report examines the humanitarian capacity and capabilities of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) to continue responding to humanitarian crises. In particular, it looks at:

- FCDO's humanitarian capacity;
- the Humanitarian Emergency Response Operations and Stabilisation programme (HEROS);
- working with other delivery partners;
- humanitarian response through multilateral organisations; and
- preparedness and resilience.

FCDO's humanitarian capacity

2.2 FCDO was formed in 2020 from a merger of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development. In our 2024 report on the merger, we identified benefits it created for humanitarian response. This included greater cooperation between humanitarian and foreign policy work, with staff reporting a greater understanding of both.¹⁰ Where these capabilities are brought together, FCDO can respond more effectively to humanitarian crises, as seen during the humanitarian response to the war in Ukraine in 2022.

2.3 However, our report found that the merger was disruptive for many staff, affecting morale and staff turnover. We found a reduction in expert development adviser roles between 2019 and 2022, unfilled programme-management vacancies, and that further work was needed to embed longer-term culture change.

¹⁰ Comptroller and Auditor General, *Progress with the merger of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development*, HC 637, Session 2023-24, National Audit Office, March 2024.

2.4 Humanitarian advisers provide FCDO with expertise in preparing for and responding to humanitarian crises. These staff often bring geographic and contextual understanding and external experience, which is crucial for responding effectively. At the end of 2025, there were signs of reduced humanitarian advisory capacity in some critical posts, and FCDO has faced difficulties developing humanitarian capacity internally and with external recruitment. In 2024, FCDO assessed that it would find it difficult to respond to more than one new major humanitarian crisis concurrently. As at March 2026, FCDO had 59 humanitarian adviser roles worldwide (**Figure 7**).

2.5 FCDO's responses to humanitarian crises also depend on other specialist roles, including health advisers and programme managers, and can draw on support from other central teams such as the Research and Analysis Directorate. When normal capacity is overwhelmed, FCDO reassigns staff on a temporary basis. Our case studies highlighted challenges around staffing at posts, with all six posts we covered experiencing either current capacity shortages or risks of future shortages. Insufficient capacity at posts or regions can lead to an over-reliance on Humanitarian Crisis Response Department (HCRD) resources.

2.6 FCDO is implementing its FCDO2030 transformation programme, with the aim to become smaller but more effective by 2030. This includes a planned headcount reduction of around 15% to 25% by 2029, which will affect how FCDO responds to sudden-onset humanitarian crises. FCDO has developed a high-level skills framework, setting out the types of skills that it needs to develop and retain to be successful in achieving its objectives, and it is developing a workforce strategy to complement the framework. FCDO will need to include a strategic assessment of its critical humanitarian capacity requirements, including the number of humanitarian professionals it needs, across its overseas network. Without this, there is a risk that reduced capacity will weaken the effectiveness of future crisis responses.

The Humanitarian Emergency Response Operations and Stabilisation (HEROS) programme

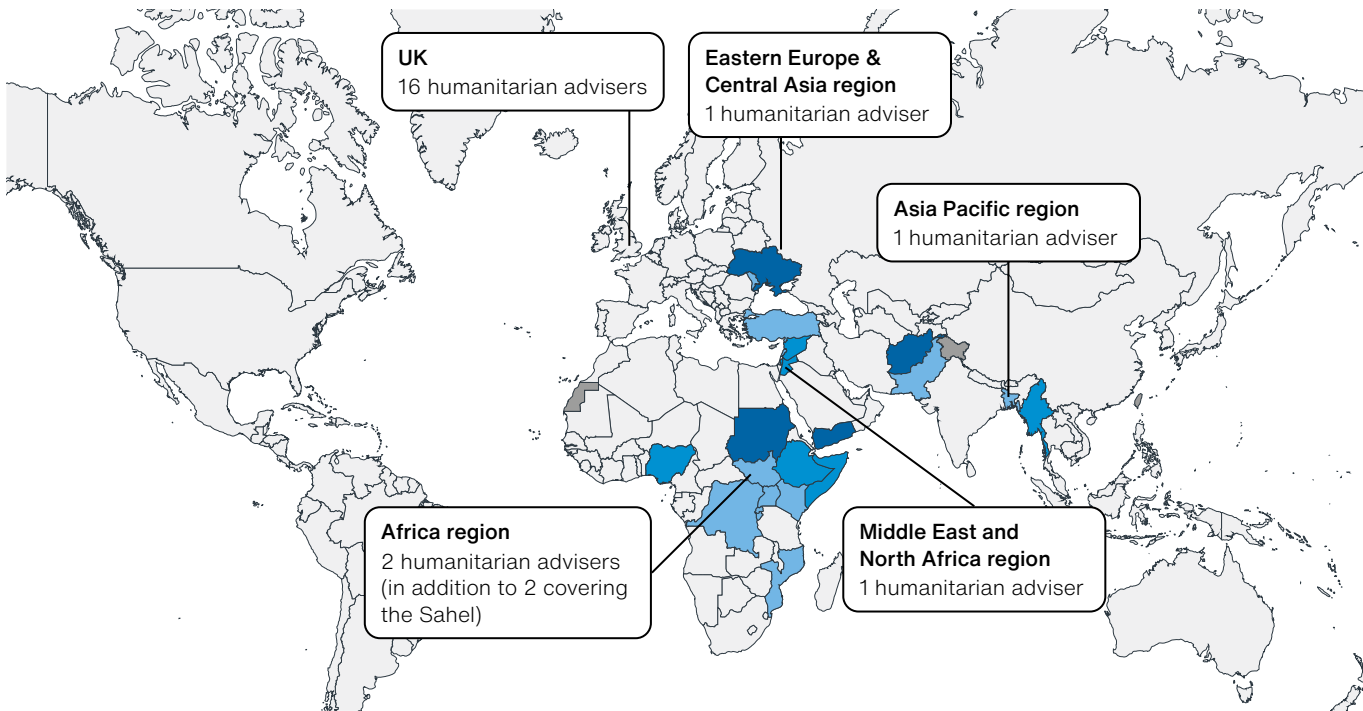
2.7 Most of FCDO's central rapid response capability is provided primarily by a supplier, Palladium International Ltd, through the HEROS programme. The core programme and wider contract 'drawdown' facility, running between 2017 and 2027, provides access of up to £330 million for the maintenance and use of Palladium capabilities by FCDO and wider government. Its main aims, as it relates to FCDO, include:

- providing effective and timely responses to at least six new crises each year;
- increasing FCDO's ability to provide a bespoke, flexible response to crises; and
- building a robust humanitarian supply chain and operational capability to prepare for, and respond to, the full range of humanitarian crises.

Figure 7

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office’s (FCDO’s) humanitarian advisers’ coverage, March 2026

FCDO has 59 humanitarian adviser roles, including 36 covering African, Asian and European countries; the others cover regions or are based in the UK



Number of humanitarian advisers covering countries

- 3
- 2
- 1
- Disputed territories

Notes

- 1 This map does not necessarily represent the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status. It has been designed for information purposes only and should not be considered an authority on the delimitation of international boundaries.
- 2 Humanitarian advisers provide expertise across conflicts, protracted crises, displacement, sudden-onset disasters, and preparedness for crises.
- 3 As of March 2026, FCDO had 59 humanitarian adviser posts. This includes 43 focused on specific countries or regions (with over 70% of these posted overseas).
- 4 FCDO can deploy additional humanitarian advisers through its Humanitarian Emergency Response Operations and Stabilisation programme.
- 5 Lines are pointed at the general FCDO regions that advisers cover.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office data

2.8 HEROS is managed by an FCDO programme team of 4.5 full-time equivalent staff. It oversees the programme through monitoring output indicators, annual reviews, and a programme management board. Palladium provides six main capabilities (**Figure 8**). Between November 2022 and October 2025, Palladium supported 28 responses, provided 74 early warning risk briefs and 178 humanitarian deployments, and delivered core relief items (CRIs) to an estimated 608,000 people (**Figure 9** on page 32). On 224 occasions, Palladium also deployed experts to support the United Nations' needs assessments and operational responses to crises.

2.9 Palladium procures, stores and delivers CRIs for FCDO, from warehouses in the UK and the United Arab Emirates and stockpiles in Antigua. FCDO needs to be ready to deploy aid around the world rapidly, and use different modes of transport depending on the type and amount of CRIs required and the context of the crises. Between 2020 and 2025, FCDO delivered more than 4,800 metric tonnes of CRIs, ranging from 132 tonnes in 2020 to almost 1,700 tonnes in 2022 (**Figure 10** on page 33).¹¹

2.10 Palladium's early warning system and core team of humanitarian experts enables response speeds that FCDO would have difficulty in undertaking by itself. This includes alerts for humanitarian events within 30 minutes, analysis within two hours, and mobilising a deployable team for major international emergencies within 12 hours of request. Our case studies provide examples of how Palladium enabled FCDO to respond quickly to the following events:

- Hurricane Melissa response: Surge support of five experts within three days alongside one official from HCRD, several Standby Partnership deployments to support the wider humanitarian system (with partners reporting this as a valuable addition to their operational capacity), and six CRI deliveries within two weeks of the hurricane.¹²
- Turkey–Syria earthquake response: Humanitarian advisers deployed in-country within 72 hours, providing essential information and support to overstretched posts, and seven CRI deliveries within two weeks of the earthquake.

¹¹ This includes deliveries of enabling equipment and vehicles.

¹² Standby Partnership deployments are specialists who are loaned to UN agencies to bolster capacity in crises.

Figure 8

The Humanitarian Emergency Response Operations and Stabilisation (HEROS) programme capabilities provided by Palladium International Ltd to the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)

Palladium provides rapid response capabilities and expertise to FCDO through the HEROS programme

Palladium capability	Description
Scalable conflict and humanitarian expertise	Manage FCDO's roster of surge conflict and humanitarian experts.
Humanitarian early warning and analysis of risk	A team of eight analysts providing early warning analysis, briefs and alerts, drawing on mixed sources.
Standing team of humanitarian experts	A team of eight deployable humanitarian advisers with sector expertise, for example health, shelter, water and hygiene, and a roster of 300 additional humanitarian experts; the standing team can be deployed in 24 to 48 hours.
Procurement and logistics	A team of 19 logistics specialists and support staff, some of whom are based in FCDO's UK warehouse; they manage, maintain and deploy core relief items (CRIs), advise on procurement and logistics and coordinate with the Ministry of Defence and international partners.
Standby Partnership deployments	Oversees FCDO's Standby Partnership agreements through which it can fund deployments of humanitarian experts to United Nations (UN) agencies requesting surge capacity.
UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) deployments	A roster of senior humanitarian advisers accredited for UNDAC deployments which it deploys at the request of the UN.

Note

1 FCDO manages the HEROS programme, and it outsources delivery primarily to Palladium International Ltd.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office documents

2.11 FCDO published an independent evaluation of HEROS in 2023.¹³

The evaluation found that HEROS capabilities were capable of surging and shrinking in line with needs, and the programme was seen by FCDO and people deployed as critical for enabling effective and timely responses to crises. FCDO highly valued the operational, logistical and humanitarian expertise provided by Palladium. However, the evaluation found that outcomes often depended on factors beyond the HEROS programme, making it difficult to attribute results directly to the supplier's activities. It also identified insufficient performance monitoring data, which constrained its ability to fully evaluate the programme's impact and outcomes. These limitations have been acknowledged in FCDO's annual reviews since 2023, which have recommended further strengthening of monitoring, learning and evaluation systems.

¹³ Integrity Research & Consultancy, *Independent Evaluation of the Humanitarian Emergency Operations and Stabilisation Programme*, May 2023 (viewed on 2 February 2026).

Figure 9

The Humanitarian Emergency Response Operations and Stabilisation (HEROS) programme delivery metrics, 2023 to 2025

Responses supported by the HEROS programme are measured through various deliverables

Deliverable	2023	2024	2025
Responses supported	15	5	8
Early warning briefs produced	31	20	23
Humanitarian expert deployments ⁴	84	45	49
Civilian Stabilisation Group deployments ⁴	63	64	107
Standby Partnership and United Nations (UN) Disaster Assessment and Coordination deployments ⁵	69	73	82
Supply chain plans produced	15	13	18
Core relief items (CRIs) delivered ⁶	98,600	84,500	4,400
Number of people supported through CRIs (estimate)	296,000	291,000	21,000

Notes

- 1 The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) manages the HEROS programme, and it outsources delivery primarily to Palladium International Ltd.
- 2 The figures above are based on the contractual year (1 November to 31 October). For example, 2023 covers 1 November 2022 to 31 October 2023. Data for each year may include information relating to crises that started in a previous reporting period.
- 3 Responses supported include both sudden-onset and protracted humanitarian crises. HEROS also provides support for conflict, stabilisation, and security work in fragile and conflict-affected states. Some deliverables for these are not included in this figure.
- 4 Humanitarian experts include humanitarian advisers, logisticians and coordinators. Civilian Stabilisation Group experts have expertise in areas including conflict prevention, stabilisation, and governance.
- 5 Standby Partnership deployments are specialists who are loaned to UN agencies to bolster capacity, and UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination deployments are experts deployed to support initial needs assessments and provide leadership to the UN's operational response.
- 6 CRIs include physical items such as tents, hygiene kits and solar lanterns. FCDO delivers CRIs around the world using a range of modes of transport including air and sea.
- 7 There are some inconsistencies in management data for these deliverables. However, FCDO has advised that these are the most appropriate data to use.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office data

Figure 10

Core relief items (CRIs) provided by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), by mode of delivery, 2020 to 2025

Depending on the context of a particular crisis, FCDO will have to consider how to deliver CRIs, and in 2025 FCDO provided 275 metric tonnes of CRIs in response to humanitarian crises



Notes

- 1 CRIs include physical items such as tents, hygiene kits and solar lanterns. FCDO delivers CRIs around the world using a range of modes of transport including air and sea. This function is carried out for FCDO by its supplier, Palladium International Ltd.
- 2 The figures also include deliveries of enabling equipment and vehicles.
- 3 Data are incomplete as the mode of delivery and weight of items was not captured for some deliveries.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office data

Working with other delivery partners

2.12 HCRD holds two further specialist capabilities through the Emergency Deployments Team 2 programme: the UK Emergency Medical Team (EMT) and the UK International Search and Rescue (ISAR) team. These teams have supported FCDO with high-quality responses, including the EMT's deployment to Rwanda during the 2024 Marburg virus disease outbreak, and the ISAR team's deployment to Turkey–Syria following the 2023 earthquake (**Figure 11**).

2.13 FCDO also engages other government departments and agencies to boost its ability and capacity to respond to humanitarian crises. Our case studies highlight how this strengthened FCDO's response.

- Turkey–Syria (earthquake), 2023: The Ministry of Defence (MoD) delivered CRIs to Turkey. It also transported the UK EMT to Turkey via two RAF flights.
- Jamaica (Hurricane Melissa), 2025: MoD directed HMS Trent to support the response, which distributed some of the CRIs and provided military engineers to assist with debris clearance and repairs. The UK Health Security Agency also supported disease surveillance and public health response.
- Ukraine (Russia–Ukraine war), 2022: Delivery of substantial in-kind aid from across government included medical supplies from the Department of Health & Social Care and electricity generators from the former Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. FCDO also engaged MoD on civilian–military coordination, and the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs on food security.

Humanitarian response through multilateral organisations

2.14 FCDO funding to multilateral organisations and pooled funds is a key part of its approach to responding to humanitarian crises globally. Organisations such as the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the United Nations (UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs can provide both immediate scale and reach in contexts where FCDO has little or no presence. Pooled funds like the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), to which the UK contributed £52 million in 2025 (the second largest contribution globally), can release funding within hours of a crisis, supporting large-scale responses to major events, for example, in response to Hurricane Melissa. As FCDO budgets reduce, it anticipates a greater reliance on such organisations and pooled funds, particularly for small- and medium-scale crises.

Figure 11

UK Emergency Medical Team (EMT) and UK International Search and Rescue (ISAR) team capabilities

The EMT and ISAR are on standby to deploy to responses as soon as 24 hours after a crisis

	UK EMT	UK ISAR
Delivered by	UK-Med, a UK charity.	Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority.
Description of capability	Provides emergency medical, surgical, rehabilitation, disease outbreak and public health experts, from NHS and international rosters. They are ready to deploy at 24–48 hours' notice to support local health workforces.	Provides response teams comprising volunteers and equipment (including search dogs, medics and engineers), who are on 24-hour standby to support local search and rescue efforts.
Accreditations	World Health Organization accredited as a type 2 EMT. ¹	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs classification as a 'heavy urban search and rescue team'.
FCDO grant to cover maintenance of capability (deployment incurs additional costs)	£11 million allocated between August 2022 and March 2027.	£8.5 million allocated between July 2022 and June 2027.
Engagements supported in 2024-25	9 engagements, including crisis assessments, deployments and building the capacity of affected countries.	12 engagements, including crisis assessments, crisis management and building the capacity of affected countries.
Example of successful deployment from our case studies	<p>Rwanda Marburg virus disease response, 2024:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deployed two people to Rwanda, who identified gaps and areas where a full deployment would improve the local response; • initially deployed 10 expert positions, with 16 personnel covering these positions throughout the six-week response; and • contributed to the successful resolution of the Marburg virus disease outbreak. <p>Cost of deployment: £450,000</p>	<p>Turkey–Syria earthquake, 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deployed 77 search and rescue personnel, four dogs and several other professionals within 72-hours of the earthquake; • remained in country for eight days, rescued eight people and recovered three deceased people; and • ISAR representative awarded a medal from the President of Turkey in recognition of their work. <p>Cost of deployment: £439,000</p>

Note

1 A type 2 EMT can provide outpatient care, inpatient acute care, and surgery for trauma and other major conditions.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office documents

2.15 The UK also uses its influence to shape the multilateral system.

- Around 30% of the UK's core contributions to major UN agencies are tied to specific performance commitments to support the humanitarian reset and incentivise improvements in anticipatory action, localisation, needs assessment and other global reforms.¹⁴
- FCDO provides international leadership on anticipatory funding. This is funding that is pre-agreed in advance of a predicted crisis. FCDO has been one of the leading advocates for CERF's anticipatory action since 2019. A CERF representative told us that UK advocacy was central to system-wide adoption of this innovation.
- FCDO funds several organisations that promote localisation and enabling services across the humanitarian system. This includes the Start Network, which supports local delivery partners and is an innovator in rapid and anticipatory funding. It also includes the H2H Network, which provides services that support operational delivery in the wider humanitarian system, such as data and research, community engagement, and security.

2.16 In the Ukraine response, FCDO identified that multilateral organisations lacked the capacity to respond to a crisis of this scale. It therefore supported them to effectively scale their response and contribute to a large-scale international humanitarian response. This included FCDO providing flexible funding to UN agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC), as well as seconding staff to five UN humanitarian partners in Ukraine and the region.¹⁵

2.17 FCDO also supports responses through the UK Aid Match, including with the DEC.¹⁶ In 2025, the UK government matched £5 million for the Myanmar Earthquake Appeal, as well as £10 million (in 2024) and £3 million (in 2025) for the Middle East Humanitarian Appeal.¹⁷ DEC told us that Aid Match encourages public donations and strengthens trust in DEC appeals by demonstrating the UK government's confidence in the appeal, and that this added assurance can be particularly important for complex crises.

14 The humanitarian reset is a programme of reforms to the global humanitarian system launched in March 2025 by the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. More information is available here: [Humanitarian Reset | Inter-Agency Standing Committee](#).

15 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, *UK aid to Ukraine*, April 2024 (viewed on 9 April 2026).

16 UK Aid Match is a FCDO-supported mechanism by which selected UK charities can raise public donations and government funding for approved appeals supported by the UK government.

17 In addition to these, outside of the Aid Match arrangements FCDO matched £1 million of donations to the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies appeal in support of Jamaica following Hurricane Melissa in 2025.

Preparedness and resilience

2.18 Preparing for, strengthening resilience to, and anticipating humanitarian crises can be more cost-effective than responding when FCDO or affected countries are unprepared. FCDO's crisis doctrine emphasises "90% preparation" as a key principle of its crisis management approach, and "Prepare" (along with "Plan", "Deliver" and "Learn") as one of the core elements of its continuous cycle of activity. In 2025, FCDO committed to prioritising greater humanitarian crisis prevention, through anticipatory action and early warning systems, and building the resilience of households and communities to shocks.

2.19 While other teams in FCDO engage in broader preparedness and resilience work, HCRD leads FCDO's preparedness work relating to sudden-onset humanitarian crises, and considers how to improve the resilience of affected countries. This includes leading on FCDO's humanitarian preparedness strategy, supporting FCDO's geographic teams and country posts with risk analysis, planning, and working with the Crisis Management Department to deliver training across the network.

2.20 Through the Emergency Deployments Team 2 programme, FCDO supports affected countries to build their emergency capability to respond to future humanitarian crises. Examples include the following.

- Ethiopia: The UK EMT is supporting the Ethiopian government's EMT to achieve World Health Organization classification, which would make it the first national civilian EMT in Africa accredited to international standards.
- Malawi: UK ISAR has delivered multi-year flood-rescue training, strengthening the readiness and capability of the Malawian Defence Force, police and other national organisations.

2.21 Preparedness activity enhanced the effectiveness of responses in four of our five case studies. For example, in Bangladesh, FCDO's investment in Start Fund Bangladesh enabled local organisations to mobilise within 72 hours during the 2024 floods. In the Caribbean, the UK's broader preparedness work including pre-positioned relief items, enabled a faster and more effective response to Hurricane Melissa (**Figure 12** overleaf).

Figure 12

UK government preparedness activity that contributed to its Hurricane Melissa response in Jamaica

Preparedness work by the UK government helped to make the response to Hurricane Melissa more effective

Activity	Description of activity	Benefits observed during response included
Contributions to pooled funds	Wider Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) programmatic funding to pooled funds that contribute to rapid response.	The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' Disaster Relief Emergency Fund allocated 1 million Swiss Francs, and the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund allocated \$4 million to Jamaica within days of the hurricane.
Disaster risk financing mechanisms	The UK government has been an advocate for disaster finance mechanisms and worked closely with the Jamaican government to set up a pre-arranged finance framework.	Jamaica mobilised \$662 million for rapid response and recovery from various disaster risk financing mechanisms.
Hurricane season preparedness activity	The Humanitarian Crisis Response Department (HCRD) undertook annual hurricane season preparedness activity, including a regional visit, tabletop exercises, and providing response training to the region.	This activity enabled FCDO to be prepared and ready to respond to Hurricane Melissa prior to it making landfall.
Ministry of Defence (MoD) deployment of Offshore Patrol Vessel	Joint planning with MoD and pre-positioning of HMS Medway and HMS Trent to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief during the hurricane season.	HMS Trent delivered 120 hygiene kits for onward distribution and supported the Jamaican Defence Force to set up a field hospital run by the Spanish government.
Supply chain plan	FCDO had developed a humanitarian supply chain plan before Hurricane Melissa struck Jamaica to ensure relief stock availability. This included pre-positioning core relief items (CRIs) in Antigua.	The response to Hurricane Melissa was reliant on the supply chain, and pre-positioning of CRIs supported the delivery of priority relief items in the first phase of the response.
The Caribbean Humanitarian Response Platform (CHuRP)	An innovative regional multi-year programme to strengthen FCDO agility in preparing and responding quickly to disasters across the Caribbean.	The CHuRP enabled a rapid response through its pre-established partners, ensuring organisations such as the United Nations agencies could mobilise quickly.

Notes

- 1 Hurricane Melissa struck Jamaica in October 2025, affecting millions of people. FCDO committed £7.5 million in emergency funding within the first few days of the crisis and a further £1 million in the months after.
- 2 The UK also supported responses in Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic through funding and a specialist deployment.
- 3 HCRD is a team within FCDO that leads on UK responses to sudden-onset humanitarian crises.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and publicly available documents

Part Three

Monitoring performance, costs and impact

3.1 This part of the report examines the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's (FCDO's) performance in responding to sudden-onset crises and how it learns lessons. In particular, it looks at:

- timeliness of response;
- measuring impact;
- costs and cost effectiveness; and
- learning and evaluation.

Timeliness of response

3.2 Timeliness is often critical in responding to sudden-onset humanitarian crises. A timely response can save lives, reduce costs and improve operational performance. For example, procuring relief items before prices rise, and avoiding travel and logistical bottlenecks. Early response also reduces the risk of emergencies becoming protracted, and the scale, duration and cost of response efforts required later. FCDO recognises the importance of timeliness in humanitarian contexts in its *Programme Operating Framework*, which sets out how FCDO programmes and projects should be managed.¹⁸ Maintaining the ability to deliver a fast response as funding reduces will require trade-offs, such as with geographic coverage, the number and scale of responses, and preparedness work.

¹⁸ Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, *FCDO Programme Operating Framework*, (viewed on 11 December 2025).

3.3 FCDO is able to respond to sudden-onset humanitarian crises in a timely manner. Our case studies show examples of FCDO responding quickly with different capabilities, whether delivering core relief items (CRIs) or deploying specialist teams or humanitarian expertise.

- The UK's International Search and Rescue team arrived in Turkey within 72 hours of the Turkey–Syria earthquake.
- Pre-funding of Start Fund Bangladesh enabled local non-governmental organisations to be identified within 72 hours of crisis alerts and funding disbursed within a further 24 hours during the August 2024 floods.
- Rapid deployment of six personnel and an initial delivery of CRIs to Jamaica within three days of Hurricane Melissa made the UK one of the first responders to the crisis (**Figure 13** on pages 42 and 43).

3.4 FCDO maintains a timely response despite facing challenges, including:

- difficulty in obtaining information in rapidly evolving contexts, as we heard about in the Rwanda Marburg virus disease case study;
- internal delays to decision making that can slow down FCDO's response;
- infrastructure disruption affecting operations, such as widespread damage to Jamaica's power and water systems during Hurricane Melissa; and
- concerns from some partners about FCDO staff turnover and insufficient handovers, which can reduce continuity.

Measuring impact

3.5 FCDO needs ongoing performance measurement to understand how effective its responses are. Relevant performance indicators include the speed or timeliness of a response, such as the time taken from the onset of a crisis to funding decisions, disbursement of funding, team deployments, or the delivery of CRIs. They also include the numbers of people reached or supported compared with plans. FCDO began centrally collating data on response indicators, including the number of beneficiaries reached, in September 2023. However, these data are limited to eight of the 11 sudden-onset humanitarian crises that the Humanitarian Crisis Response Department (HCRD) responded to since then. Monitoring is complicated by the varied contexts and organisations, the number of teams within FCDO involved in each crisis, and the speed with which FCDO has to respond.

3.6 FCDO uses performance frameworks and annual reviews of its core humanitarian response programmes to monitor the performance of its partners. The reviews focus largely on programme delivery and compliance. FCDO has indicators on speed of deployments, such as a 12-hour mobilisation target for Palladium and a critical 72-hour time period for the deployment of the International Search and Rescue team. The data on programme delivery is not sufficient to enable FCDO to fully consider how well its partners' deployable capabilities have responded to individual crises. Notwithstanding the gaps in central data, our case studies show examples of rapid mobilisation of expertise, delivery of CRIs and quick provision of funding to local organisations to save lives.

3.7 FCDO has also been able to exert strategic influence and positive impact over its partners, other humanitarian organisations, and the global humanitarian system, for example by:

- taking a leading role in the response to Hurricane Melissa, including the rapid deployment of Palladium's humanitarian expertise;
- influencing local organisations in Bangladesh, including Start Fund Bangladesh and CARE Bangladesh, whose approaches have shaped national disaster-management processes, for example for floods; and
- acting as a key donor and advocate for anticipatory funding in the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund.

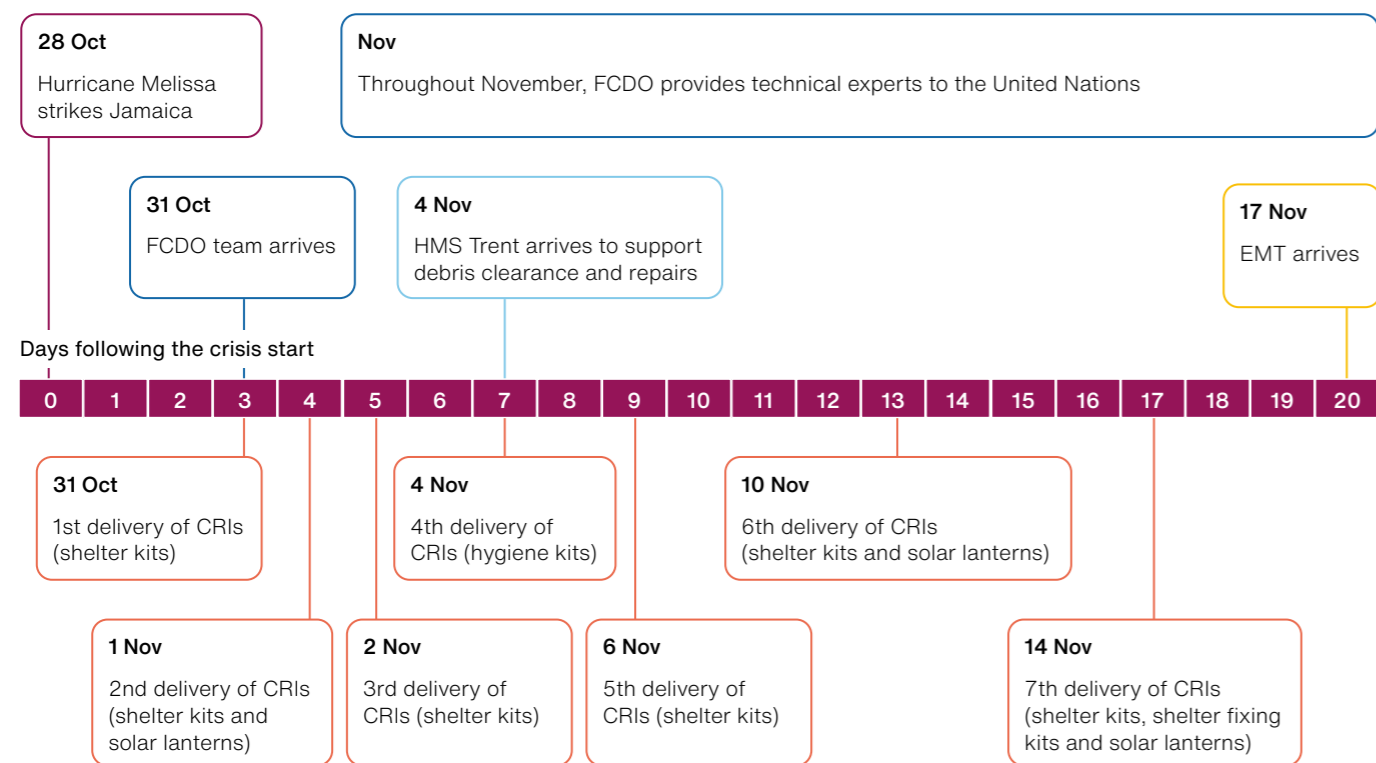
Costs and cost effectiveness

3.8 FCDO tracks Official Development Assistance (ODA) spending for long-term programmes, including humanitarian ones, but it does not centrally track all costs of responding to sudden-onset humanitarian crises. While allocations from the Humanitarian Crisis Fund are monitored centrally, spending reprioritised from existing budgets is not. This is due to posts and regions managing their own spending and to limitations in how FCDO's accounting system is configured to track spending. FCDO had to do in-depth work with overseas posts to provide us with budget and cost data for HCRD supported crisis responses (**Figure 14** on page 44). This lack of comprehensive cost data held centrally limits FCDO's ability to assess the cost-effectiveness of HCRD and its partners' capabilities. FCDO therefore cannot assess the overall value for money of its interventions or make informed trade-offs between different response options as resources become more constrained.

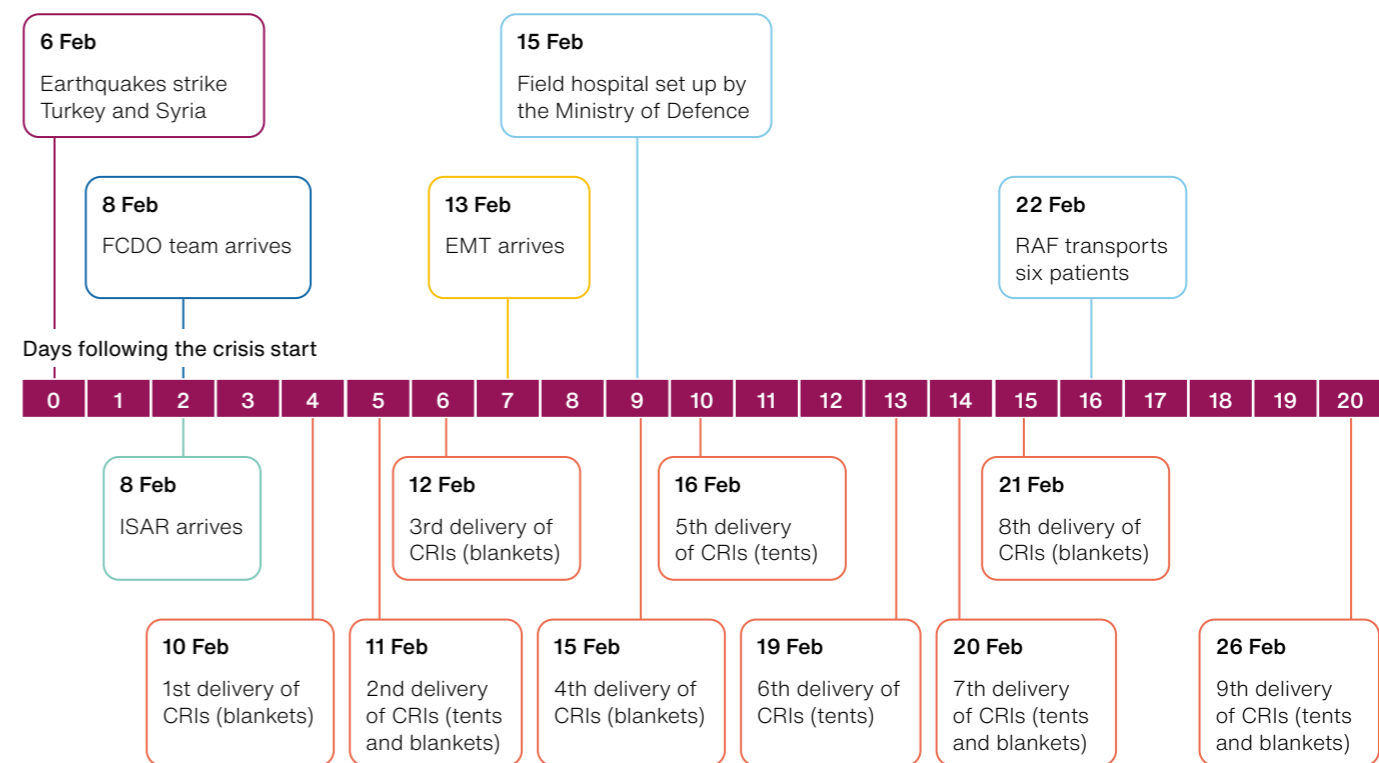
Figure 13
 Timeline for the immediate UK responses to Hurricane Melissa in Jamaica (2025)
 and the Turkey–Syria earthquake (2023)

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), working with other government departments and organisations, worked quickly to provide aid to Turkey, Syria and Jamaica following each natural disaster

Hurricane Melissa October – November 2025



Turkey–Syria Earthquake – February 2023



- Crisis
- Support from other government departments
- Advisers and expertise
- Emergency Medical Team (EMT)
- Core relief items (CRIs)
- International Search and Rescue (ISAR)

Notes

- 1 FCDO also contributed to both responses through multilateral organisations that it funds.
- 2 Core relief items (CRIs) include physical items such as tents, blankets, hygiene kits and solar lanterns.
- 3 Timelines only include the first 20 days of support provided by FCDO.

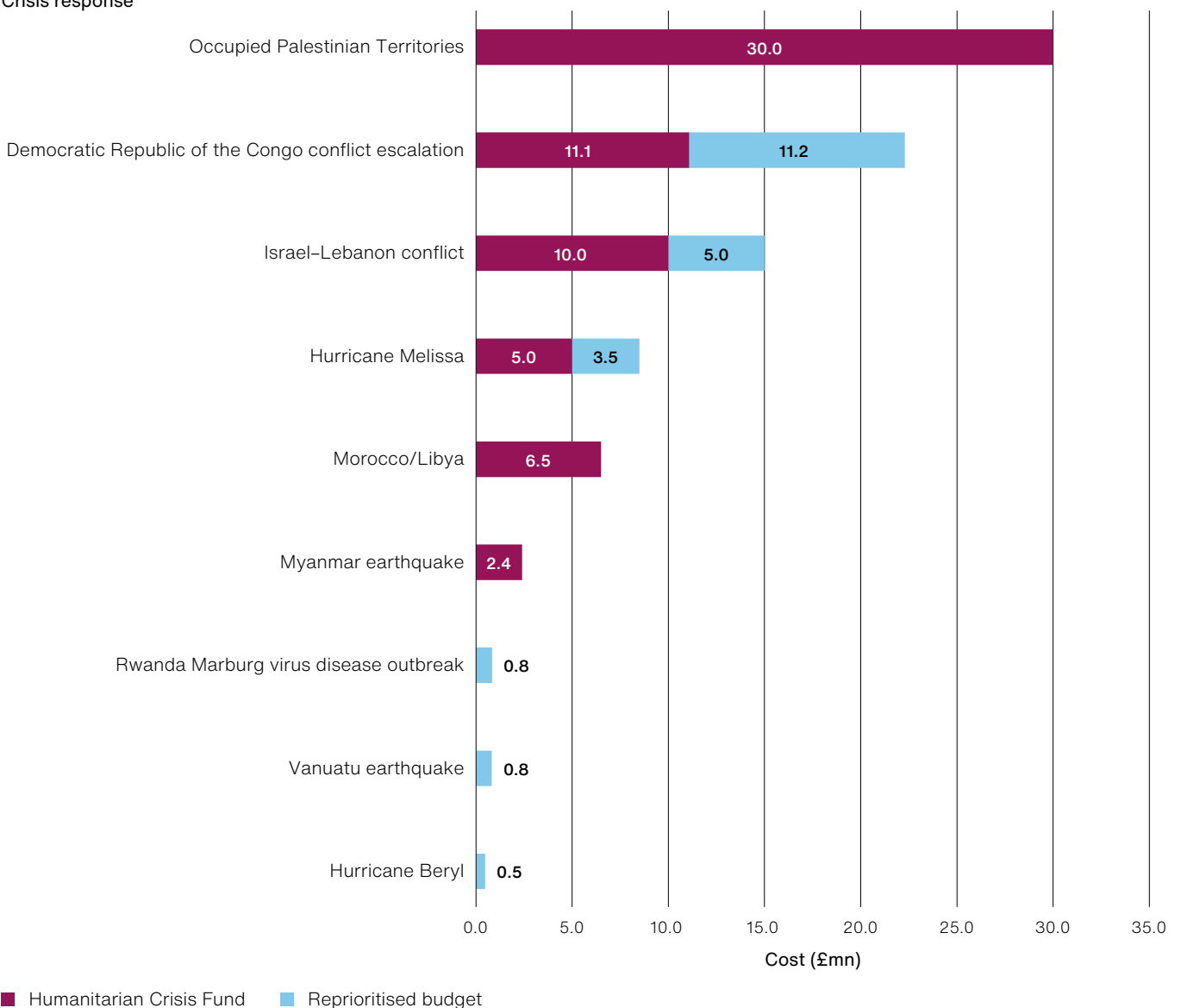
Source: National Audit Office analysis of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office data

Figure 14

Cost of individual Humanitarian Crisis Response Department (HCRD) supported responses to sudden-onset humanitarian crises, 2023-24 to 2025-26

Some HCRD supported responses to sudden-onset humanitarian crises are reliant entirely on the Humanitarian Crisis Fund, and some make use of reprioritised post or regional budgets

Crisis response



Notes

- 1 This figure only includes responses supported by HCRD. HCRD leads on UK responses to sudden-onset humanitarian crises. The figure does not include crises that were responded to entirely at post level, and some crises which had a cost of £0.
- 2 Costs consist of allocations from the Humanitarian Crisis Fund and reprioritised post or regional budgets. This does not include all uses of the Humanitarian Crisis Fund. The costs do not include staff costs relating to crises or the ongoing costs of maintaining the capabilities provided by HCRD.
- 3 Spending in 2025-26 is provisional.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office data

Learning and evaluation

Learning

3.9 Learning from previous crises is essential for improving the speed, quality and coordination of FCDO's humanitarian responses. Sudden-onset crises often involve high-pressure decisions, such as whether to deploy and how to coordinate activity, which directly affect the effectiveness of a response. A structured approach to capturing, sharing and learning from lessons ensures that performance is improved, experience is not lost, and repeated challenges can be addressed. FCDO recognises the importance of learning and applying lessons, and this underpins its principle that all of its programmes should be evidence-based.

3.10 FCDO has several mechanisms for learning lessons from sudden-onset humanitarian crises, including:

- **post-crisis learning reviews**, which gather views from teams in the UK and at post: FCDO carried out lessons learned reviews for each of our five case studies;
- a **central lessons log**, where validated lessons can be searched by crisis, type of lesson or audience; and
- a **humanitarian response lessons and actions board**, which oversees follow-up actions across HCRD and Palladium and considers recurring lessons from recent responses.

3.11 Lessons learned exercises are also conducted by the Crisis Management Department, delivery partners and overseas posts. FCDO's lessons learned exercises were focused mainly on operational processes. We saw examples of learning being applied in subsequent responses: lessons that FCDO learned from hurricane responses in the Caribbean informed it to deploy a humanitarian field team during Hurricane Melissa more quickly; and following the earthquake in 2023, FCDO's Syria post developed a crisis management plan as a result of a recommendation from the post-crisis learning review.

3.12 HCRD collates lessons to identify recurring lessons. However, there is limited evidence that these recurring lessons have been monitored or acted on in a way that has led to subsequent improvement or consolidated into an accessible resource for posts and regions. **Figure 15** overleaf summarises recurring lessons identified by FCDO, including the need for clearer communication of the HCRD offer to posts.

Figure 15

Recurring lessons from responses to sudden-onset crises identified by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)

FCDO and its partners have identified a number of recurring lessons which could improve future responses

Recurring lesson	Potential impact on future responses
There is a hesitancy to pre-deploy or rapidly deploy field teams or capabilities on the 'go big and pare back' basis.	Pre-deployment can improve logistics handling, early strategic mapping of partners, anticipatory action with government, early information, and analysis provided back to centre.
There is a need for clear and timely communication of the Humanitarian Crisis Response Department (HCRD) and Palladium capability offer to posts.	Without timely communication, the response to crises is slower, and the quality of HCRD's support offer is compromised.
There is a need to ensure better communication of key humanitarian messages across FCDO.	Communication of key messages can improve decision making, consistency of information, and sharing of information on capabilities and experts.
There needs to be better management of humanitarian staff shifts and the transition to FCDO's crisis mode.	Improved transition would support efficient decision making and identification of skills and knowledge gaps.
There can be a lack of capacity of posts to coordinate a response.	More capacity and better coordination could lead to more effective deployment of aid and expertise.

Note

- 1 HCRD leads sudden-onset humanitarian crisis response centrally for FCDO. Palladium International Ltd provides FCDO with technical and operational expertise.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and its partners' documentation

Evaluation

3.13 Evaluation can provide an objective assessment of the effectiveness and value for money of a response and support decisions on prioritising resources. Although evaluation is not mandatory for every intervention, FCDO considers this an important part of improving its impact. However, its evaluation of the results of its sudden-onset crisis responses is limited.

3.14 Systematic evaluation is hindered by limited monitoring data on the speed, outcomes and effectiveness of responses. FCDO regions own the crisis risks in their region and have responsibility for reviewing and implementing lessons learned from previous crises, meaning that regions and posts are more likely to have a fuller view of the results. Where HCRD has commissioned external evaluations of its programmes that provide the core response capabilities, limitations in the monitoring data have also constrained their findings. As set out in paragraph 2.11, the external evaluation of the Humanitarian Emergency Response Operations and Stabilisation programme in 2023 reported significant gaps in monitoring data, which constrained its ability to assess the programme.¹⁹ Similarly, a 2026 external review of the Emergency Deployments Team 2 programme found that limitations in the information available made it difficult to evaluate the results it achieved.

3.15 In 2025, the International Development Committee reported that past ODA reductions saw cuts to monitoring, evaluation and learning budgets.²⁰ FCDO's internal audit work has also identified risks that monitoring programmes may be paused or deprioritised as a result of recent reductions in UK ODA. With further cuts planned, there is a risk that these activities may be constrained further. Without better monitoring data and evaluation, FCDO's ability to demonstrate the value for money of its response work and to make effective decisions on where to prioritise resources will be limited.

¹⁹ Integrity Research & Consultancy, *Independent Evaluation of the Humanitarian Emergency Operations and Stabilisation Programme*, May 2023 (viewed on 2 February 2026).

²⁰ House of Commons International Development Committee, *Assessing Value, Ensuring Impact: The FCDO's Approach to Value for Money in Official Development Assistance*, Seventh Report of Session 2024-26, HC 422, October 2025, page 2 (viewed on 20 April 2026).

Appendix One

Our audit approach

Our scope

1 This report examines whether the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) responds effectively to sudden-onset humanitarian crises. Such crises require rapid decisions on whether and how the UK should intervene, and a surge of funding, staff and specialist capabilities to provide a response. These demands can place pressure on FCDO's capacity and funding, creating risks to value for money. In this report, we examined:

- FCDO's strategy and approach to sudden-onset humanitarian crisis response;
- FCDO's humanitarian capacity and core capabilities needed to continue responding; and
- the cost, speed and impact of FCDO's responses and the extent to which it evaluates and learns lessons from previous crises.

2 FCDO carries out a broad range of activities in support of its objectives for responding to sudden-onset humanitarian crises. We made initial enquiries into all significant areas and then focused more on those areas where either it was a main part of the response, or there appeared initially to be more risks to value for money.

3 More generally, we have not examined FCDO's management of long-term Official Development Assistance (ODA) programmes, or foreign policy or consular responses which do not have a significant humanitarian dimension.

4 We reached our conclusions based on our analysis of evidence collected between November 2025 and May 2026.

Our evidence base

Interviews

5 We conducted around 20 interviews with FCDO officials selected because of their job role and experience managing responses to sudden-onset humanitarian crises. This meant interviewees were primarily from FCDO's Humanitarian Crisis Response Department (HCRD). Most interviews were conducted online, and we tailored interviews to the role of the person being interviewed.

6 We interviewed representatives from other organisations including:

- Bond;
- the Disasters Emergency Committee;
- H2H Network;
- the Independent Commission for Aid Impact;
- the International Committee of the Red Cross;
- Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority;
- Palladium International Ltd;
- Start Network;
- UK-Med; and
- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, including the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund secretariat.

Document review

7 We carried out detailed analysis of over 240 relevant FCDO documents in response to our evidence request. These were reviewed against our study questions on strategy, resources and capability, and implementation. Documents included guidance, board papers, business cases, and annual reviews.

Data analysis

8 We analysed data FCDO provided to us such as the number of humanitarian advisers across the overseas network, and costs for responses over the last three years. We also analysed publicly available data from sources such as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Case studies

9 We conducted case studies of five sudden-onset humanitarian crises to illustrate and test our findings from document review and interviews. These case studies were designed to provide in-depth understanding of how FCDO planned for, delivered and managed its responses in different contexts. We physically visited one overseas post and conducted the remaining case studies virtually. For each case study, we interviewed FCDO staff at the overseas post and/or region, including humanitarian advisers and programme managers, and delivery partners who supported on the responses. We also reviewed relevant documentation and analysed available data to examine FCDO's preparedness, decision making, capacity and capability at post, the use of central capabilities, costs, timeliness and reported impacts. The case studies were conducted between January 2026 and March 2026.

10 The case studies were selected to provide coverage across different types of sudden-onset crises, geographic regions and response models, and to reflect variation in FCDO's response. Selection criteria included the nature and severity of the crisis, regional context, the extent to which central capabilities and partners were used, and the availability of evidence. We examined each case study against a consistent analytical framework, drawing together interview evidence, documentation and data.

11 These case studies are illustrative rather than representative. They cover a small number of crises, but they do not capture the full range of contexts or responses across FCDO's portfolio. Evidence availability also varied between case studies, particularly for data on costs and impacts.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

12 We made limited and targeted use of AI to support specific analysis and drafting. This included; to review and analyse selected documentation, to draw out themes and insights across documents, interviews and case study material, and to support drafting text in line with National Audit Office standards. All outputs generated by AI were subject to review and validation by the audit team.

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