

Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: Addressing the Disruption of Humanitarian Aid Distribution in Conflict Zones

Student Officer: Eleanor Ding

Position: President

Introduction

In recent years, an escalating number of both natural and human-caused crises have led to the blatant disregard of humanitarian rights all around the world. Humanitarian aid is often provided by the United Nations (UN) and other Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) in crisis regions to alleviate the suffering of civilians and affected personnel, saving countless lives with the assistance of aid workers and maintaining human dignity. A wide range of services are often provided in humanitarian aid, which should be provided regardless of location, political affiliation, or social status, thereby ensuring those in need will receive aid.

In most cases, crises are uncontrollable: famine, disasters, or displacement due to natural causes. However, an equally important portion of crises that the UN has historically struggled to provide humanitarian aid to are conflict-based crises. During conflict, people are often displaced and struggle to access life-essentials such as food, water, basic hygiene supplies, equipment, and tools for recovery. With no specific routes, fixed schedules, or reliable infrastructure, it is incredibly difficult for aid workers to deliver humanitarian aid.

Humanitarian aid in conflict zones has often been disrupted through factors such as restricted access, violence against aid workers, damaged infrastructure, and political instability. Thus, there has been much discourse and criticism regarding aid in conflict regions. The distribution of aid is often associated with significant ethical, legal, political, and operational challenges, notably due to the fact that human aid does not favor either side of a conflict and thus may result in the inadvertent support of terrorist organizations. However, delegates during this conference should more so look at the purposeful disruption of humanitarian aid.

In 2022, the UN documented nearly 4000 verified instances of denial of humanitarian access, mostly by government forces. The highest figures were documented in Occupied Palestinian Territory, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Mali. Aid workers faced consistent attacks and denial of access by both Governments and non-State groups. Moreover, not only is aid denied to individuals fighting in armed conflicts, but to children caught in the crossfire as well. Such denial is linked to restrictions of humanitarian activities and movements, interference with aid operations and discrimination of recipients, as well as attacks on civilian infrastructure. The purposeful disruption of human aid is not only a violation of human rights, but also a violation of international law. Data from 2024 has

suggested that without reforms on both a short-term and long-term scale, humanity will be on course to witness a drastic increase in statistics of denied access.



Figure 1: People making their way along al-Rashid street in western Jabalia after receiving humanitarian aid from an aid distribution point in the northern Gaza Strip, July 24th 2025 (NPR)

Definition of Key Terms

Humanitarian Aid

Humanitarian Aid is a form of assistance designed to save lives and alleviate suffering during and after crises.

Conflict Zone

Conflict zones are geographic areas currently experiencing armed conflict or severe political instability. Oftentimes, this conflict leads to widespread disruption of daily life, destruction of civilian and government infrastructure, and risks to human security and aid efforts. Conflict zones also disrupt the access to essential services such as housing, transportation, communication, etc., meaning that the response of people outside the community of people affected is required.

International Humanitarian Law (IHL)

Similarly known as the Law of War or Law of Armed Conflict, International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is a set of rules created in tangency to the Red Cross Foundation. It aims to limit the effects of armed conflict for

humanitarian reasons, and protects people who are not or are no longer participating in the hostilities and restricts the means and methods of warfare. IHL is a part of international law, meaning it is legally binding in between States and countries. It is important to note that IHL does not regulate whether or not a State is allowed to use force, but rather how it is able to limit the amount of force needed.

IHL applies only to armed conflict, and does not apply to internal tensions or disturbances such as isolated acts of violence. IHL only takes into effect once a conflict between two States has begun, and does not favor either side, but applies equally to both sides regardless of who started the conflict.

Humanitarian Corridors

Conceptually, humanitarian corridors, also known as safe passages, are agreements between parties in an armed conflict to allow for safe passage of citizens. Physically, they are specific geographic areas that can allow for safe passage for a short duration of time. Civilians are allowed to leave, humanitarian aid is allowed to enter, and the wounded, sick, and dead are evacuated. Humanitarian corridors provide a temporary and specific area that allow for civilian evacuation, where neither side is allowed to impede on the agreement.

Background

Humanitarianism has long been seen as an ideology centered around the value of human life. Humans help other humans in times of need to reduce and alleviate suffering, but modern humanitarianism only truly began to take place following the second World War. Along with the establishment of the UN, key institutions emerged that built on top of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Agencies in the UN such as United Nations Child Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Program focused specifically on providing humanitarian aid and treating issues concerned with the integrity of human life. The frameworks involved with humanitarian assistance were defined by the Geneva Conventions, which defined the rights of civilians, prisoners of war (POWs), and aid workers. It was only until the Cold War that the politicization of human aid occurred vastly and uncontrollably, yet aid convoys and workers today are still seen as targets while mediating in conflict zones.

Major Obstacles to Aid Distribution

There are several different obstacles that restrict humanitarian aid in conflict zones, including not only human-designed obstacles, but also natural ones. Throughout the course of the conference, delegates should address each obstacle both individually and holistically.

Restricted Access and Security

Humanitarian access is a prerequisite for action in providing human aid. Thus, many different types of stakeholders, such as non-state armed groups (NSAGs) or local religious and community leaders, will often play a role in obstructing humanitarian access as a means to make a political statement or weaken their opposing side. Restricting access means anything from a state prohibiting the entry of

humanitarian personnel or goods to otherwise restricting and conditioning access to terms that the state dictates.

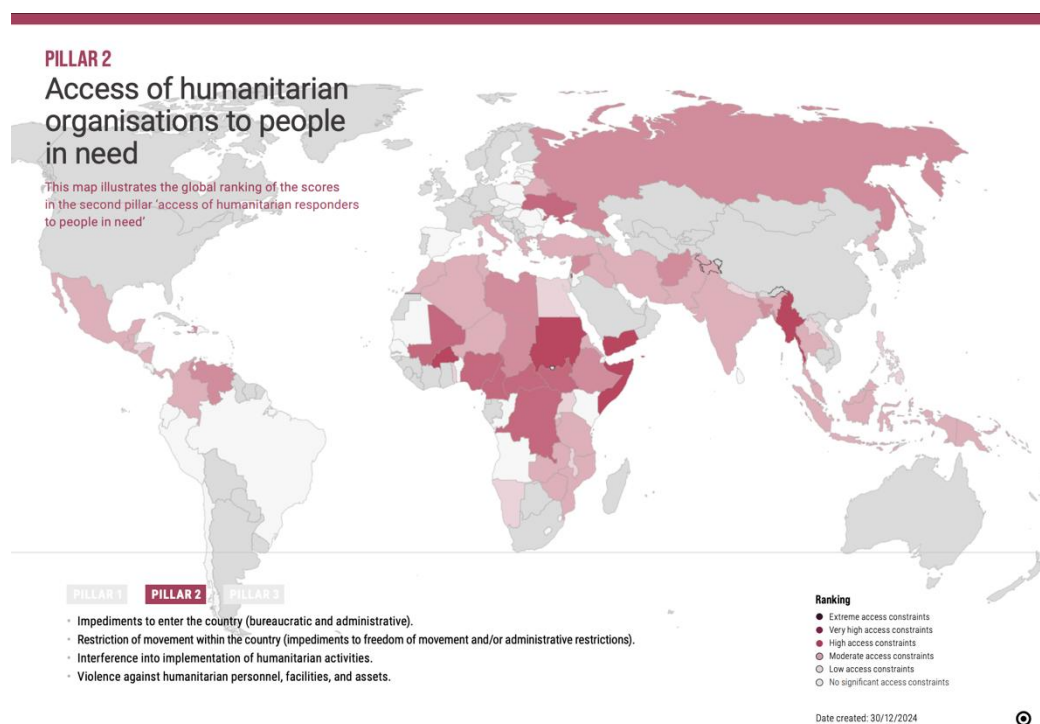


Figure 2: Map illustrating the global ranking of scores access of humanitarian organizations to people in need (ACAPS)

Forms of access obstruction include exerting control over the needs assessment process, as well as the scope and scale of programming, and potentially limiting an International Humanitarian Organization (IHOs)'s ability to undertake monitoring and evaluation. When there is access obstruction, IHOs might maintain access to their target population only by compromising one or more of their core humanitarian principles, something that should be avoided at all costs.

Violence and Threats

In recent years, there has been a global trend of increasing violence against humanitarian personnel, facilities, and assets resulting from the escalation and intensification of armed conflicts. In 2025, the number of aid workers killed by August in the year has increased by almost 50% compared to the same period in 2024. Despite this, accountability remains lackluster at best, as world leaders continuously fail to hold perpetrators accountable and address violations of IHL. Especially regarding attacks on health facilities, health workers, and those seeking care, deliberate violence against workers undermines the health and wellbeing of entire societies. Analysis on intentionality of violence has shown considerable variations, ranging from crimes of opportunity to overt attacks on humanitarian workers for political, economic, or other reasons. There has also been a large amount of violence on aid workers correlated with collateral damage, as they are never far away from Improvised Explosive Device (IED) explosions, shelling, or stray bullets during armed conflict.

Damaged Infrastructure

Damaged infrastructure creates logistical and strategic impediments that delay or completely prevent the delivery of aid, triggering further crises for affected citizens. Perpetrators often target essential services such as hospitals, schools, energy grids, and public transportation in order to exacerbate the humanitarian toll. Urban fighting can also indirectly damage critical infrastructure necessary to supplying vital services for citizens. For those who are inherently dependent on supporting infrastructure for their wellbeing, a failure in infrastructure will often lead to greater risks in public health and people's livelihoods, in turn leading to the massive displacement of populations. Aid workers face several logistical challenges when addressing destroyed infrastructure. For example, impeded transportation, such as the destruction of roads, bridges, and ports, makes it difficult for aid agencies and IHOs to transport supplies and personnel. Aid packages are thus stranded at borders, access to frontline areas is prevented, and significant delays in humanitarian aid is caused.

Impact on Vulnerable Populations

Despite humanitarian aid often taking a more political context in contemporary society, it is imperative to remember that the ultimate goal of aid is to alleviate the suffering of vulnerable populations in crisis zones. By disrupting humanitarian aid distribution to these populations, massive impacts and implications are caused.

Increased Food Security and Lack of Essential Services

By blockading humanitarian aid from reaching vulnerable populations, essential living supplies and services, most notably food, is denied. In conflict zones such as Gaza, where long-term aid blockades occurred, populations face prolonged food shortages. Hunger crises bring acute malnutrition, starvation, illness, and death. With a lack of essential health services through further blockade or destruction of healthcare infrastructure such as hospitals and clinics, death rates of citizens skyrocket. Under Article 54 of Additional Protocol I of IHL, this is a war crime. Furthermore, when aid workers and supplies are unable to reach vulnerable populations, health systems fail, as hospitals run out of general-use medical supplies and staff. Water and sanitary services also begin to lack, often leading to outbreaks of diseases such as cholera and dysentery.

Displacement

When humanitarian aid is obstructed or denied, conflict-affected populations will often flee in search of safety and areas where aid is present and readily available. Mass internal displacement and refugee flow intensifies the humanitarian crisis both within and outside of the borders of the conflict zone, simultaneously making it more difficult for aid workers to provide aid and creating a self-perpetuating cycle by which less aid can be reached to the population, causing more displacement and thus higher difficulty in providing aid. Without constant and consistent aid, people, often entire villages, flee to areas with better access to humanitarian services. However, they instead often end up in overcrowded refugee camps with limited sanitation and healthcare, some becoming Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) while

others cross borders to become refugees. Neighboring states will often struggle or fail to accommodate large refugee inflows, and camps face overwhelming requirements for aid, leading to secondary crises.

Major Parties Involved

Palestine (Gaza Strip)

Located in the Middle East, the Gaza Strip, the smaller of the two Palestinian territories, has been under a land, air, and sea blockade by Israel since 2007. The blockade was initially justified as a security measure to ensure no weapons smuggling, but also held humanitarian implications. With access to clean water, electricity, and healthcare being greatly limited, the region was heavily aid dependent. Prior to the 2023-2024 escalation, 80% of Gaza's population was already dependent on humanitarian assistance, mostly from the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and World Food Program (WFP). Following October of 2023, when war broke out between Israel and Hamas, Israel imposed a siege on Gaza, cutting off all aid deliveries and electricity for several weeks. Humanitarian convoys organized by the UN faced border restrictions, and bombardments, damaged infrastructure, and lack of fuel made distribution of aid impossibly difficult. As a crisis zone with one of the highest documented numbers of denied humanitarian access, the Gaza Strip and its surrounding area suffers tremendously from a lack of humanitarian aid.

Burkina Faso

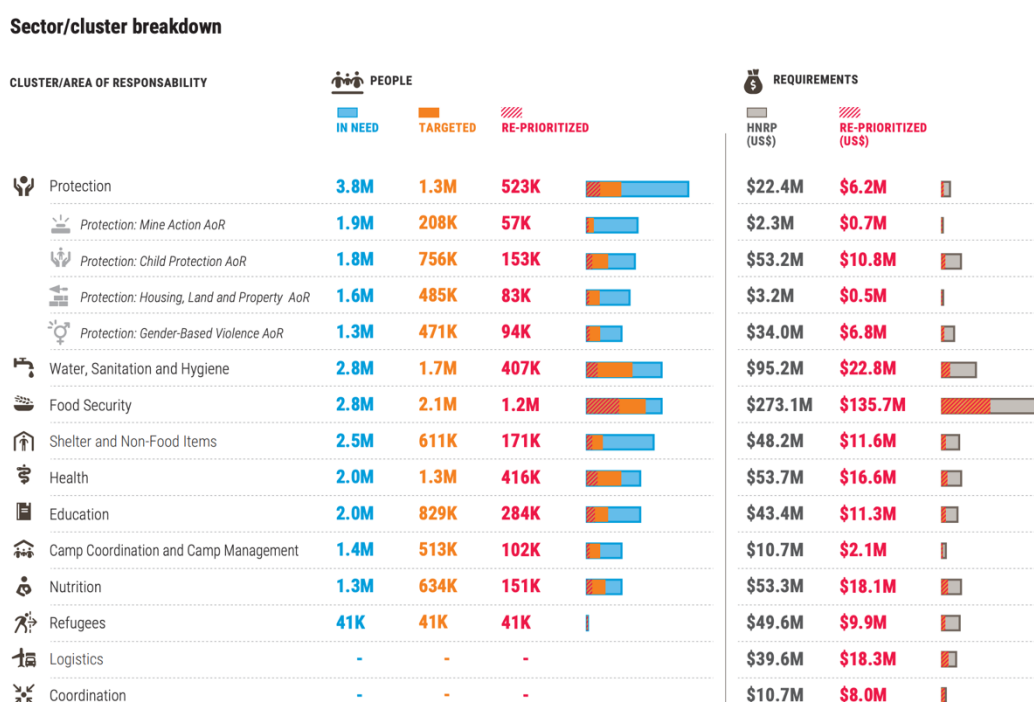


Figure 3: Breakdown on the re-prioritized needs and monetary requirements for aid in Burkina Faso (UNOCHA)

Between January of 2019 and November of 2024, over 300 documented cases of security incidents affected aid workers and the transport of humanitarian aid in Burkina Faso. Today, humanitarian access still remains greatly limited as a result of continuous insecurity, blockades, and the presence of IEDs. The Burkina Faso government's imposition of armed escorts for humanitarian aid convoys has further worsened the situation, and severely

disrupted the access of aid. Located in West Africa, conflict in Burkina Faso first spread from Mali, and has now caused over 6 million people, or a quarter of the population, to consistently require humanitarian aid. Insurgents and armed groups often intentionally cut off areas under government control, surrounding entire villages and populations, to starve citizens into submission and local resentment. Primary sources of income, especially farming and trade, are often disrupted, leading to heightened food insecurity across the country. While there are often millions of people in need of aid, targeted populations make up little of the actual percentage due to lack of funding and access.

European Union (EU)

As a strong and vocal advocate for IHL and the protection of citizens, the European Union (EU) is collectively the world's largest donor of humanitarian aid, counting both EU institutions and its member states. Under the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the initial EU budget for the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) amounted to about 1.65 billion euros per year. The EU has allocated much of this funding towards aiding in the many conflicts in Gaza, Syria, and Yemen, as well as funding aid programs in Ukraine. Through its Civil Protection Mechanism and the EU Humanitarian Air Bridge, the EU facilitates emergency responses and transports relief supplies and evacuates patients during crises.

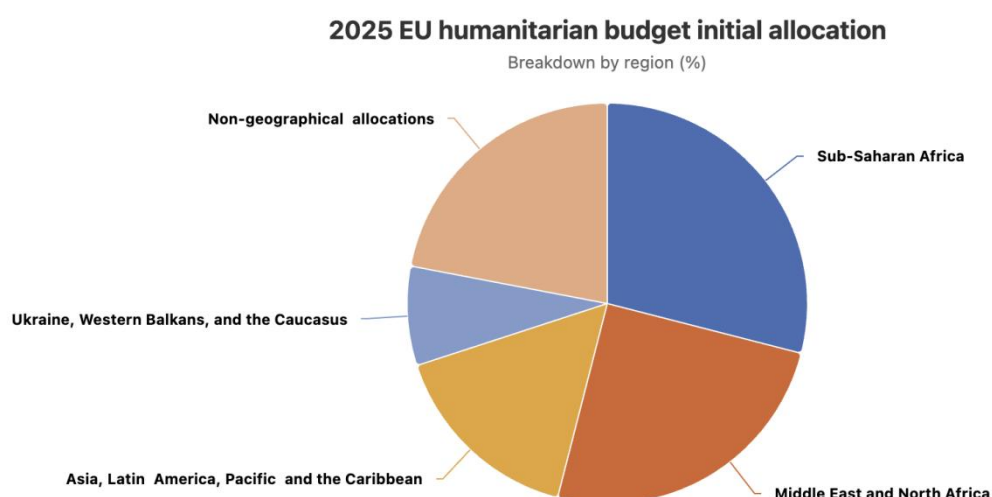


Figure 4: Pie Chart of the European Union's humanitarian aid budget initial allocation by region percentage in 2025 (European Commission)

United States of America (USA)

The United States has been consistently one of the largest donors of humanitarian aid in the world, providing billions in funding annually through the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and contributions to WFP and UNHCR. In 2024 alone, America's humanitarian assistance budget surpassed \$15 billion, with a majority of their allocations being directed towards Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan. Despite this, much of America's aid policies are interrelated with geopolitical and national security priorities. The U.S. mostly prioritizes aid in regions where instability could threaten U.S. interests or allies, and aid is often used as an incentive for political behavior or to punish governments that violate human rights and harbor extremist terrorist groups.

Following Donald Trump's day one executive orders to implement a 90-day pause in United States foreign development assistance, operations from local sources have been scaled down or even ceased entirely due to a lack of funding. Information channels necessary to providing aid worker safety were furthermore shut down or affected severely by the aid freeze.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is a neutral and independent organization aimed at providing humanitarian aid and protection to people affected by conflict and violence. Founded in 1863, the ICRC was a key force in developing International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and was also the main driving force behind the initial Geneva Convention of 1864. The ICRC provides several of the key aspects necessary in addressing the disruption of humanitarian aid in conflict zones, offering emergency relief to displaced and affected peoples, delivering medical assistance to the wounded, and facilitating the exchange of messages between separated family members. Under the Geneva Convention, the red cross and other red emblems provide protection for military medical services and relief workers in armed conflict, posing an important role in this topic.

The ICRC is a founding member and key component of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the world's largest humanitarian network. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement comprises of the ICRC, which focuses on armed conflicts, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which coordinates international disaster relief, and 191 individual national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

In the past, both the Security Council and General Assembly has reaffirmed countless times that all member states should abide by International Humanitarian Law, and thus condemn all those who attempt to purposely disrupt the distribution of humanitarian aid. However, much of them held limitations that led to little reform being completed. One of the earliest and most important treaties focused on humanitarian aid were Protocols I and II of the Geneva Conventions, which aimed to address core IHL protecting citizens and aid workers. These two treaties legally required that citizens in conflict had access to basic supplies, and that parties on both sides of an armed conflict must allow and facilitate rapid humanitarian relief. However, the enforcement of this agreement relied heavily on international pressure and accountability mechanisms that were politically fragile.

- 26 August 2003 (S/RES/1502)
 - Condemned all forms of violence toward those participating in humanitarian aid operations
 - Reaffirmed that all parties involved in an armed conflict must comply with the rules of international law
 - Suggested that the situations in which humanitarian assistance is denied as a consequence of violence is brought to the attention of the UN

- Limited by the fact that it was non-binding, and thus depended greatly on member states' cooperation
- 22 February 2014 (S/RES/2139)
 - Security Council resolution passed unanimously that demanded an end to violence against civilians and an immediate halt to sieges of populated areas in Syria
 - Demanded that all parties (especially Syrian authorities) allow immediate and unhindered humanitarian access through both cross-line and cross-border routes
 - Marked one of the first times the UN authorized cross-border aid delivery without the host state's consent
 - Only due to extreme obstruction
 - Limited by the fact that there was no automatic enforcement mechanism in case of further non-compliance due to fear of veto
 - Russia and China both vetoed the renewal of this mandate several times in the future, reducing the number of open border crossings and limiting access greatly

Possible Solutions

To strengthen humanitarian access and coordination, both temporary and long-term solutions must be considered and taken into account. Humanitarian corridors are a short-term way that humanitarian convoys can safely transport supplies while maintaining impartiality. These routes or temporary ceasefire zones also provide citizens and vulnerable populations with a way to escape. Past examples of humanitarian corridors are the Black Sea Grain initiative in Ukraine and the UN Humanitarian Air Service in South Sudan. Strong monitoring mechanisms by neutral UN observers must be implemented to prevent misuse of these corridors, and the passages must only be used in the short-term in order to pave the way for more stable solutions. Meanwhile, bordering and neighboring countries should be encouraged to host logistics hubs in order to increase coordination efforts. Regional humanitarian task forces should be established, such as under the African Union, Arab League, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), in order to ensure cross-border relief and reduce dependency on a few major donors. Response systems are decentralized, providing more possibilities for swift and diverse sources of aid. Finally, regional or international data-sharing systems should be established and built upon. Due to the fact that broken-down infrastructure and destroyed transportation often causes the blockage of aid, real-time mapping systems should be developed in order to track blocked routes, damaged or unusable infrastructure, and population displacement. These systems would be powered by satellite data and local NGO reports, and would consist of both global data and regional data. IHOs and delocalized aid agencies would be able to use one set system and

understand how to map and plan routes for aid delivery. This would furthermore improve transparency for all participants.

Legal and institutional mechanisms form a large part of addressing the disruption of humanitarian aid, but it is important to note that, as the Human Rights Council, delegates are not allowed to demand the actions of member states. To enforce IHL, accountability measures could be promoted for those who deliberately obstruct aid, either through targeted sanctions or International Criminal Court (ICC) referrals on war crimes. UN investigative bodies are encouraged to include the obstruction of aid as a standard category in conflict monitoring reports to raise awareness on proper international law, and starvation tactics should be explicitly classified as a war crime in public records. In order to protect humanitarian workers, the UN Safety and Security Framework should be expanded to include investments in training of workers, secure communication systems, and early warning systems of targeted attacks. A Humanitarian Protection Protocol could be created in collaboration with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), obligating all parties involved in an armed conflict to share aid convoy coordinates with external forces such as the UN and refrain from targeting them. Incentivized compliance through sanctions relief or aid funding bonuses should also be implemented for groups that protect humanitarian staff, measured in documented accounts of how many workers are attacked.

The final goal of this committee is to ensure long-term solutions that allow vulnerable populations to sustain themselves without having a dependency on aid. Donators could collaborate with the UN Environment Program (UNEP) to help conflict regions invest in local food production, renewable energy, and infrastructure repairs to build resilience. Experts from developed countries would be invited to host workshops by which sessions on sustainable farming and energy use are taught. Clean and sustainable water systems and micro-financing projects could be supported to make communities less reliant on unstable supply chains, meaning populations can still sustain themselves despite a lack of aid. To strengthen early warning systems, global early-warning networks should be established, to predict when and where potential humanitarian blockades will occur based on conflict patterns and updates, weather, and displacement data. Agencies would thus be able to pre-position supplies in areas with low likelihoods of blockades before access is lost. To track aid flow and prevent diversion in a transparent way, digital verification systems would be implemented. These could be digital platforms in which organizations share data to the public.

Bibliography

- ACAPS. *HUMANITARIAN ACCESS OVERVIEW Spotlight on Violence against Aid Workers*. 2024.
 ≈www.care.org/media-and-press/record-number-of-attacks-on-aid-workers-as-crimes-go-unpunished/. Accessed 11 Oct. 2025.
- European Commission. “Funding for Humanitarian Aid.” *Civil-Protection-Humanitarian-Aid.ec.europa.eu*, civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/funding-evaluations/funding-humanitarian-aid_en.
- . “Humanitarian Aid.” *Civil-Protection-Humanitarian-Aid.ec.europa.eu*, 2023, civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid_en.
- . “Humanitarian Principles.” *Civil-Protection-Humanitarian-Aid.ec.europa.eu*, European Commission, 2023, civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/who/humanitarian-principles_en.
- GEODIS. “How to Organise Humanitarian Logistics in Conflict Zones | GEODIS.” *Geodis.com*, 2025, geodis.com/us-en/blog/vertical-logistics-expertise-and-special-events/how-organise-humanitarian-logistics-conflict. Accessed 8 Oct. 2025.
- Grace, Rob. “Understanding Humanitarian Access Obstruction during Armed Conflict.” *Oxford Academic*, 5 Sept. 2025, academic.oup.com/isq/article/69/3/sqaf059/8248240#531129475.
- Humanitarian Outcomes. *Organisational Elements: Structures and Policy Instruments*.
- ICRC. “How Humanitarian Corridors Work to Help People in Conflict Zones.” *Www.icrc.org*, 17 May 2022, www.icrc.org/en/document/how-humanitarian-corridors-work.
- . “Urban Warfare and Violence.” *International Committee of the Red Cross*, 2 Jan. 2024, www.icrc.org/en/law-and-policy/urban-warfare-and-violence.
- International Committee of the Red Cross. *ADVISORY SERVICE What Is International Humanitarian Law?* July 2004.
- Prasad, AN, and PL Prasad. “Children in Conflict Zones.” *Medical Journal Armed Forces India*, vol. 65, no. 2, Apr. 2009, pp. 166–169, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4921424/, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0377-1237\(09\)80134-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0377-1237(09)80134-2).
- Strucke, Michelle, and Marc Cohen. “What Is Happening to U.S. Humanitarian Assistance? Will the United States Continue to Save Lives?” *Csis.org*, 2025, www.csis.org/analysis/what-happening-us-humanitarian-assistance-will-united-states-continue-save-lives.
- United Nations. ““Shocking Increase” in Denial of Access to Life-Saving Humanitarian Aid for Children in Conflict Zones Worldwide, Security Council Hears, as Delegates Discuss Solutions | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases.” *Press.un.org*, 3 Apr. 2024, press.un.org/en/2024/sc15651.doc.htm.
- . “Crisis and Emergency Response | United Nations.” *United Nations*, 2025, www.un.org/en/global-issues/crisis-and-emergency-response.
- UNOCHA. “Burkina Faso.” *OCHA*, 18 July 2019, www.unocha.org/burkina-faso.
- UNRWA. “UNRWA | United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees.” *UNRWA*, 2019, www.unrwa.org/.

World Health Organization. "People in Gaza Starving, Sick and Dying as Aid Blockade Continues." *Who.int*,
World Health Organization: WHO, 12 May 2025, www.who.int/news/item/12-05-2025-people-in-gaza-starving--sick-and-dying-as-aid-blockade-continues.