



FPH Policy on responding to international humanitarian emergencies and conflicts

Introduction

The strength, and very fabric, of the Faculty of Public Health (FPH) is our membership: our diversity, passion, expertise, and relentless commitment to fairness. This is what drives our vision of **Better Health for All – Leaving no one Behind**. We believe that it is unacceptable for people's life expectancy and health outcomes to be determined by where they live, their ethnicity, sexuality, gender, beliefs or their income.

The Faculty has developed markedly since its formation, following the report of the Royal Commission on Medical Education in 1968. We have welcomed membership from beyond medicine and, increasingly, beyond the United Kingdom. This diversity is one of our key strengths and we will continue to listen, learn and evolve to realise our vision and aims.

At the same time, the world has also changed. Changes in demography, including global migration; technology, including social media and a 24-hour news cycle; and a recognition of the impacts of colonialism, environmental degradation and structural inequity, mean that we are ever more aware of, and called to address, global issues.

FPH is a registered charity, bound by UK charity law, with clear charitable aims: To promote the advancement of education in public health to develop public health with a view to maintaining the highest possible standards of professional competence and practice and to act as an authoritative body for the purpose of consultation in matters of educational or public interest concerning public health. We deliver on these aims through our education and standards functions, and through our advocacy work on public health subjects that is driven through our established network of committees and special interest groups.

We (FPH) may on occasion be asked to issue statements, provide comment, sign up to collective statements or take other action regarding **specific** international humanitarian emergencies and conflicts (both abroad and in the UK). Such requests may come from the membership, partner organisations, staff or elsewhere. Whilst the FPH role is to improve the health and wellbeing of local communities and national populations, we are not a political, partisan or development organisation and are bound by our charitable role and responsibilities.

We recognise that our membership, individually or collectively, may be compelled to speak or act in accordance with their conscience, independent of the Faculty. As a fundamental principle, we believe that no public health professional (or indeed anyone) should be persecuted professionally,

financially or judicially for drawing attention to the public health consequences of any conflict or emergency.

The Faculty's default position is not to pass comment or make statements that show allegiance to any particular group. We do, however, take such matters seriously and, in some circumstances, it may be appropriate for FPH to take action or pass comment. Such matters will be considered on a case-by-case basis in accordance with the below policy.

1. Raising an issue with FPH

- 1.1 FPH may be alerted to an international humanitarian emergency or other issue in the UK or abroad by representations from members, partner organisations, staff or FPH Special Interest Groups and Committees.
- 1.2 In the case of an international humanitarian emergency, FPH may be alerted when the [Disaster Emergency Committee \(DEC\)](#) launches an appeal.

2. Assessment of issue

- 2.1 On being alerted of an issue, elected FPH Officers and the FPH Senior Management Team (SMT) will first assess if it is an appropriate issue to fall under this policy. This may be subjective and therefore FPH Officers will discuss and consider if the issue has the potential to be divisive within the FPH membership and come to a collective view on whether it is an appropriate issue to be considered in line with this policy.
- 2.2 Should FPH Officers and SMT determine that it is an issue to be considered in line with this policy, they will then discuss and assess if it is appropriate and reasonable for FPH to respond to the issue in some way.
- 2.3 In assessing the issue, FPH Officers and SMT will take advice from relevant Committees (e.g. FPH Ethics Committee) or Special Interest Groups (e.g. Disasters & Humanitarian Response SIG) and will take into account the following:
 - 2.3.1 If it is an issue which members have expressed concerns and made clear a wish to see FPH take a position.
 - 2.3.2 That any response must have a clear purpose. There will be many issues of domestic and world politics where the opinion of FPH is not going to be of relevance or interest.
 - 2.3.3 That any response is not seen to be preferential or discriminatory. This also means that FPH is not required and does not need to respond and take action on every issue.
 - 2.3.4 The risks of action/inaction across multiple domains, including in relation to FPH Standing Orders and FPH's charitable remit.
 - 2.3.5 The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges [Principles to guide college statements on humanitarian emergencies](#).
 - 2.3.6 Charity Commission for England and Wales. [Campaigning and Political Activity Guidance for Charities](#) [Appendix I]
- 2.4 FPH Officers and SMT may consult with the FPH Board before making a final decision on whether any action is appropriate, and in any case if FPH Officers agree that action may be appropriate they will pass their recommendations to the FPH Board of Trustees for agreement. The decision of the Board will be final and made in accordance with Board voting procedures.

- 2.5 A decision to undertake any work should always be taken in the light of the effect on the FPH's resources. That is to say, the question should be asked as to whether undertaking work would consume a disproportionate amount of FPH resource in terms of staff and volunteer time and financial cost, and therefore impact on other areas of charitable work. In considering these issues, FPH Officers and SMT will take seriously the views of its members, elected leaders, and Board of Trustees, alongside its specific responsibilities as a charity with a defined purpose as set out in Standing Orders.

3. Possible action

- 3.1 If the FPH Board, after assessment of the issue by FPH Officers and SMT, determine that FPH can meaningfully take some action, this plan states what FPH **may** do and will not do following a specific international humanitarian emergency or conflict.
- 3.2 Linked to its charitable objects, the Faculty may take action through its role in:
- 3.2.1 Professional standards – reinforcing ethical standards of members and fellows embedded in Good Public Health Practice
 - 3.2.2 Workforce and membership – supporting the wellbeing of members directly/indirectly impacted by the emergency and promoting unity
 - 3.2.3 Policy & advocacy – advocating for the maintenance of public health standards in the face of the international humanitarian emergency or other international or domestic issue
- 3.3 Action **may** include:
- 3.3.1 Through relevant Committees and Special Interest Groups, making contact with relevant national public health association(s), international public health associations (e.g. WFPHA and the WHO), and relevant partner organisations and FPH members to ascertain what level of FPH response, if any, would be of assistance.
 - 3.3.2 Dependent on the outcome of this first step, creating a steering group to coordinate the FPH response. Membership of this steering group will include at least one FPH Board member, representatives from the Global Health Committee and relevant Special Interest Groups, and at least one member of FPH staff. The steering group will meet regularly for the duration of the emergency, or until it deems any further action inappropriate.
 - 3.3.3 Creating a central list of activities and actions which will be updated regularly
 - 3.3.4 Tailoring its resources and response to the particular needs arising from each individual situation, for example, this might include describing the situation in terms of public health impact and how the health outcomes could be improved, or translating FPH resources into particular languages or supporting training sessions for those involved in delivering public health services
 - 3.3.5 Sharing existing FPH resources with relevant stakeholders
- 3.4 The Faculty will not:
- 3.4.1 Express a political viewpoint or make statements that go beyond its scope in the field of public health **[see additional note below]*
 - 3.4.2 Become involved in direct public health service delivery

- 3.4.3 Encourage members to become involved in supporting efforts in an individual capacity
- 3.4.4 Duplicate efforts of other organisations when this does not add significant value

4. *Additional note on Statements

- 4.1 FPH is occasionally asked to produce, comment on or sign up to statements about specific international humanitarian emergencies and conflicts (both abroad and in the UK). As noted above in 2.4, in considering these issues, FPH takes seriously the views of its members, elected leaders and Board of Trustees, alongside its specific responsibilities as a charity with a defined purpose as set out in Standing Orders.
- 4.2 Consideration must also be given to the Faculty's role as a professional membership body. As a professional body, the majority of our members are required to be our members for their training and for their career progression and the Faculty needs to support our membership to feel comfortable and safe as part of the whole membership community and profession.
- 4.3 FPH's default position is that it will not respond to these issues by making public statements, public signs of support or allegiance, or pleas to members, the public or government. On rare occasions, this position may be adjusted if:
 - 4.3.1 The issue is considered by the Board of Trustees to further or deliver FPH's charitable aims and purposes, and
 - 4.3.2 That by making the statement, FPH anticipates that it will achieve a specific outcome not otherwise achievable. These might include the following:
 - 4.3.2.1 To alert or highlight a particular aspect or impact to public health to our membership and wider stakeholders, if the issue is already widely publicised.
 - 4.3.2.2 To offer specific support to members of FPH affected by the crisis and signpost available resources.
 - 4.3.2.3 To support humanitarian programmes of work.
- 4.4 In any case where a statement is considered appropriate and linked to conflict, it should not normally specify the drivers of this conflict, whether religious, political or otherwise.

5. Past FPH Statements

- 5.1 FPH has in the past made statements on issues relating to specific humanitarian emergencies and other areas of conflict. With the approval of this policy, the FPH Officers and SMT will review those previous statements to ensure they do not contravene this policy. In those instances where it is considered they do, statements will be removed from the website and archived, and replaced with an explanation of the decision, including a link to this policy.

Policy owner: FPH Board of Trustees

To be reviewed every two years, or more frequently if requested by the FPH Board.

APPROVED BY FPH BOARD – OCTOBER 2025

APPENDIX I

Charity Commission for England and Wales. [Campaigning and Political Activity Guidance for Charities](#). Summary responsibilities of charity trustees regarding political activity as follows:

- legal requirement: to be a charity an organisation must be established for charitable purposes only, which are for the public benefit. An organisation will not be charitable if its purposes are political
- campaigning and political activity can be legitimate and valuable activities for charities to undertake
- legal requirement: however, political campaigning, or political activity, as defined in this guidance, must be undertaken by a charity only in the context of supporting the delivery of its charitable purposes. Unlike other forms of campaigning, it must not be the continuing and sole activity of the charity. ([Section 3.5](#) provides a fuller explanation.)
- there may be situations where carrying out political activity is the best way for trustees to support the charity's purposes. A charity may choose to focus most, or all, of its resources on political activity for a period. The key issue for charity trustees is the need to ensure that this activity is not, and does not become, the reason for the charity's existence.
- charities can campaign for a change in the law, policy or decisions (as detailed in this guidance in [section 2.4](#)) where such change would support the charity's purposes. Charities can also campaign to ensure that existing laws are observed.
- legal requirement: however, a charity cannot exist for a political purpose, which is any purpose directed at furthering the interests of any political party, or securing or opposing a change in the law, policy or decisions either in this country or abroad.
- legal requirement: in the political arena, a charity must stress its independence and ensure that any involvement it has with political parties is balanced. A charity must not give support or funding to a political party, nor to a candidate or politician.
- a charity may give its support to specific policies advocated by political parties if it would help achieve its charitable purposes. However, trustees must not allow the charity to be used as a vehicle for the expression of the political views of any individual trustee or staff member (in this context the Charity Commission means personal or party political views).
- legal requirement: as with any decision they make, when considering campaigning and political activity charity trustees must carefully weigh up the possible benefits against the costs and risks in deciding whether the campaign is likely to be an effective way of furthering or supporting the charity's purposes.
- legal requirement: when campaigning, charity trustees must comply not only with charity law, but other civil and criminal laws that may apply. Where applicable they should also comply with the Code of the Advertising Standards Authority
- a charity can campaign using emotive or controversial material, where this is lawful and justifiable in the context of the campaign. Such material must be factually accurate and have a legitimate evidence base
- the principles of charity campaigning and political activity are the same, whether the activity is carried out in the United Kingdom or overseas