Corporate Volunteering and Disasters

Given the increasing number and severity of natural and human-made disasters, it is imperative that companies determine the most appropriate roles they can play – and where volunteering can best make a difference.
Major Takeaways

- **Now** is the time for companies to plan, prioritize and prepare for future disasters. The worst time to build disaster-related partnerships is after a disaster happens. Impactful partnerships take time to develop, build trust, define roles and be prepared for activation.

- Many engagements with disaster situations will require companies to volunteer as an institution through not only contributions of financial support, seconded employees and goods and services, but also the encouragement of and support for employees to volunteer both on company time and their own time. Companies need to have plans in place for that broad response.

- For global companies, an important reality is that their own employees may be directly impacted by disasters. They must plan to support their own people and families, perhaps through company volunteers, as well as the broader community.

- Many disasters have a long-term impact. Companies have to decide, case by case, the length of their commitment. Is it only until the media leaves at the end of the emergency response phase, or is it through long-term recovery?

- Humanitarian organizations are clear: the corporate volunteers they need are those who have been trained and are practiced in specific aspects of emergency response. These organizations stress that untrained spontaneous volunteers often are more hindrance than help and may complicate response efforts.

There is no avoiding the obvious reality that natural and human-made disasters are worsening throughout the world, many as a result of the growing impact of climate change. Already the lives of tens of millions of people are being affected and most forecasts suggest the worst is yet to come. As a matter of self-preservation, countries, communities, companies and other institutions must prepare for that inevitability. As a reflection of their humanitarian obligations, all companies must be willing to take steps toward mitigation wherever possible; they must be prepared to respond immediately; and they must be willing to assist with long-term recovery wherever disaster strikes.

This chapter is based both on interviews conducted over the course of the current research as well as 10 years of engagement with global companies and international humanitarian relief organizations on issues of volunteer involvement and partnership development related to disaster mitigation, relief and recovery.
Global companies – with people, facilities, supply chains and customers around the world – have a particular imperative to develop clear policies and partnerships and put in place mitigation strategies, emergency response and long-term recovery plans well in advance. They also must be clear about their institutional commitment to help others confronting disaster – in their own communities and beyond. Not only is it in companies’ immediate self-interest to do so, it also demonstrates responsiveness to expectations of employees, customers and society as a whole. That is, given their immense resources, they can and will do something!

That help can take multiple forms:

- Philanthropic commitments through contributions of money and donated goods.
- Institutional volunteering through donated services by employees who have stepped forward to participate, loaned personnel, pre-planned and focused skills-based commitments around specific pre-identified needs.
- Encouragement, facilitation and support for volunteering by employees, retirees and their families in disaster-related activities through released time and expense reimbursement.

All of these call for clear strategic and tactical decisions, advance planning and building sustained relationships with key partners that can facilitate and multiply the impact of what a company can do.

This chapter explores the major issues related to corporate volunteering in disasters: partnership development, helping communities prepare for disasters, company engagement in “close-to-home” disasters, specialized disaster response skills, recovery assistance and support for mitigation programs.
The term “humanitarian organization” in this chapter refers to the panoply of local and global nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and humanitarian agencies directly engaged in one or more of the action phases related to disasters. Notable examples include the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and United Nations agencies like the World Food Program and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA).

For the past 10 years, IAVE has been leading a series of facilitated dialogues between companies, humanitarian organizations and intergovernmental agencies on the topic of disaster-related corporate volunteering. This work began in London in 2012 with *Leading Together in the Face of Disasters: The Global Dialogue on Corporate-NGO Volunteer Partnerships*. It continued in subsequent years with the IAVE Research Working Group on Disaster-Related Corporate Volunteering, and gatherings specific to the topic such as the 2016 forum in Berlin, Corporate Response to the Refugee Challenge. This chapter is informed by these conversations in addition to company and humanitarian organization interviews conducted specifically for this research report.
The Phases of Engagement

Although there are multiple conceptual models for defining actions related to disasters, they generally include three major phases. Each offers an opportunity for corporate involvement and leadership, from the community level to global.

**Preparedness**

Developing the knowledge, skills, partnerships, processes and required resources needed to react to and manage an emergency – and ensuring that employees and their families are well-informed and ready to respond if needed. This includes actions focused on mitigation, those done in anticipation of disasters, reducing the possibility of something harmful happening or mitigating the harmful effects if it does.

**Response**

The first phase of engagement during and immediately after a disaster, usually driven by highest priority emergency needs, focusing on saving lives and caring for those impacted.

**Recovery**

Begins with assessment of need, helps people and communities begin to return to a “new normal,” ensures vital systems are being restored. Ideally, this morphs into sustained effort, often over years, to rebuild lives, property and community systems through significant, sustained investment and action.

Humanitarian organizations urge companies that are not disaster-focused to prioritize preparedness and recovery, leaving response to those trained to engage. This may include loaned personnel and volunteers from companies who have been trained and are practiced in specific aspects of emergency response. However, these organizations stress that untrained spontaneous volunteers often are more hindrance than help and may complicate response efforts.
Building and Sustaining Partnerships

While humanitarian organizations, NGOs, governments and companies need each other in disaster situations, the reality is that they have different business models and value sets that may not quickly and easily mesh. Each may be suspicious of the motives of the other in seeking partnership. Each may be concerned that their expertise and experience will be discounted by the other. Each may initially overlook the potential for win-win partnerships.

Humanitarian organizations may be dubious about whether corporate volunteers bring needed levels of skills, time and knowledge. They may also question whether volunteers will still want to be engaged after the cameras quit rolling and the media rushes to the next newsworthy event or whether companies with which they partner will respect the organization’s experience, knowledge, expertise and skills.

Similarly, companies may have doubts about the ability of humanitarian organizations to effectively manage their skilled employees, whether acting as volunteers or loaned personnel. They may have concerns as to whether an organization has the expertise and skills needed to manage a crisis situation or whether “partnership” is seen by those organizations mainly as a way to obtain financial support for their work.

All of these concerns are legitimate. But they underscore something that both organizations and companies engaging in humanitarian programs agree on: Attempting to build a successful, sustained partnership in the middle of a disaster is a recipe for failure. Partnerships depend on mutual respect and trust, on shared knowledge and experience, on well-defined roles and responsibilities, on processes that have been developed and practiced together. These are not developed overnight or in the heat of crisis.

Companies need to be very clear about why they want to be involved and what they propose to offer. They must listen to what the humanitarian organizations articulate as their needs, priorities and realities. It is essential for companies and organizations to enter into an ongoing dialogue that will shape what their partnership will look like, the roles each will play and how they will share planning, decision-making and resource allocation when they are working together. That discussion may well determine how the partners will assess and learn from their shared experiences.

Like all strong, enduring relationships, these partnerships take time to develop. They will inevitably encounter rough spots that require trust and open communication to manage. But there will also be opportunities to grow stronger through shared experiences in difficult times and circumstances.

Both companies and humanitarian organizations must be willing to invest time and energy, outside the maelstrom of an active crisis, to build a trust-based partnership that defines the work they will do together and the process through which they will accomplish that.
Humanitarian organizations need to understand that companies can bring much more than funds to the partnership. Skills-based employee volunteering can be a way for companies to increase their impact on specific problems. The utilization of skilled employees can also build capacity within those organizations and in communities. At the same time, these opportunities allow participating employees to practice their existing skills and learn new ones – contributing to their own professional development.

Skilled volunteers are valuable to organizations if their specific expertise is directly relevant to the work to be done in the field – logistics, communications, technology, healthcare, water and sanitation, for example, as well as anything else that can contribute in the recovery phase. Equally valuable is expertise that can improve preparedness: information technology, data collection and analysis, mapping, accounting and an understanding of financial markets.

While companies may feel both internal and external pressures to engage in the immediate response to disasters, unless they already have employee volunteers trained to fill specific roles in established partnerships with response-focused NGOs or government agencies, their best immediate contribution in fact may be a financial one. It is a way to offer employees an opportunity to give immediate help that the company will match in some way. Humanitarian organizations are clear, however, that the immediate impulse to send “stuff” that it is perceived that people will need is not helpful. It can lead to wasted time and money that can be better invested elsewhere and can negatively affect local commercial goods manufacturers and suppliers.

Humanitarian organizations are in agreement about not sending inexperienced volunteers without specific technical expertise into the field in a disaster as it can interfere with the organizations’ primary work and can put the volunteers in danger. But there are many other ways to engage “at home.” In addition to fund raising, corporate volunteers can help build public awareness of the scope and impact of the disaster and can become advocates on behalf of communities and people affected. Save the Children offers a full range of “at home” volunteer activities including preparation of emergency kits and providing backfill for headquarters staff as well as assistance with its Humanitarian Leadership Academy.

Employee residents in areas hit by disaster potentially can be very useful during the response phase, by offering their language skills and local knowledge to humanitarian organizations. Identifying employees willing to play such roles can be an important addition to company data bases of skills-based volunteers.
The Airbus Foundation program, which began in 2008, offers a good example how a program can evolve over time through co-creation and constant dialogue between the company and its NGO partners. The leaders of the Airbus Foundation determined that the organization could make the most significant impact by working with the humanitarian community in emergency response. At the outset, humanitarian partners looked to Airbus for funding, but they soon realized Airbus products and services could be even more useful. Airbus began optimizing flights, both commercial and cargo, to include humanitarian staff or goods for the World Food Program and the IFRC. Next, Airbus trained humanitarian community members to utilize their satellites to collect images so they could access the technology themselves to survey disaster scenes. The service has now evolved to the point where environmental organizations are also using the satellites to monitor developments on the ground related to climate change.

Initially Airbus offered “off the shelf” products and services but as they developed relationships with the humanitarian organizations, they started to co-create solutions. It started with 20 employees from the IFRC annually joining Airbus employees at the Airbus University, the company’s internal leadership development program. This resulted in lots of engagement between Airbus employees and IFRC employees. One outcome was that many Airbus employees were inspired to be trained as emergency responders and then began regularly volunteering in disasters.

Airbus employee volunteers started to work on challenges as identified by their humanitarian partners. They did this through the Airbus employee volunteer led Humanity Labs – a renowned center for innovation created by an employee. Volunteers work on their personal time to prototype inventions that then become open source. For example, the IFRC needed to redesign hand-washing stations to be portable for refugee centers. It became an internal contest with 13 teams of Airbus engineers competing to design the best portable hand washing station. The IFRC also needed mobile tents for decontamination. They brainstormed with Airbus volunteers to adapt an Airbus product for this purpose.

The company has a strong on-going partnership with the Kenyan Red Cross. In addition to helicopter and satellite use, they also work together on innovation. Recently they worked with Airbus volunteers on a water sanitation system that has been installed in seven sites in Kenya.
The Chinese insurance company, Ping An, has facilitated training for employees and the general public on how to respond to disasters. In 2019, the company developed the Ping An Guardians Program through a partnership between the company, Shenzhen Urban Public Safety and Technology Institute and the Shenzhen Public Safety Volunteers Association. By the end of 2019, 1,565 volunteers located in 19 cities were trained on emergency response and rescue techniques.

Manulife partners with the Canadian Red Cross and supports their work to improve the resilience of Canadian communities. The company’s financial support enables the pre-positioning of supplies in high-risk areas as well as the training of community-based disaster volunteers. Additionally, Manulife employee volunteers are trained through the Ready When the Time Comes program with basic first aid, logistics and organizing skills specific to supporting the Red Cross in emergency response and recovery activities.
When Disaster Hits Where Employees Live and Work

Frequently employees live in the vicinity of a disaster. Many times they are motivated to respond because it impacts their community, and also because they are familiar with the community’s needs. The Beirut, Lebanon port blast, on the 4th of August 2020, devastated the city and challenged a population already facing civil unrest as a result of food and fuel shortages, an ongoing socioeconomic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. The blast killed more than 178 people, left more than 6,500 injured, and left 300,000 people homeless. Much of the port – a critical lifeline for the import of food and medical supplies to the country – and the surrounding areas were leveled. Thousands of homes in the surrounding neighborhoods were damaged or destroyed, with windows and doors blown out.

Fattal employees immediately responded. Employees set out each day bringing juice, water, food, mops and brooms to those in need throughout the city. They also reached out to clients who were affected by the explosion. They continued to volunteer for three months after the explosion, helping to fill the gap in services until NGOs were able to take over.

Japan is highly vulnerable to earthquakes and tsunamis. Since 2011, Daigas Group (formerly Osaka Gas) employees have been supporting disaster-stricken areas with hands-on, on-site volunteer activities. They went to the areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake and Typhoon No. 12 in 2011, (the most powerful earthquake every recorded in Japan), the Kumamoto Earthquake in 2016, the Osaka North Earthquake and torrential rains in 2018, and Typhoon No. 19 in 2019. Employees worked to remove mud and debris and conduct general cleanup. A popular volunteer activity at Japanese disaster sites is greeting evacuees at the footbath. Evacuees wash and warm their feet in a small bathtub or washbasin with hot water while volunteers talk with them and sometimes give them a hand massage. This act of compassion and humanity is done to help evacuees relax and hopefully ease some of their anxiety.

In May 2020, Storm Amphan, a powerful and catastrophic tropical cyclone, caused massive destruction across Eastern India and in Bangladesh. Within five days and with the support of the Center Head of Kolkata (capital of West Bengal) and local NGOs, Cognizant employees set up collection boxes for employees to drop grocery items based on the predetermined list of the top 10 items needed by those impacted by the disaster. Some employees shared their residences as drop-off or collection points. According to the Cognizant volunteer leader: “It is interesting to see how at the time of any humanitarian crisis, the employees come together like magic.”

---

1 World Health Organization, https://www.who.int/emergencies/funding/appeals/lebanon-explosion-2020
**EDP’s** approach to disaster response with employee volunteers is a good example of a program that combines on-site hands-on and skills-based volunteering as well as behind the scenes collection and packing of goods.

In response to the horrific fires in Portugal in June 2017, EDP partnered with Doctors of the World Portugal to assist the population. Doctors of the World provides health care and psychosocial support in emergencies and also coordinates volunteer actions. This tragic fire burned 29,819 acres, killed 67 people, injured 250 and destroyed 500 homes. Three thousand EDP volunteers distributed hygiene kits, removed debris from homes, cleaned agricultural fields and pastures and replanted burned areas. Later, EDP employees used their architectural and electrical skills to rebuild homes that had burned.

When Cyclone Idai struck Mozambique in 2019, EDP partnered with the Support Mozambique Initiative to promote the collection of essential goods to send “Hope Backpacks” to help families that were most affected by the disaster. Thousands of EDP volunteers plus friends and family, prepared the backpacks and collected cooking utensils, non-perishable food, medicines and clothing for adults and children benefiting some 12,600 people.

The **Tata Group** has a long history of being at the forefront of disaster response in India and the region. The company’s philosophy, summed up by the head of the program is: “In India, you don’t write an impersonal check at the time of disasters, you get to the ground and act directly to benefit the community.” In 2014, the Group took steps to institutionalize its disaster response efforts and set up a dedicated Disaster Management team as a part of the Tata Sustainability Group (TSG).
The Tata response to disasters is led by two specialized cadres of volunteers – Project Managers and Procurement Officers. Project Managers lead on the ground relief operations and ensure timely implementation of the same. The Procurement Officers ensure high quality relief material is purchased locally at cost-effective prices and is packed on time to reach the victims of the disasters.

Additionally, through Tata Engage – the Group’s corporate volunteering platform – employees from Tata Group companies are called in during disasters to volunteer for response work. The Tata Group’s disaster response interventions start after the rescue phase of a disaster (usually after seven days after the disaster striking) and can continue until the rehabilitation phase for up to five years, depending on the scale of the disaster.

Based on availability and ability to commit a week to 10 days' time, volunteers sign up to join the Disaster Response (DR) team deployed in the field by the Tata Sustainability Group. Volunteers are given a brief orientation, following which they begin work in roles that are most suitable to them.

The Group seeks to work with local entities in order to best serve the interests of the affected communities. They have partnered with the government, the armed forces, other companies and several NGOs to ensure that support reaches the worst affected and most vulnerable. The activities carried out range from setting up community kitchens immediately after a disaster, to distributing relief kits and setting up health camps – even vaccinating cattle as a means to help sustain livelihoods.
Specialized Disaster Response Skills

While in most instances, it isn’t wise for corporate volunteers to travel to a disaster site, those well trained and with specialized skills are in a unique position to provide critical assistance. That is the case with some technology and telecommunications companies.

The Google.org Crisis Connectivity network currently has about 400 employees on the network roster with about 100 trained and ready to be deployed at a moment’s notice. Volunteers work closely with NGO partners, the Information Technology Disaster Resource Center (ITDRC) and NetHope, a consortium of over 60 leading global nonprofits that works with technology companies and funding partners “to design, fund, implement, adapt and scale innovative approaches to solve development, humanitarian, and conservation challenges.”

The Google.org network has a broad range of background experience, including former military and systems engineers. Both share a common motivation: to use the valuable skills that make them good at their job and help the best way they know how. Google employees use their tech skills to restore connectivity in disasters in critical locations around the world including shelters, clinics and schools.

In 2015, the Crisis Connectivity network started volunteering alongside NetHope on Project Reconnect to install Wi-Fi networks and device charging stations along the refugee route in various locations throughout Europe. In 2015, they deployed to Jordan, and to Greece; in 2017 to support the Syrian refugee crisis. It allowed refugees to reconnect and check-in with their families. It also facilitated access to education and information resources on the web and brought hope to refugees amid difficult circumstances and some comfort that they were not alone. The initiative helped an estimated 500,000 people.

After Hurricane Dorian struck the Bahamas in 2019, Google.org deployed volunteers on the Crisis Connectivity team. The team spent 80 person-days in the field, helping to bring back Internet connectivity in dozens of locations. Residents were able to access critical information, connect with family members and simply de-stress by going online.

The company is mindful that research continues to show that long-term support, particularly to local NGOs, is vital to a community’s recovery. Communities require ongoing, flexible funding to rebuild and to heal.

For 20 years, Ericsson Response has played a leading role in the UN Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC), a global network of organizations that work together to provide shared communications services in humanitarian emergencies. The key role of
Ericsson Response is to install and maintain temporary Internet connectivity until local services have sufficiently recovered or until increased capacity is no longer needed.

Carefully selected employees are short-listed and trained in Sweden for one week. When Ericsson Response volunteers arrive in a disaster zone, their role is to enable temporary voice and data connectivity so that humanitarian relief agencies can quickly coordinate their relief efforts. Ericsson Response works together with relief agencies, governments and local authorities to prioritize deployments in affected areas, using its telecoms skills and technology to bring together the appropriate aid organizations affected populations need. The program currently has around 150 volunteers globally. When the need arises, there is a clear mandate from the CEO to drop everything, get on a plane, carry the technical equipment and work on disaster response.

In partnership with the UN World Food Programme and Emergency Telecommunications Cluster, UNICEF, and Save the Children, Ericsson Response has provided connectivity support and technical expertise during more than 60 humanitarian missions in 40 countries around the world. These include such natural disasters as Hurricane Maria on the islands of Dominica and Puerto Rico and Cyclone Idai in Mozambique; medical emergencies like the Ebola crisis in West Africa; and protracted crises in places like South Sudan, Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

"As challenging as the conditions in the field often are, it is extremely rewarding to be able to work with fellow Ericsson volunteers to set up a communications infrastructure that enables the humanitarian workers to do their jobs more efficiently and effectively – thereby saving more lives."

Ericsson employee volunteer
Responding to Humanitarian Crises

In 2016 Telefónica volunteers rallied to meet the needs of refugees (from Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America). They worked to address the urgent needs of food and clothing as well as long-term needs such as integration into Spanish society. The company collaborated with recognized aid organizations with deep expertise on refugees such as UNHCR, the Spanish Red Cross and local organizations.

In eight months, 150 employees volunteered specifically to help the refugees through 20 different projects. Employees collected bikes for refugees, organized a joint bike ride and planned a bike repair clinic. Volunteers helped the newcomers learn the Spanish language and culture. Volunteers and refugees worked together to build urban gardens within a refugee residence. Employees located outside of Spain also helped through on-line volunteering in areas of communications, web design and translation.

Iberdrola volunteers have also been meeting the needs of refugees. Beginning in 2014, Iberdrola joined forces with the Dutch lighting company, Signify, to work with Alianza Shire and the European Union, on the Energy for All program to develop energy supply solutions that improve the services and quality of life for the refugee population in Ethiopia. The volunteers, for example, provided indoor lighting in community kitchens, primary schools and the women’s and girls’ health center. In December 2020, owing to military clashes between federal and regional forces in Tigray (Ethiopia), the Alianza Shire was forced to suspend the project.
At the Philam Foundation (AIA), disaster volunteering is a significant component of the company’s employee volunteer program and has led many employees to take interest in other forms of volunteering as well. They report that it is not at all difficult to motivate employees to respond to disasters. Perhaps this is unsurprising in a country such as the Philippines, which experiences frequent natural disasters. The company supports “community service leave” specifically for disaster response volunteering. According to the president of the Philam Foundation: “Filipinos as people are kind and have the spirit of service. Disaster volunteering is our way to expand volunteering in the country.”

Philam Paaralan, the Foundation’s flagship disaster program, includes partnerships with government departments and NGOs. The program supports the education of Filipino youth through the building of disaster resilient, well lit, well-ventilated, fully furnished classrooms complete with restrooms in calamity-stricken, unserved and underserved areas around the country. To date, in the past eight years, the Philam Foundation has built 217 classrooms for 40,000 students in disaster-hit areas.

Medtronic and its NGO partner, All Hands and Hearts, have worked together for years to address the immediate and long-term needs of communities hit by natural disasters. Medtronic supports relief efforts with products and supplies to support relief efforts in affected areas. They also enable employee volunteers, providing each employee five days of paid time off per year to volunteer with a nonprofit or non-governmental organization (NGO). They pride themselves on getting involved when the media attention for a particular disaster is gone. Over 200 Medtronic Foundation employee volunteers have joined All Hands and Hearts on eight different rebuilding programs, from Louisiana to Oaxaca, since 2017. According to one Medtronic volunteer: “I can give money to this and not know what’s going to happen with it; versus, I’m actually there making a difference. You get the experience to go out and meet the people you’re working for”.

Salesforce employees also help communities rebuild after a disaster. On September 7, 2017, an 8.5 magnitude earthquake struck Oaxaca, Mexico leaving thousands of families homeless and much of the area in ruins. Volunteers from Salesforce joined All Hands and Hearts for a week to rebuild a pre-school and a primary school. Afterwards, under the auspices of the Mi Casa Tu Casa program, volunteers joined local families in their homes for food and conversation.
Volunteers are also active in mitigating disasters, particularly those brought on by climate change.

**NCBA Bank** regularly funds nonprofits, but in 2017, amid a significant drought, they donated to the Kenya Red Cross which led to the development of a tree planting campaign. Through its *Change the Story* initiative, the company has launched a one million indigenous-tree nursery at Karura Forest. NCBA and its partners have planted over 7 million trees across Kenya including over 50,300 trees directly planted by NCBA staff. The Green Belt Movement (GBM) provides the seedlings and NCBA’s employees volunteer to plant them during the rainy seasons, early April to June and then October to December. The many tree planting activities assist with reforestation initiatives around the country and help reduce drought conditions, alleviate rising flood waters and reverse the effects of climate change in arid and semi-arid areas in Kenya.

**Marriott International** employees also support reforestation efforts. In 2019, Marriott associates and community members planted 1,500 mangrove trees in Thailand. Mangroves are important to the ecosystem. Their dense roots help bind and build soils and their aboveground roots slow down water flows and encourage sediment deposits that reduce coastal erosion and protect against flooding. Since 2013, more than 81,508 mangrove trees have been planted throughout Thailand.

Furthermore, Marriott continues to build on their 10+ year partnership with the Foundation of Amazon Sustainability (FAS) and the Government of Amazonas through the Juma REDD+ Project, which has worked to curb deforestation and associated greenhouse gas emissions in a 2,770-square-mile (7,174-square-kilometer) area with significant land-use pressure in Brazil’s northwestern Amazon rainforest.

In 2019, Marriott became a founding member of the Evergreen Alliance, a select group of Arbor Day Foundation partners and collaborators committed to advancing trees and forests as natural contributions to corporate sustainability and citizenship goals. Through this group, they have committed to support the planting of 100 million trees by 2022.
UPS: A Global Leader in Humanitarian Relief

UPS is well known for having one of the most inspiring and innovative corporate humanitarian relief programs in the world. They engage across the full cycle of response, relief and recovery in both natural and humanitarian crises, relying heavily on highly skilled employees who volunteer to participate and then receive released time from regular duties to do so. With management by and financial support from the UPS Foundation and in partnership with other logistics companies, UPS is a model of innovative global leadership.

A critical element in the UPS response to crises has been to work in partnership with other companies, international organizations and both global and national nonprofits. Most recently that has been through partnership with Zipline and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, a world leader in drone delivery to respond to critical medical needs. In Rwanda, 23% of maternal deaths are attributed to postpartum hemorrhage. Due to the region’s geographical landscape, a one-hour blood delivery by car could take four to six hours during the rainy season. In 2016, with the support of the Rwandan government, UPS partnered with Gavi and Zipline in developing a medical drone partnership to accelerate Rwandans’ access to lifesaving medical supplies.

In 2017, UPS logisticians volunteered to assist the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to implement best-in-class fleet management processes and, in 2019, they expanded the Gavi-Zipline drone program in Ghana, facilitating the first drone delivery of COVID-19 vaccines anywhere in the world. More than 50,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been delivered to rural clinics in Ghana via the UPS-Gavi-Zipline medical drone partnership.

The UPS Foundation has been supporting UNICEF’s work since 2000 through freight capacity for emergency response, technical expertise and cash contributions.
to supply chain improvement projects. Most recently, the two partners teamed up in a rapid logistics effort to send 3,000 oxygen concentrators to India in response to the 2021 spike in COVID-19 cases. This delivery was just the beginning of a response that saw UPS support the delivery of over 20,000 oxygen concentrators, ventilators and medical supplies to India.

UPS has been a leader in the Logistics Emergency Teams (LET) led by the United Nations World Food Program (WFP). The LET consists of logistics experts from UPS, Maersk, Agility and DP World. This cross-company partnership relies on employee volunteers with warehousing, transportation, and logistics expertise. Based all around the world, these teams are deployed within 48 hours of a humanitarian crisis. They identify logistical gaps and bottlenecks and together find a way to overcome them to re-establish broken supply chains in the aftermath of large-scale disasters. WFP has recognized the value of this unique collaboration: “One of the great things about the Logistics Emergency Teams is, you have companies that would normally compete coming together in one unit to assist the humanitarian community.”


In Europe, UPS has lent its assets, employee volunteers and expertise to provide over $3 million in the past three years to organizations providing aid to refugees. One hundred UPS employee volunteers have been supporting refugee relief in 15 countries, partnering with large global organizations as well as smaller local partners. Activities include delivering Christmas presents to children in camps in the Netherlands, building furniture out of wooden pallets in Belgium, setting up camps, providing transportation and local hospitality in Germany, distributing winter clothing in Austria and delivering warehouse items on a three-times-per-week schedule in Greece.
Corporate Volunteering for a Post-Pandemic World