



Hospital in Darfur, Sudan, 2004. Photo by Sandro Colombo

January – February 2024

Field Epidemiology for Humanitarian Crises: An Introductory Course

The faculty will include expert epidemiologists
with field experience in humanitarian settings

Participants will be able to present
and discuss case-studies

The course will be structured in three phases:

Online sessions

15 January to 9 February 2024: six sessions, 2 hours each,
16:00-18:00

Self-study

12 to 23 February 2024, 8 hours

Residential course

26 to 28 February 2024 – SERMIG, Torino (Italy)

Background: why this course?

In humanitarian crises affecting resource-limited countries, robust and timely public health information is often scarce, of poor quality and coverage. Its utility for assessing the severity and consequences of the emergency and guiding an effective humanitarian response is limited.

The capacity to interpret and use the available data, with their limitations, is, overall, limited, while the pressure to act is often strong.

Standard epidemiological methods often need to be adapted to humanitarian crises, due to time, security, resource constraints, and contextual factors. Worldwide, there are few courses where field epidemiology is taught. Few organisations have a dedicated structure of field epidemiologists who can be quickly deployed. This lack of epidemiological expertise has serious consequences when priority health needs are not adequately identified, the severity of the crisis is misjudged, and inadequate response strategies and interventions are designed and implemented. Timely and critical information can prevent avoidable mortality, morbidity, and suffering.

Furthermore, data on the health impact of conflicts are critical. They can inform political decision-making and public opinion about the humanitarian costs of wars. They can also highlight the prevention of wars as a public health priority.

Aim

The objectives of the course are:

- to introduce participants to key epidemiological concepts and methods relevant to humanitarian crises in resource-limited settings
- to improve their capacity to identify, examine, and interpret relevant secondary health and context-relevant data for defining health priorities, identifying appropriate interventions, and communicating effectively for decision-making and advocacy
- to improve their capacity to decide if and how primary data should be collected, and seek technical advice and support for implementing data collection
- to improve their ability to critically read and understand the literature in the field
- to improve their awareness on the role of health professionals in the prevention of wars

This course has an introductory scope. It is not intended, therefore, to equip participants to fully implement the appropriate epidemiological and public health methods for conflicts.

Structure and methodology

The course is field-oriented, drawing from the experience of the trainers and real examples from humanitarian contexts. It is structured in three phases:

1. Six 2-hour online sessions on basic concepts and methods relevant to humanitarian crises. The sessions will be recorded, but online active participation is encouraged
2. Self-study, based on the reading of a few key articles and the background of the simulation exercise
3. A three-day residential phase, including lectures (day one), a simulation group exercise (day 2), and selected participants' presentations on case studies -details to be communicated later on- (day 3).

Main topics

- The 'new' wars, their forms and the changing contexts; Public health consequences of conflicts
- Epidemiology in humanitarian crises: an overview of its objectives, scope, tools, and methods
- Epidemics: basic principles and concepts
- Statistical and epidemiological concepts relevant to humanitarian crises
- Key health indicators pertinent to crises: meaning, sources, utilisation

- Data interpretation and communication: general principles
- Review of available methods for collecting and using public health data in humanitarian crises
- Methodological challenges and innovations for epidemiology in humanitarian crises and study of migrant populations

Audience

The course is intended for epidemiologists and other health professionals (or professionals from related disciplines) working in or strongly interested in humanitarian assistance programs.

Requirements

- Basic knowledge of public health
- Commitment to attend all the sessions and to dedicate extra time for self-study
- Working knowledge of English
- Access to an internet connection to follow the online sessions
- Desired: working experience in humanitarian crises

How to apply

Interested applicants should send their updated CV, a short letter including 2-3 sentences to describe their motivation to participate in the course and one sentence to summarize their expectations to: aie.congressi@gmail.com, using as subject "Field epidemiology course: Application". A maximum of 30 applicants will be selected on the basis of the information provided.

- **Deadline** for the application: **10 December 2023**
- **Notification** of the course acceptance: **20 December 2023**

Teachers

The main teachers are epidemiologists, both practitioners and academics, with field experience in humanitarian settings, including Chiara Altare (John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health), Francesco Checchi (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine) **TBC**, Sandro Colombo (independent consultant, former WHO Medical Officer). Additional

teachers and trainers are involved in each session.

Venue

The residential part will be held in Torino at the Arsenale della Pace – SERMIG, Piazza Borgo Dora, 61 from 26 February 2024 at 11:00 to 28 February 2024 at 15:30.

Course fee

AIE supports the course by covering part of its costs. The course fee is 250 euros, reduced to 150 euros for participants aged less than 35 years, and AIE members. The fee covers the course material, coffee breaks and lunches. Dinners, accommodation and travel costs are not included. Each student should organise his or her travel plan and accommodation; students can book accommodation at the Arsenale della Pace at their own expense. Payment details will be provided after acceptance.

Contact address

Associazione Italiana di Epidemiologia (AIE), email aie.congressi@gmail.com

Preliminary Programme

Online sessions (h. 16:00-18:00)

15 January to 9 February 2024

1. Introduction
2. Refresher of relevant epidemiological and statistical concepts
3. Key data from/for humanitarian crises
- 4 & 5. Public health information in humanitarian crises: an overview of key methods and their use
6. Epidemics: basic concepts applied to field epidemiology

Self-study

12 to 23 February 2024

- Review of presentations
- Reading of 2-3 articles
- Reading of the simulation exercise's introduction and background

Residential course

26-28 February 2024

- **Day 1 – 26 February 2024 (11:00-18:00)**
Recap of the online and self-study sessions and Q&A; Method challenges and innovations for epidemiology in humanitarian crises and study of migrant populations
- **Day 2 – 27 February 2024 (9:00-18:00)**
Simulation exercise
- **Day 3 – 28 February 2024 (9:00-15:30)**
Selected participants' presentations and discussions of case studies; take-away lessons and course evaluation

Faculty and Organizers

Chiara Altare
Carla Ancona
Luigi Bisanti
Silvia Candela
Cristina Canova
Francesco Checchi (TBC)
Sandro Colombo
Pirous Fateh-Moghadam
Francesco Forastiere
Giovenale Moirano
Lorenzo Richiardi
Stefania Salmaso
Francesco Venturelli

Additional teachers and tutors have been contacted; their participation awaits confirmation.

The detailed programme will be shared with the selected participants prior to the start of the course