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Redefining humanitarian pathways for giving

In recent years, the world has witnessed an alarming increase in the frequency and intensity of crises. From natural disasters, such as floods, earthquakes, and wildfires, to man-made disasters, like armed conflicts and large-scale displacements, these events have profoundly impacted millions of lives. Climate change has exacerbated many of these issues, leading to prolonged droughts, severe storms, and rising sea levels, which threaten vulnerable communities. Meanwhile, geopolitical tensions and economic instability have resulted in escalating refugee crises, food insecurity, and widespread poverty.

Humanitarian needs have reached an unprecedented scale, and organisations like the Red Cross play a crucial role in providing relief and support. As the demands on their resources continue to grow, it is essential to respond effectively to immediate crises while also preparing for inevitable future challenges to ensure lasting impact. This requires a collective approach where individuals, communities, and organisations come together to make a difference.

How we, as individuals, can help

In times of crisis, individual action matters. People can contribute in numerous ways, depending on their circumstances, skills, and

resources. Volunteering is one of the most direct and impactful ways to help. Whether assisting in local shelters, distributing aid, or offering professional expertise like medical care or counselling, volunteers are the backbone of many humanitarian operations.

People can play crucial roles in various community efforts. For example, in areas prone to wildfires, like Australia, community members often engage in preparatory activities such as clearing vegetation around homes, creating firebreaks, or participating in local fire response training. This hands-on assistance significantly reduces the risk and impact of wildfires. Similarly, during extreme weather events, communities come together to establish resilience programs. In flood-prone areas, individuals might help with sandbagging or reinforcing levees, while in regions affected by hurricanes, they assist in securing homes and public spaces.

Another impactful way to contribute is through skills-based volunteering. This might include offering free mental health support to trauma-affected individuals, tutoring children displaced by conflict, or providing logistical support during emergencies. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many volunteers delivered groceries to the elderly or helped run local food banks to

address widespread hunger. Moreover, participating in blood donation drives remains vital in addressing medical emergencies, as organisations like the Red Cross constantly appeal for donations to maintain adequate blood supplies. Each of these actions demonstrates how individual efforts, no matter how small, can have a significant collective impact during crises.

Giving is a powerful way to help. While financial donations are often critical, there are many other forms of giving. In-kind donation of goods, such as food, clothing, or medical supplies, can directly meet the immediate needs of affected communities. Some people offer their homes as temporary shelters, while others provide logistical support, such as transportation or communication tools. For instance, providing clean water or mobile charging stations can make a huge difference. Every contribution, no matter its form, can make a significant impact.

Additionally, businesses can contribute by offering their services or products. For instance, logistics companies might provide transportation support, while manufacturers could donate necessary equipment or materials. These contributions can reduce operational costs and improve response times during emergencies. The American Red Cross highlights that non-monetary donations are crucial in meeting the immediate needs of communities during disasters.

Another impactful form of giving is the donation of time through digital volunteering. With advancements in technology, individuals can assist remotely by participating in activities such as crisis mapping, data analysis, and information dissemination via online platforms. This support enhances situational awareness and facilitates better decision-making during crises. Organisations like the Red Cross utilise digital volunteers to monitor social media for

urgent requests, translate information, and support communication efforts. Digital volunteering expands the reach of humanitarian aid without the need for physical presence.

Challenges of giving money across cultures

Despite the critical need for funding, giving money can be fraught with cultural and religious complexities. Different communities hold varying beliefs about how and when financial assistance should be provided, which can shape attitudes toward donating to formal organisations.

For instance, in some Western cultures, there is a strong tradition of direct philanthropy, where donors expect transparency and clear accountability from charities. People often want to know exactly how their money will be used and may withhold donations if they perceive a lack of clarity. Similarly, in countries with high levels of government corruption, mistrust can lead individuals to prefer direct aid—giving money or goods personally to those in need rather than through institutions.

In cultures where gift-giving is deeply symbolic, the act of giving can be about more than just material support. For example, in many Asian societies, charitable giving is closely tied to family and community obligations. Money given as a gift may carry social or spiritual significance, reinforcing bonds within a community. In such contexts, formalised giving to large organisations may feel impersonal and disconnected from these traditional values.

Religious beliefs also play a significant role in shaping attitudes toward giving. For instance, in Christian traditions, particularly in the context of tithing, where individuals are encouraged to donate a portion of their income to the church or charity as an act of faith. However, some may feel that institutional giving is less impactful than personal acts of generosity.

Giving and Islamic cultural practices

In Islamic cultures, the concept of giving is deeply rooted in religious teachings. Charitable giving is seen as a moral and spiritual obligation, with specific practices such as zakat (mandatory almsgiving), sadaqah (voluntary charity), and waqf (endowment for public benefit). Zakat, one of the Five Pillars of Islam, requires Muslims to donate a fixed portion of their wealth annually to support the less fortunate. This practice not only helps those in need but also purifies the giver's wealth and soul.

However, certain challenges arise when it comes to formalising these practices through modern organisations. For many Muslims, trust and transparency are paramount. Donors want to ensure that their contributions are used in

accordance with Islamic principles, which prioritise direct aid to the poor and vulnerable. Some may hesitate to give to organisations they perceive as insufficiently aligned with these values, especially if the use of funds is not clearly communicated.

Furthermore, cultural nuances can affect the way giving is perceived. In some Islamic communities, the preference is for personal or local acts of charity, where the impact is visible and immediate. There may also be concerns about whether funds donated to non-Islamic organisations will be used appropriately, especially when addressing crises in predominantly Muslim regions.

The Red Cross Challenge: Redefining humanitarian pathways for giving

Humanitarian organisations like the Red Cross strive to engage more effectively with diverse communities to sustain and expand their mission. Among these, Islamic communities worldwide have a long-standing tradition of charitable giving deeply rooted in religious and cultural practices. However, despite this alignment of values, there can be gaps in how these communities perceive and connect with formal humanitarian organisations.

To bridge this gap, the Netherlands Red Cross seeks innovative approaches to foster stronger relationships with Islamic communities and individuals, and to encourage greater participation.

Your challenge is to design a service that makes giving—whether through donations or financial contributions—more accessible and aligned with Islamic values. The service should reflect core principles such as compassion, transparency, and community support while addressing cultural and practical barriers. This is an opportunity to create a culturally sensitive, user-centred design that builds trust and strengthens connections between the Red Cross and Islamic communities.

The objectives

- **Empathy building:** Conduct research to understand the specific motivations, cultural nuances, and priorities of Islamic communities concerning charitable giving.
- **Building trust:** Design strategies to raise awareness and build trust within the Islamic communities around the Red Cross' humanitarian efforts.

- **Ease/Joy of giving:** Develop an engaging, empowering, sustainable, and easy-to-use/accessible service that is culturally appropriate, supporting both digital (remote) and in-person financial contributions.
- **Openness and transparency:** Design mechanisms that allow donors to fully understand and, therefore, also feel responsible for the impact of their contributions, ensuring accountability.

Design principles

When designing your solution, consider these principles inspired by the challenge's core values:

- **Design for empathy:** Understand the lived experiences and values of Islamic communities to create authentic, meaningful solutions.
- **Design for trust and transparency:** Build mechanisms that demonstrate accountability and ensure contributions align with donor values.
- **Design for inclusivity:** Ensure the service accommodates a wide range of cultural, socioeconomic, and technological contexts.
- **Design for ease of use:** Create an intuitive and seamless experience that inspires joy in giving.
- **Design for empowerment:** Enable individuals to take ownership of their giving journey, becoming advocates for humanitarian efforts within their communities.
- **Design for sustainability:** Focus on eco-conscious practices in the giving process, reducing waste and environmental impact while ensuring efficient use of resources.

Questions to consider

- How can your solution **reflect Islamic values** such as compassion, community support, and transparency?

- What innovative strategies can you employ to **foster trust** between the Red Cross and Islamic communities?
- How might technology be leveraged to make giving more **accessible and engaging**?
- How can your design accommodate diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts while maintaining **personal relevance**?

Your mission

As a design student, you have the opportunity to tackle this real-world challenge. Your work can help humanitarian organisations better connect

with diverse communities, creating sustainable and inclusive support systems. This is a chance to apply your skills in empathy and innovation, contributing to the global effort to address crises and support vulnerable populations. Join us in crafting solutions that make a lasting impact and empower the Red Cross to continue its vital mission!

About the Red Cross

This is a challenge offered to you by [the Netherlands Red Cross](#). The Red Cross is a global humanitarian organisation committed to providing critical assistance during emergencies, including natural disasters, conflicts, and public health crises. Established in 1863, the Red Cross operates impartially to deliver essential aid worldwide, offering vital resources such as medical care, food, water, and shelter to those affected.

The Netherlands Red Cross is part of this international network, working both locally and globally to support vulnerable communities. In the Netherlands, The Red Cross provides targeted support through cash and voucher assistance, emergency shelter, and other crucial

services to help individuals and communities recover and regain stability. During local crises such as floods and severe weather events, our teams mobilise quickly, deploying volunteers and resources to aid those in need.

We are also dedicated to fostering preparedness and resilience. Through first aid training and educational programmes, the Netherlands Red Cross equips individuals with essential skills to respond effectively in times of crisis.

