

When crisis hits: mobilising kindness in our communities

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Executive summary

Crisis can happen anywhere at any time. This report – bringing together British Red Cross emergency response data and research with over 4,000 UK adults – shows how prevalent emergencies are in the UK and that we need to do more to harness the public's desire to get involved in responding to them.

The community reserve volunteer programme is a new opportunity for the public to make a difference during an emergency like a flood or fire. It's quick and easy to sign up online and community reserve volunteers will be contacted by text if there is an emergency in their community that they could help with. Specialist skills aren't required and training is provided at the scene.

The British Red Cross has teamed up with Aviva for a three-year partnership, including the community reserve volunteer initiative. We want to build a network of 10,000 volunteers across the UK who can be called upon to help in a crisis.



Photo © Derek Gordon/British Red Cross.

Emergency response in the UK

- In 2017 the British Red Cross responded to approximately 1,500 emergencies across the UK.
- Recent extreme weather incidents such as Storm Eleanor and the Beast from the East show there is a real need for support from the public in emergency response.

Community spirit and the desire to help

- When disaster strikes communities want to play a part and small acts of kindness can make a difference to people in need.
- The majority of people (88%) would want to help if an emergency happened in their area.

Community preparedness for crisis

- The public recognises the likelihood of an emergency in their community and a need to be more prepared.
- Most people who have experienced an emergency felt they could have offered more support but didn't know how (66%).

Harnessing the power of kindness in a crisis

- Effective emergency response needs to be human-centred, focussing on individuals and communities.
- Organisations like the British Red Cross and Aviva can help to connect people in a crisis.

To learn more about the community reserve volunteer scheme and how to sign up, visit redcross.org.uk/reserves

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For any questions about this report please contact press@redcross.org.uk

Foreword from British Red Cross

Disaster can strike anywhere at any time. The British Red Cross is known for its work in international emergencies, but many people aren't aware that the Red Cross responds to an emergency every four hours here in the UK. From domestic fires, to extreme weather and floods, to national emergencies including terror attacks – in 2017 our staff and volunteers responded to almost 1,500 incidents spanning the length and breadth of the UK.

Last year we faced an unprecedented number of major emergencies. The Westminster attack, Manchester bombing and London Bridge attack, closely followed by the Grenfell Tower fire and Finsbury Park attack, devastated families across the country and made 2017 one of the most demanding years for the British Red Cross since World War Two.

While these incidents brought tragedy to so many people, last year we also saw remarkable acts of kindness, as people and businesses rallied to help in any way they could – some supporting their neighbours and local communities, others travelling hundreds of miles to show solidarity. That strength of community spirit is borne out in the research contained in this report.

Yet the findings of our research also highlight that many people don't feel adequately informed about the crises that could happen in their community and don't know how to help when an emergency occurs. Worryingly, many people also say they don't feel confident their communities are prepared to cope with large-scale emergencies.

When a crisis hits, people often turn up at the scene wanting to help in whatever way they can. To be as effective as possible in an emergency situation, preparation is key, and we want to harness the power of these kind intentions.

That's why the British Red Cross, in partnership with Aviva, is committed to strengthening local emergency resilience by creating a taskforce of

10,000 community reserve volunteers across the UK by the end of 2019.

It's quick and easy to sign up online and community reserve volunteers will be contacted by text if there is an emergency in their community that they could help with. This national network of volunteers could help take the pressure off local emergency services, local authorities and British Red Cross emergency response teams by undertaking practical, behind-the-scenes tasks specific to each emergency – for example putting together food parcels, blowing up airbeds for rest centres and filling sandbags in times of flooding.

Through this initiative we can put individuals and their communities at the heart of emergency response, and provide a more connected and coordinated way for people to show their kindness to those in crisis.

Mike Adamson

Chief Executive of the British Red Cross



Photo © Alex Rurnford.

Foreword from Aviva

At Aviva, we understand just how traumatic events like fires and floods can be. We want to go beyond simply paying out claims to fix any damage in the aftermath. We also want to help our customers and their communities prepare for and respond quickly to such crises when they happen. As far as possible, we want to help limit or prevent damage from happening in the first place. Our partnership with the British Red Cross allows us to do just that.

This report shows that people are becoming increasingly concerned about emergencies happening in their community. The vast majority would want to get involved and help, yet too many say they would not know where to start. The majority of those surveyed also believe more can be done to improve local co-operation.

So Aviva and the British Red Cross are working together to address some of these concerns and help more communities do more to help themselves.

Aviva has sponsored the British Red Cross free Emergency app, which sends live emergency alerts to people in their local area so they can prepare. We are also trialling Community Flood Workshops so emergency responders and local community members can discuss how to prevent or prepare for a flood, and what would be needed in their area should one hit.

We understand that the effects of flooding and other disasters go beyond the physical. Our claims people are often among the first on the scene when major events happen and they can stay with communities for many weeks afterwards to support our customers and help manage claims. Through the British

Red Cross, we have provided training to our frontline claims teams to help them better identify and manage the emotional impact of major events on the wellbeing of customers as well as on their own mental health.

No matter how much we prepare, we cannot prevent every crisis. This report highlights just how much people want to be involved in helping their neighbours when the worst happens; it shows that people would in fact take great pride in being able to do so. We are proud to be involved with the community reserve volunteers programme to allow many more people to make that difference when their community needs it most.

Andy Briggs

Chief Executive Officer, UK Insurance



1. Emergency response in the UK

The British Red Cross is the UK's leading emergency response charity, helping communities prepare for, respond to and recover from crises. Thousands of trained emergency response volunteers are ready to provide practical and emotional support at a moment's notice.

We also represent charities in national forums, such as the National Police Chiefs' Council civil contingencies meeting, we chair the National Voluntary Sector Civil Protection Working Group and sit on local multi-agency emergency planning forums across the UK.

In 2017 we mobilised hundreds of staff and volunteers to respond to almost 1,500 incidents across the length and breadth of the UK.

Our emergency response teams assisted more than 9,300 people in situations ranging from fires, to power outages, to flooding and search and rescue operations.

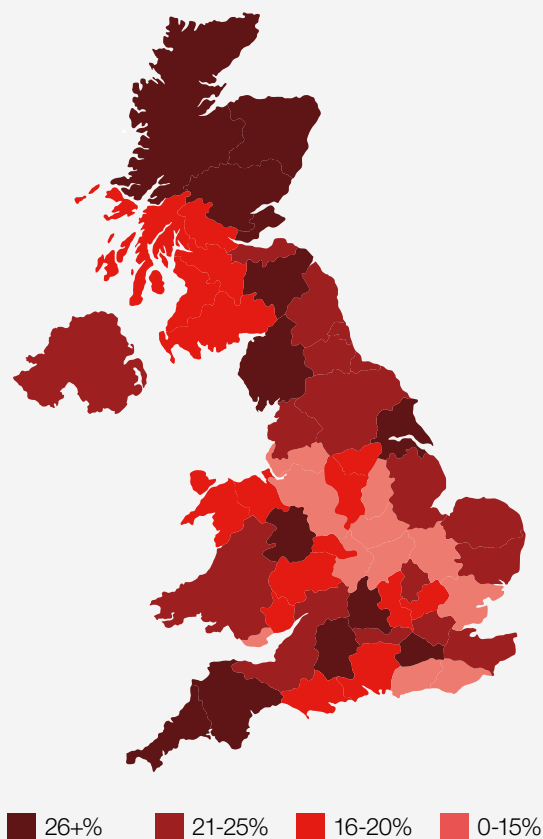
It can be easy to assume that emergencies only happen in places far from our own homes. But **our research shows that one in five people (21%) in the UK have witnessed or experienced a major emergency in their local area**, with severe weather and flooding being the most common. This rises to one in four people in Scotland (27%), Northern Ireland (27%), South West England (27%), and Yorkshire and the Humber (25%).

Not only is the UK no stranger to major emergencies such as severe weather and flooding, but our research also indicates that the incidents in London and Manchester last summer have led to a heightened awareness of emergency response in the UK. **More than half of people (53%) feel it's more likely that their community could experience a major incident in the future**, following the devastating events of 2017. This was common

across all areas of the UK but Londoners expressed the greatest concern (63%).

The community reserve volunteer programme is a new opportunity that allows local people to get involved and make a difference if and when disaster strikes in their area.

Proportion of people who have witnessed or experienced an emergency in their community



Source:

To view the data used to create the above map, please see the



CASE STUDY

Pete Thain works at Aviva. He recently attended a British Red Cross simulation exercise in Portreath, Cornwall to test how a community reserve volunteer taskforce would be deployed should a major crisis happen.

“The simulation event was brilliant. It was inspiring to meet people who want to spend their time helping their community and making it more resilient if the worst happens.

“Doing something like this definitely makes me proud to work for Aviva. I think it’s important for Aviva to support charities like the British Red Cross because the things we do aren’t dissimilar. Aviva helps people to defy uncertainty. When everything goes wrong, we’re there to make sure that it gets put right. That’s what the British Red Cross is doing as well.”

2. Community spirit and the desire to help

When disaster strikes, small acts of kindness can make a real difference to people in need. The findings from our research show that communities want to pull together when an emergency happens, and local people have a desire to get involved.

Communities want to play a part

As part of our research we surveyed 4,000 UK adults and asked respondents to what extent they agreed with a number of statements on community cohesion during a crisis. The findings show the extraordinary strength of community spirit across the UK, and the strong desire from individuals to play a bigger role in times of crisis.

Almost nine in ten people (88%) said if an emergency happened in their community they would want to get involved, and of those who had actually experienced an emergency already, fewer than one in ten (7%) said they did not want to help.

Harnessing the power of communities

It's clear we must do more to harness the power of local people. The public recognises this, with **92% of people feeling that the events of last year in London and Manchester demonstrate why more should be done to build cooperation and resilience to emergencies within local communities.**

We believe that crisis response should be local, with communities empowered to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. For example we are expanding our ability to engage with communities by strengthening our community engagement approach. More than two thirds of people (68%) feel there is a good sense of community spirit in their area and we need to draw on this in our approach to crisis response.

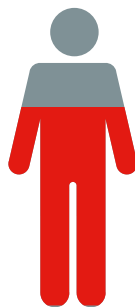
Key findings

I would take pride in helping my community recover from an emergency



90% agree

I would need my neighbours to help me if a crisis happened in my community



67% agree

When an emergency happens it's important to rally together as a community



94% agree

When an emergency happens it's important that people know how they can help to speed up the recovery



94% agree

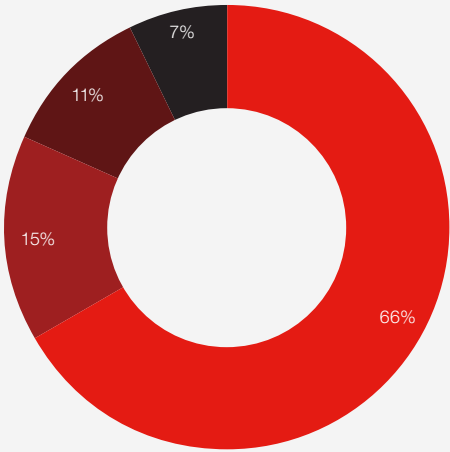
Source:



Overall, two thirds of people (66%) who had experienced an emergency said they had helped out in some way. Of those who didn't, 26% said it was either because they didn't know how to help or they didn't think they had the right skills.

This is further emphasised by the fact that **two thirds of people who experienced an emergency felt that there was more that their community could have done to help if they knew how.** The community reserve volunteer scheme addresses this by offering people both the opportunity to help and the knowledge to understand what is useful in a coordinated response to an emergency.

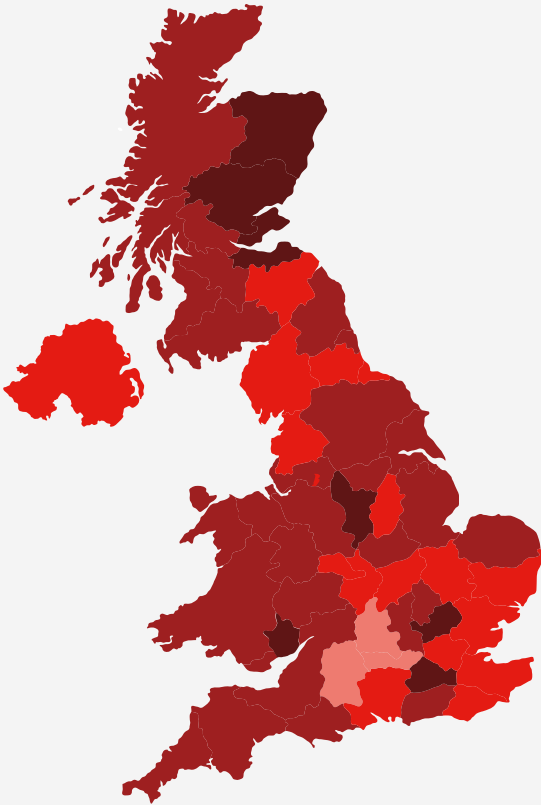
How people helped when they experienced a crisis



- Helped with their local emergency
- Wanted to help, but didn't know how
- Wanted to help, but didn't think they had the skills
- Did not want to help

Source: .

Areas where people feel they have the highest and lowest sense of community spirit



Percentage of people who agree that there is a good sense of community spirit in their area:

- 96-100%
- 90-95%
- 86-90%
- 80-85%

Source: .

To view the data used to create the above map, please see the .

3. Community preparedness for crisis

Unlike countries that are more prone to natural disasters that can lead to crisis situations - for example, earthquake zones - the UK does not have a well-developed culture of crisis resilience. Recent events and the increased likelihood of natural disasters due to climate change suggest that the UK ought to develop such a culture.

The findings from our research show that the public is concerned about how they and their communities respond to major emergencies. We believe that this concern stems from an absence of clear and tangible ways for people to get involved and help build communities that are resilient to crises.

Communities aren't clear on how they can respond to emergencies

In our survey of 4,000 UK adults, **one in five (21%) said they had personally experienced or witnessed a major emergency in their community**, with severe weather, flooding, large scale power outages and fires being the most common incidents. However, when asked about response to those emergencies, more than half (56%) felt that people within their community were not given enough opportunity to support.

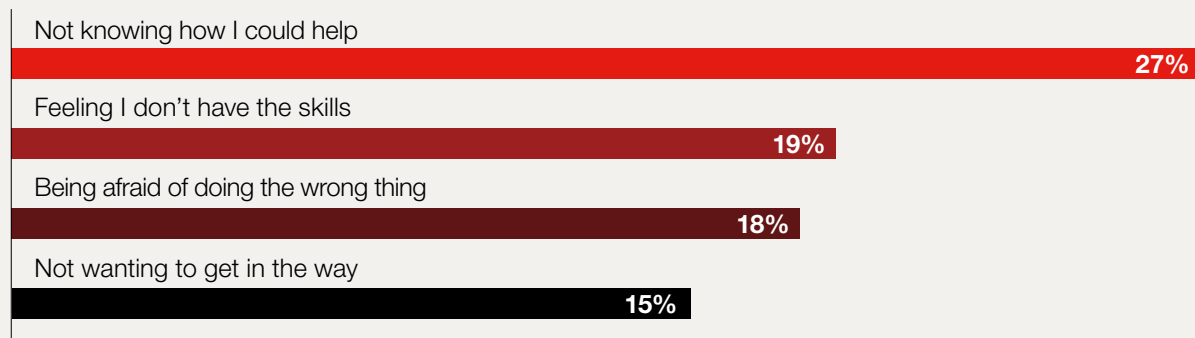
Similar findings are reflected in the responses of the wider population with more than half of people (53%) stating they would not know what to do or how to help if disaster struck.

Local people have a critical role to play in emergency response, **but there are some significant obstacles stopping people from helping in an emergency situation such as not knowing how to help or feeling like they don't have the right skills to offer.**

More than half of people who had experienced an emergency felt their community was not given enough opportunity to help.

Why people would be put off from helping in a crisis

Biggest reasons holding people back from helping in an emergency:



Source:

As part of our research we asked the public about how well-equipped they felt their community as a whole would be to cope with a range of major incidents, many of which the British Red Cross responded to last year, such as major fires, floods and power outages.

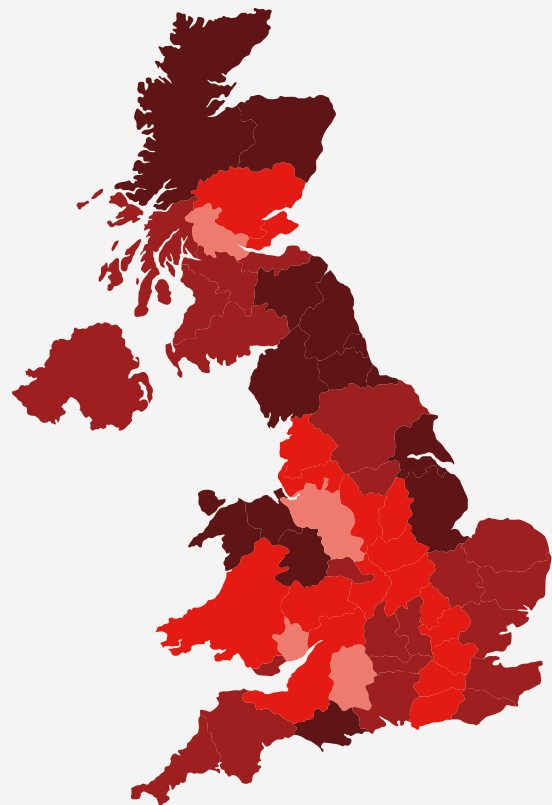
Half of people feel their community would be unprepared to cope with a large-scale emergency.

The findings show that **half of people (50%) feel their community would be unprepared to cope with a large-scale emergency** – rising to 58% in the North West where people expressed greatest concern. Interestingly, the findings from our research showed that, across the board, people living in coastal areas – places which are arguably prone to weather-related emergencies – feel more confident to cope with a major incident than people living further inland.

What is concerning is that the types of emergencies that at least half of people felt their communities were least prepared for included some of the most common incidents that the British Red Cross is called out to – including fires and flooding, as well as incidents like evacuations, water outages and gas explosions.

Overall, two thirds of people who experienced an emergency felt that there was more their community could have done to help if they knew how.

Where people in the UK feel most and least prepared



Percentage of people who agree that they feel prepared for an emergency

61+% 51-60% 41-50% 0-40%

Source:

To view the data used to create the above map, please see the



CASE STUDY

Michael Asante, from Winchester, signed up as a community reserve volunteer to begin making steps towards his dream of becoming a police officer. He said: “I liked the idea of helping people and this is something that’s very relevant to what I want to do eventually, as I want to go into policing.”

Michael, 21, who is applying for a Masters in Criminology, added: “I think there’s a real satisfaction that comes from helping others. I signed up to become a community reserve volunteer because I wanted some practical, hands on experience of assisting people in crisis.”

4. Harnessing the power of kindness in a crisis

Following the significant events of 2017, we are more convinced than ever that effective emergency response is truly human-centred, focussing on the individuals and communities at the heart of an emergency.

As the UK's leading emergency response charity, responding to crises is a core part of who we are and what we do. We work to prevent crises from happening; intervene early to prevent further unnecessary suffering; respond to emergencies; as well as providing support to help people and communities recover and be more prepared for the future.

We must ensure people in crisis have timely and compassionate access to the support they need in that moment, whether this be practical, emotional or financial.

We need simple processes to mobilise expressions of human kindness that so often follow a crisis, so that individuals know how they can support in a major local emergency. Whether it is distributing sandbags, or sorting emergency provisions, we all have something to give.

Recommendations:

- The British Red Cross in partnership with Aviva feels that more support should be given to communities in regard to what to do and how to help in a crisis.
- Recruiting 10,000 community reserve volunteers across the UK will create a vital network of people who can be called upon to help communities respond to emergencies.
- The voluntary sector and statutory services should work together to coordinate the deployment of volunteers using innovative initiatives such as our community reserve volunteers, to support people to help in the most effective way possible

Kindness in the community

A separate piece of research by the British Red Cross measured levels of kindness in communities across the UK, which could be harnessed in an emergency. Three quarters of UK adults (74%) said that people in their communities are kind to each other and two thirds (67%) said that people in their community look out for each other.

The findings also support the desire for localised assistance, as **92% of people said that they appreciate acts of kindness from neighbours or people in their community.**

This research also demonstrated the role that the British Red Cross could play in mobilising this kindness. **More than four in five UK adults (83%) said they would trust British Red Cross to encourage people to use simple acts of kindness to help each other.**

Source:



CASE STUDY

Thomas Milburn, 26, signed up as a community reserve volunteer after being assisted by British Red Cross volunteers when he was badly burnt in the Shoreham Air Show disaster in 2015.

He said: “I looked up into the sky and this plane was coming straight towards me. The next split second I was engulfed in flames. I thought ‘I’m not sure I’m going to make it out of this alive’. The British Red Cross got me sat down, checked all my vital signs, and made sure I was alright. If I had been away from their help I’d potentially have much more serious injuries.

“I know in the aftermath of the crash, the British Red Cross did a lot to help the emergency personnel on the scene. That’s something that people in the community could also help with in those extreme circumstances.

“I think the community reserve volunteer initiative is a really great idea because not everyone has the time to volunteer on a weekly or monthly basis but people do want to get involved when something major happens. It’s something that I’ll be proud to help the Red Cross with.”

Appendix

Data from map on page 5

Proportion of people who have witnessed or experienced major emergencies in their area, by region

	Any	Flooding	Major power outage	Gas Explosion	Missing person	Major Fire	Terror attack	Severe weather	Drought	Evacuation
UK	21%	9%	6%	1%	3%	4%	2%	10%	3%	2%
NE England	23%	10%	11%	4%	5%	4%	1%	9%	1%	4%
NW England	19%	12%	7%	2%	1%	3%	2%	6%	1%	1%
Yorks & Humber	25%	13%	6%	1%	2%	1%	0%	11%	1%	1%
E Midlands	13%	6%	3%	2%	1%	3%	0%	5%	1%	1%
W Midlands	17%	7%	3%	0%	1%	2%	0%	9%	3%	1%
East of England	16%	6%	4%	1%	3%	3%	0%	7%	2%	2%
London	23%	10%	7%	3%	5%	8%	7%	11%	7%	7%
SE England	21%	9%	5%	1%	2%	3%	1%	8%	3%	1%
SW England	27%	10%	9%	0%	3%	4%	1%	17%	5%	0%
Wales	18%	7%	3%	2%	3%	2%	1%	14%	2%	0%
Scotland	27%	9%	6%	1%	5%	4%	0%	19%	2%	1%
N. Ireland	27%	10%	9%	0%	4%	2%	12%	7%	3%	3%

n=4,000

Data from map on page 8

Proportion of people who feel there is a good sense of community spirit in their area, by region

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	NET agree	NET disagree
UK	16%	52%	26%	6%	68%	32%
North East	11%	61%	21%	6%	73%	27%
North West	16%	45%	30%	9%	61%	39%
Yorks & Humber	15%	55%	26%	4%	70%	30%
East Midlands	15%	51%	27%	7%	66%	34%
West Midlands	14%	51%	27%	8%	65%	35%
East of England	15%	50%	29%	5%	65%	35%
London	17%	49%	25%	9%	66%	34%
South East	13%	52%	29%	7%	65%	35%
South West	18%	55%	22%	5%	73%	27%
Wales	20%	55%	22%	3%	75%	25%
Scotland	22%	55%	18%	5%	77%	23%
Northern Ireland	19%	59%	16%	5%	79%	22%

n=4,000

Data from map on page 10

How prepared do you think your community would be to cope with a large scale emergency (such as a fire or flooding)?

	Very prepared	Prepared	Unprepared	Very unprepared	NET prepared	NET unprepared
UK	7%	44%	39%	11%	50%	50%
North East	6%	57%	30%	8%	63%	37%
North West	4%	39%	41%	16%	43%	58%
Yorks & Humber	5%	49%	37%	9%	54%	46%
East Midlands	4%	43%	44%	9%	47%	53%
West Midlands	7%	40%	42%	12%	46%	54%
East of England	5%	48%	40%	7%	53%	47%
London	12%	38%	38%	12%	50%	50%
South East	5%	46%	39%	10%	50%	50%
South West	7%	45%	41%	7%	52%	49%
Wales	8%	39%	42%	11%	47%	53%
Scotland	8%	47%	34%	11%	55%	45%
Northern Ireland	9%	46%	27%	18%	55%	45%

n=4,000

References

- 1** The British Red Cross commissioned Opinium Research to conduct a survey of 4,000 UK adults, representative of the population. Fieldwork was conducted online between March 9 and 13, 2018.
- 2** British Red Cross operational data 2017.
- 3** The British Red Cross commissioned Opinium Research to conduct research online with 2,005 adults. Fieldwork took place between March 29 and April 3, 2018, representative of the population.

The British Red Cross helps people in crisis, wherever and wherever they are. We are part of a global voluntary network, responding to conflicts, natural disasters and individual emergencies. We enable vulnerable people in the UK and abroad to prepare for and withstand emergencies in their own communities. And when the crisis is over, we help them to recover and move on with their lives.

British Red Cross

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