



Humanitarian  
Leadership  
Academy



# Humanitarian Operations Programme training in Poland

---

Case Study



# Background

Poland's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis stands out as a unique example of a locally led humanitarian response with an extraordinary level of mobilisation of the general population and involvement of non-traditional actors (private businesses, civil society, private citizens).

Polish well-established governance structures and social welfare system have allowed for a fast response, providing accommodation, and integrating refugees. The response was bolstered by public awareness and cultural connections between Poles and Ukrainians.

These factors have enabled Poland to demonstrate a compassionate and effective approach to addressing the needs of Ukrainian refugees, setting a notable precedent for how European countries can respond to humanitarian challenges.

The Humanitarian Leadership Academy's (HLA) mission is to enable local humanitarian actors to respond to crises by providing high-quality learning opportunities and strengthening civil society. To provide better support to the humanitarian responses around the globe, the HLA has six regional centres. Our Eastern Europe Regional Centre is based in Poland to support the Ukraine crisis response.



The [Humanitarian Operations Programme \(HOP\) Core](#) training covers the essential elements of setting up and running a humanitarian response such as conducting rapid needs assessments, proposal writing, conflict sensitivity programming, safeguarding in emergencies, wellbeing in emergencies, and gender equality.

This case study provides insights gathered after the HOP training in Poland in 2023. It is based on the feedback and reflections provided by three individuals who took part in the trainings, tracked for three months after completing the training. The second part of the study provides feedback from trainers, who took part in the HOP Training of Trainers (ToT) and later delivered the HOP Core training.

This study supports the HLA to better understand the HOP training from the participants' perspectives and highlights how local actors have put into practice knowledge acquired in the training. The study also helps to get a better understanding of the learning needs of less experienced humanitarian actors.

*“The HOP training has been an incredible experience, equipping me with valuable knowledge and skills that I have been able to apply directly to my work. The training has not only enhanced my understanding of the subject matter but also provided me with practical tools and strategies that have significantly improved my effectiveness in the field. The collaborative and interactive nature of the training allowed me to engage with other participants, exchange ideas, and learn from their experiences.”*



## Context

Many local responders in Poland were new to the humanitarian sector. Of the participants in this case study, one had little to no experience in the sector, while others had been working in related fields and recently started to be involved in humanitarian response work but had not received formal training prior to HOP. The HOP Core training aimed to fill the gaps in knowledge, systematise existing practical experience, and empower participants to create a more cooperative and capable humanitarian response network.

The training took place in Warsaw, over 5 days and involved 21 humanitarian actors operating in Poland and Ukraine in local NGOs, INGOs, and civil society organisations.

The training uses a mixture of theory-based learning sessions and desk-based simulation. The scenario-based simulation provides a controlled yet realistic and immersive environment to practice what has been learnt in the classroom. As during this part of the training participants work in small groups, communication, negotiation, and leadership skills are also enhanced. The simulation stands out as a crucial bridge between theory and practice, pushing participants to work together under the high-stress conditions typical of humanitarian crises.

## Methods

The case study is based on feedback and key informant interviews (KIIs) collected from training participants and ToT trainers.

For the training participants, data was initially collected during an initial post-training survey; follow-up surveys were sent to participants in one-month iterations over the course of 3 months post-training. For the ToT participants, data was collected 2-3 weeks post-training delivery in the form of spoken and written interviews.



# Findings

## The blended nature of the training helps participants develop and practice new skills

*“I felt that the proposed scenario showed a similarity to real life, in all its aspects: unpredictability, competition, cooperation, common goals, risks of duplication...It allowed me to use my skills acquired in other fields in a new field and sector for me. It was a real challenge, and I enjoyed every moment.”*

*“I'm very thankful for the opportunity to be immersed in a wider working process in comparison with what I have on my current position. The challenges that've accompanied the simulation scenario were very helpful and gave a lot of bases for productive reflection.”*

The data collected in this case study shows that the practical scenario reinforces theoretical knowledge and strengthens confidence, as well as improving cooperation and communication skills. The scenario format provided a safe space for practical exercise, especially for less experienced humanitarian actors.

The simulation helped participants grasp what was learned during the theoretical part of the training. Via exercises like a simulated needs assessment and a proposal process, they were able to demonstrate skills like:

- Conducting a rapid need assessment,
- Practicing cross-cultural communication and conflict sensitivity skills,
- Writing a project proposal, budget and log frame.

Collaboration and communication skills were practiced, because participants must work together in teams, mirroring the multidisciplinary nature of humanitarian operations. Mistakes made in a simulated setting become invaluable lessons learnt without real-world consequences, thus providing participants with a safe space for improvement.

## **Participants felt better equipped to strengthen their organisations' processes, communications and internal management related to humanitarian responses.**

Participants were able to identify the gaps in the humanitarian sector in Poland and address these areas within their organisations. Participants felt they were able to strengthen data protection in their own organisations following the training. They felt able to identify their learning needs, better plan their activities, and improve connection and communication within their teams.

All the case study participants surveyed said that they were able to apply the knowledge and skills related to safeguarding for children, gender equality and Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Assault (PSEA).

## **Participants applied aspects of the training to their roles, particularly those related to team management,**

## **coordination of programmes, and monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL).**

The RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) model and knowledge of MEAL in humanitarian operations were found to be useful in existing operations. After three months, the study participants said they were able to better divide responsibilities within their teams, coordinate programmes, as well as share the knowledge from the HOP training with their colleagues.

However, one of the case study participants stated they were not able to implement the new knowledge in their everyday work, as due to operational needs, they were mostly concentrating on fundraising and organisational development activities.

In terms of what could be done better by HOP training organisers, respondents recommended more translated content in local languages, training more native-speaking trainers, and providing training in Ukraine for those who cannot leave the country.

## Training of Trainers (ToT)

This section delves into the experiences and reflections of trainers who went on to participate in the ToT Programme, and then later facilitated HOP trainings themselves. Newly trained facilitators told us how the ToT influenced their training approaches and facilitation methods. They underscored the potential for the programme and the vital role it plays in fostering community-building within the broader humanitarian context.

### The HOP ToT training approach developed trainers' facilitation and delivery skills

The trainers highlighted the positive influence of the HOP training and HOP ToT on their facilitation methods, helping them to fine-tune their training delivery and content structuring. One trainer highlighted how their presentation skills were enhanced and reported an improved ability to engage participants quickly. Another trainer emphasised the challenge of balancing content delivery with group engagement, particularly with how intensive the theoretical section of the HOP is compared to the fast-paced simulation. Another trainer stated they better understood how to take into consideration various backgrounds and possible traumatic experiences of the



participants and how to apply a sensitive approach to training.

Trainers felt that attending the HOP training as participants significantly influenced their approach to delivering this training. They recognised the importance of allocating time for group discussions and monitoring the group process, reflecting on their own participant experience. The trainers emphasised the value of providing a secure space for participants to share experiences and reflections. Trainers additionally prioritised psychological safety and established measures to support participants during the simulation. They realised the importance of managing stress levels and looking out for the overall well-being of participants both during the theoretical sessions and the simulation.



## The HOP training contributed to building a humanitarian community in Poland through the relationships built and experiences shared

The trainers acknowledged that the HOP training is a stepping stone for engaging local humanitarian workers in a wider humanitarian community. This is done through the relationships which are built throughout the training as participants work together and learn from one another's experiences. They stressed the importance of informal interactions and networking among participants. The creation of a WhatsApp group and the connections forged during the training are highlighted as valuable steps toward community building. Going forward, it will be important to find ways to sustain this community, stressing the need for participants to continue to exchange experiences and insights. This could be done through formal meetups or informal communication between HOP participants or convening spaces.





## Finally...

The insights from this case study highlight the importance of using new and/or recently systematised knowledge in practice, particularly through scenario-based simulations. The study has also provided insight on realistic learning needs such as project management, MEAL, effective cooperation and communication between different humanitarian actors, partners, and stakeholders.

The new trainers' experiences highlighted the importance of delivering effective humanitarian training, striking a balance between content delivery and engagement, supporting participants during simulations, and fostering a sense of community among humanitarian practitioners.

---

*This Case study was prepared by Jessica Anderson, Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Officer, HLA, and Oksana Dobrovolska, Communications Officer, HLA*

