




# Humanitarian logistics: going the last mile

**T**he United Nations predicts that conflict will remain the main cause of humanitarian need in 2018, with natural disasters also causing many people to need emergency support; 135 million people globally will be affected by crises, requiring more funding than ever before to provide assistance. To meet this huge demand, a more dynamic, innovative and robust approach is required internationally and locally.

Logistics is the backbone of humanitarian operations and can represent between 60 and 80% of humanitarian expenditure. The efficiency, quality, capability and effectiveness of any action will be directly proportional to the capacity, competence and preparedness of humanitarian logistics teams. There is a recognised need to respond each year to natural disasters, such as the hurricanes that occurred last year in the Caribbean, and last mile deliveries must be adaptable and flexible if the international aid community is to remain effective and relevant. The problem is, that it is difficult to predict exactly when or where disasters will strike, or how many people will be affected.

While humanitarian logisticians are prepared to react to a diverse range of events, they must continue to tackle numerous protracted (and often forgotten) crises in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Darfur and Somalia, as well as in Syria and Yemen. Although the humanitarian logistics sector has developed its capabilities in recent years, it still faces challenges with localising response capacities, striking the correct balance between international support and national response, and investing in preparedness to improve the quality and effectiveness of emergency operations. The humanitarian sector increasingly needs private sector expertise to leverage innovative technologies and tools to forecast demand, develop virtual supply chains and transparently share data and information.

Over the past decade, humanitarian logistics has become a recognised term and a critical service. Logisticians face many challenges due to the frequency, intensity and impact of disasters, but also because investment in building capacity and recognition for the profession is still limited. There is therefore a further opportunity to build on the recognised synergies between commercial and humanitarian logistics activities. In turn, this will leverage capacities that are a fundamental component of local communities affected by crises. Private sector actors are present before emergencies occur and as these unfold they are among the first part of society to respond. Commercial operators often work directly in humanitarian contexts or indirectly through supply chains, and can leverage expertise, resources and influence to address humanitarian needs and make positive contributions to long-term solutions. They can do so independently by working directly with people affected by disaster, as well as by collaborating with humanitarian organisations at the local, regional and international levels.

The Humanitarian Logistics Association welcomes the opportunity to introduce this special edition of *Focus*. Our aim is to build a community of practice for advancing the profession, through the promotion of cross-organisation knowledge sharing, training and collaboration. We hope that the articles in this issue demonstrate that we are making progress. 

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## HUMANITARIAN LOGISTICS IN NUMBERS

**60-80%**

OF HUMANITARIAN EXPENDITURE IS  
SPENT ON LOGISTICS

**135.7**

MILLION PEOPLE IN THE WORLD  
REQUIRE AID

**90.9**

MILLION PEOPLE ARE PROJECTED TO  
RECEIVE AID IN 2018

**\$22.5**

BILLION OF FUNDING NECESSARY TO  
HELP THOSE IN NEED

**40.3**

MILLION PEOPLE ARE LIVING IN CONFLICT  
AND VIOLENCE-RELATED DISPLACEMENT

**1.7**

BILLION PEOPLE AFFECTED BY NATURAL  
DISASTERS IN LAST 10 YEARS