HUMANITARIAN ACCESS WORKING GROUP

NGO CO-CHAIR TOOLKIT

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INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian access working groups (HAWGs) have become a common feature of humanitarian responses across the globe over the past decade and there are now over 25 in operation across a range of contexts. Many are co-chaired by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and organisations such as the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) or non-governmental organisation (NGO) forums.

Women at water point in Djibo, Burkina Faso

There is a growing body of resources on humanitarian negotiations and access more broadly, including tools and templates, but there is only limited guidance on how NGOs can maximise the opportunities afforded through the co-chair role, and how to navigate the specific challenges that HAWGs, and particularly NGO co-chairs, face.

The European Union's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) has recognised this gap and supported the development of this toolkit, which offers practical guidance on the fundamentals of coordinating an HAWG from its establishment through to the delivery of activities in support of the wider humanitarian community. It is mainly intended for NGO co-chairs, but is equally relevant for UN co-chairs and other HAWG members.

A group of stakeholders, composed of NGO co-chairs, humanitarian access practitioners and members of NGO coordination bodies informed the toolkit through an iterative design and consultation process that included surveys, design sprints and bilateral interviews. ECHO also funded research on the role HAWGs play in supporting engagement with non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and de-facto authorities, which informed some of the toolkit's content.

Recommendations

A series of recurring insights and best practice emerged from the consultations and research for the toolkit that should be at the forefront of any NGO co-chair's work, either when establishing an HAWG or coming into an existing group.

They may seem intuitive, but these practices address many causes of the challenges HAWGs face.

1

HAWGs need to have strong links to the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). This is regularly articulated in an HAWG's terms of reference (ToR), but it does not always happen in practice. HAWGs and HCTs should work closely together, not as detached entities. An HAWG should function as an advisory body to the HCT and provide operational support in line with the latter's priorities.

2

Structure and membership are important to get right. Enough attention needs to be given to how HAWGs are structured and how their members are chosen. This is the basis for longer-term relevance and success.

3

Understanding the wider humanitarian architecture is vital. NGO co-chairs need to have a strong understanding of where their HAWG sits in the humanitarian coordination system and the dynamics within that system between organisations, forums, donors, and senior humanitarian staff. This knowledge helps to ensure that the collective humanitarian architecture supports the HAWG's work.

4

Effective consultations with UN agencies and NGOs are at the core of all good HAWG work. An access strategy and workplan are among the many deliverables that need to reflect HAWG and HCT members' needs, and those of the wider humanitarian community. They should not be dictated by the agencies in the co-chair roles. Without taking the time to engage in proper consultations, an HAWG will find it difficult to move beyond information-sharing activities.

5

Endorsement and implementation processes need to be managed carefully. A balance needs to be established between securing buy-in and avoiding becoming bogged down in time-intensive endorsement processes. For implementation, constant communication, and feedback, and assigning clear roles and responsibilities are crucial to bridging often imperfect endorsement processes.

6

NGO co-chairs need to maintain a connection to project implementation locations. Travelling to project locations will give NGO co-chairs a greater understanding of HAWG members' challenges, more exposure to external interlocutors and ultimately more legitimacy.

This toolkit does not represent the full breath of activities that fall under the umbrella of humanitarian access. There will be many activities that individual organisations conduct to improve access that HAWGs rarely take on. The following sections should be seen in this light, as a representation of what an HAWG does, not what individual organisations do.

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PART 1:

UNDERSTANDING

The guiding frameworks, concepts and principles that underpin humanitarian access form the basis of nearly every activity an HAWG might engage in. It is vital that not only an HAWG's leadership but also its members understand them to help foster informed and impactful coordination.

Displaced South Sudanese family in Khartoum, Sudan

Building this understanding is particularly important if an HAWG's leadership and/or members are less experienced or new to the sector.

There is a wealth of existing information and research on the topics highlighted below. We have selected some of the most relevant for humanitarian access practitioners, which can be found here.

Humanitarian access

Humanitarian access is generally defined as humanitarians' ability to reach affected populations and plan, implement, deliver and monitor aid interventions in a principled way; and people's ability to access assistance and protection safely and in dignity.

As a concept it is most frequently associated with areas experiencing armed conflict, disasters and/or other emergencies.

It is a fundamental part of humanitarian action. Without some degree of access, it would be impossible to provide assistance.

It is important to remember that humanitarian access is a dual concept. More focus is often given to humanitarians' access compared to people's access. One way to offset this potential imbalance is to ensure HAWGs work closely alongside protection clusters, including having them as members.

Given the breadth of issues that fall under both sides of humanitarian access, it is understandable that an HAWG will prioritise some over others, but it should do so consciously. If people's access is not to be given equal attention, then such a decision should be part of a clearly communicated prioritisation process. Ultimately though the HCT is likely to set an HAWG's access priorities and tasks.

Access constraints

Humanitarian access is rarely unfettered. A number of issues regularly hinder it on both sides of the equation. The UN, NGOs and others have defined these barriers in largely similar ways, with some nuances across categories. Those in the chart below are generally seen as the standard access barriers as defined by OCHA and NRC.

Discussions about humanitarian access constraints often include descriptions of areas deemed hard-to-reach (H2R) or inaccessible.

NRC defines H2R as affected population groups and areas inhabited by people in need that are unable to receive humanitarian services covering their basic needs because of a significant and sustained denial of access, the continual need to secure access or other restrictions.

NRC's humanitarian access framework with OCHA AMRF equivalence

OCHA ARMF Equivalent	People in need's humanitarian access	Dimensions	NRC humanitarian access	OCHA ARMF Equivalent	Types of impediments
Denial of the existence of humanitarian needs or of entitlements to humanitarian assistance	Denial of the existence of humanitarian needs or entitlements to assistance	Indicators	Restriction of movement (staff, goods) into & within the area	Restriction of movement of agencies, personnel, or goods into the affected country. AND 3. Restriction of movement of agencies, personnel, or goods within the affected country.	Bureaucratic and administrative (BAI)
Restrictions on, or obstruction of, conflict affected populations access to services and assistance	Restriction and obstruction of access to services and assistance		Interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities	Interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities.	
Military operations and ongoing hostilities impeding humanitarian operations	Violence threats or violence against people affected or in need		Violence threats or violence against humanitarian personnel, facilities, and assets	Violence against humanitarian personnel, assets and facilities	Conflict
Presence of Mines and UXO	Presence of landmines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), explosive remnants of war (ERW), and unexploded ordnance (UXO)		Presence of landmines, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), explosive remnants of war (ERW), and unexploded ordnance (UXO)	Presence of Mines and UXO	
Physical environment	Terrain and climate barriers and obstacles		Terrain and climate barriers and obstacles	Physical environment	Logistic and climate
Physical environment	Infrastructure barriers and obstacles		Infrastructure barriers and obstacles	Physical environment	
	Communication and connectivity barriers and obstacles		Communication and connectivity barriers and obstacles		

Access coordination

Every humanitarian organisation will pursue their own strategies and approaches to secure and sustain access. Coordination refers to the collective efforts of various stakeholders to facilitate it. These efforts are most often undertaken in settings such as HCTs, HAWGs, civil-military coordination (CMCoord) cells, NGO forums and sometimes sectoral clusters.

There are various ways access coordination forums can help to address constraints, including:

- Gathering information and providing analysis to inform common decision making
- Developing response-level access strategies and operating principles
- Developing talking points to support private advocacy and public communications
- Adapting the ways humanitarian assistance is provided
- Advising decision makers on when assistance should be limited, suspended, or withdrawn

There are good reasons to pursue collective efforts. They strengthen humanitarians' position in negotiations and advocacy by presenting a united front, reduce the likelihood of humanitarians taking contradictory or harmful approaches and protect individual organisations from potential retaliatory action by an assertive actor.

The pillars of humanitarian access

Humanitarian access is based on two foundational pillars: the humanitarian principles and the international normative framework.

Humanitarian principles

Humanitarian principles provide the fundamental foundations for humanitarian action and are the central feature of humanitarians' identity. They are central to establishing and maintaining access to affected people in any setting.

The principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality are endorsed in UN General Assembly resolution 46/182, which was adopted in 1991. The principle of independence was added in 2004 under resolution 58/114.

What are the principles?

HUMANITY: Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found
This is the primary rationale and defining characteristic of humanitarian action. From an access practitioner's perspective it includes making efforts to negotiate access to, and presence in, areas where needs are highest, and a commitment to engage with affected communities. The principle of humanity is the overriding guiding principle of our work.

IMPARTIALITY: Humanitarian action must be carried out based on needs alone,
with those most in need prioritised
Humanitarian aid should be based on need only, regardless of who the people we serve are or where they are.

NEUTRALITY: Humanitarians must not take sides in a conflict
Being neutral should not limit humanitarians from engaging with all actors to ensure aid reaches people in need, including NSAGs, de-facto authorities and criminal groups. Access practitioners play a key role in ensuring this mandate is fulfilled.

INDEPENDENCE: Humanitarians should be able to operate independently and not be guided by the objectives of other actors
Many humanitarians will often not be entirely independent. They might rely on the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) for means of transport to H2R locations or have their operations dictated by a small number of western donors. An access practitioner should always be mindful of when any such loss in independence starts to affect the other humanitarian principles.

Why do the humanitarian principles matter?

Adherence to the principles is a key enabler for humanitarians to be able to access people in need. In ideal circumstances, a warring party, local authority or community will know that a humanitarian organisation is neutral, that its only objective is to assist and protect people in need, and that it is not interested in taking sides in a conflict or favouring one group of people over another.

The reality is frequently more complicated. External stakeholders often perceive humanitarians as not adhering to the principles, which can lead to the imposition of access constraints. Humanitarians' criticism of an armed actor for targeting civilians is a typical example of being seen to take sides in a conflict. It is important to carefully weigh whether the risks of public advocacy outweigh the benefits and potentially further limit access. Other forms of engagement and diplomacy are preferrable at the initial stages.

Access in international humanitarian law

Humanitarians frequently refer to international humanitarian law (IHL) in discussions about access because it speaks to the rights and obligations of parties to a conflict as well as humanitarians in times of armed conflict.

IHL applies in two situations: international armed conflict (IAC), which takes place between states, such as the current war between Ukraine and Russia; and non-international armed conflict (NIAC), in which at least one non-state group is involved, such as the conflict between the US-led coalition in Iraq and Syria and the Islamic State group. Different IHL conventions apply depending on how a conflict is categorised.[1]

The most basic rules of IHL revolve around prohibiting attacks on civilians and civilian objects, ensuring that civilians and combatants who are not fighting anymore are protected, and that certain categories of people - such as children, medical personnel, humanitarians, women, displaced people and those with disabilities - receive additional protection.

National legal frameworks, traditional or customary norms and religious norms also provide foundations for access and can often be more impactful in helping frame engagement with actors for whom international laws are of lesser importance.

[1] As the guardian of IHL, ICRC is categorising the respective conflicts; Visit www.rulac.org to see how different situations of violence are classified legally.

PART 2:

ESTABLISHING

Tools/Templates/ Resources to download:
AWG ToR, https://bit.ly/3SuIHbX

This section highlights best practice in establishing an HAWG and outlines its relationship with other parts of the humanitarian coordination system.

Renovation of damaged school in indigenous community in Antioquia, Colombia

Purpose

An HAWG should serve as an operational and technical advisory body for the entire humanitarian response. Any issues related to access concerning the wider humanitarian community should be directed towards it.

An HAWG can be involved in a broad range of issues and activities, from supporting the development of an HCT access strategy to drafting common positions on operational dilemmas and supporting senior officials' engagement with external interlocutors.

If access issues are discussed at an HCT, inter-cluster coordination group (ICCG) or other coordination forum without the HAWG's involvement, then there is potentially a gap in communication.

Start-up

HAWGs are established in a variety of settings, but they are most commonly associated with situations of armed conflict, both international and non-international.

They might also be warranted in situations where violence is taking place, but which have not yet been classified as an armed conflict, such as in Haiti where criminal gangs are prevalent.

High levels of existing or potential access constraints and operational dilemmas should be common features of any situation where an HAWG is set up.

OCHA and its NGO partners play a key role in assessing whether an HAWG is required. Its establishment will depend on the HCT's requirements and OCHA's capacity as a convening

body for humanitarian partners and its information management capacity to support HAWG activities.

Many HAWGs are co-chaired by OCHA and either an NGO such as NRC, or an NGO forum. All co-chairs will have responsibilities both towards their own organisation and the HAWG. Co-chairs should be mindful of how their own organisation's priorities might come into conflict with those of the HAWG as a collective, and transparent about any conflicts of interest.

Terms of reference (ToR)

There can be a tendency to jump straight into developing strategies and plans when an HWAG is established, and to allow the structures that underpin it to develop ad-hoc. This is understandable in an emergency situation, but poorly defined structures can be difficult to change later and can eventually impede an HWAG's effectiveness.

It is important to establish sound structures from the outset, regardless of the situation. If an HAWG already exists, these structures should be evaluated as soon as possible.

A clear and concise ToR is one of the first documents an HAWG should aim to produce or update. It should include the following:

- **The HAWG's overall objective:** This is often generic text about improving humanitarian access.
- **Roles and responsibilities:** The topics, issues, and activities the HAWG will focus on.
- **Membership and chairing:** The co-chairs and their functions, how members will be selected and revised, and what is expected of members in terms of time and effort dedicated to the HAWG.
- **Meetings and agendas:** How often the HAWG will aim to meet, how the agenda will be decided and when minutes will be shared. Attendance rules could also be included, allowing the possibility of changing membership if organisations do attend regularly.
- **Reporting lines:** Who the HAWG will report to, ideally the HCT. If possible, a commitment should be included that the HAWG leadership will sit on the HCT.
- **Revision:** When the HAWG's ToR will be updated during the course of a year, providing an opportunity to adjust its structure if it is not fit for purpose.
- **Norms and ways of working:** An HAWG's strength depends on its members' ability to collaborate and share information in productive and safe ways. Firm norms and expectations for participation enable more productive collaboration.

Best ToR practices

A ToR might be drafted at the same time as the group membership structure is being decided, so involve prospective members in the process. The ToR, or any document for that matter, should not solely be produced by the co-chairs.

Ensure the HCT has ownership of, and engagement in the HAWG's work by having it endorse the ToR. HCT endorsement is particularly important if the HAWG envisions presenting regularly to the HCT.

An endorsed ToR helps to establish accountability for the commitments it contains. Many HAWGs have excellent ToRs, but they regularly are not fully realised. An endorsed ToR can be a useful tool to remind HAWG members or the HCT of the commitments they have made.

Many HAWG ToRs do not specify how the co-chairs will split their responsibilities. This has its pros and cons. On the one hand it provides flexibility to divide tasks as they arise, but on the other it can lead to frustration in situations where there is a poor working relationship between the co-chairs or their superiors. At a minimum, the co-chairs and their superiors should discuss the division of responsibilities as soon as possible so clear expectations are established early on.

In case of major disagreements, recourse to the Global Access Working Group could be taken as a last resort.

Reporting lines

An HAWG should ideally have an active reporting line to the HCT. This increases it chances of influencing important strategies, engagements, policies and decisions related to humanitarian access and principled action. As the HC will often lead on the most important high-level negotiations, a connection to the HCT and by extension the HC is important to ensure technical advice and support for these negotiations.

HAWGs may also have reporting lines to ICCGs. This can be a productive relationship in supporting ongoing and future operations, but it does distance the HAWG from more senior decision makers within the humanitarian response.

Regardless of which forum an HAWG reports to, its co-chairs should present regularly to the HCT, ICCG and key clusters to help realise its ToR.

If an HAWG's leadership is not present in these coordination forums, access priorities should be systematically raised with more senior officials, such as the head or deputy head of OCHA or the director of the international NGO forum, to ensure they are presented and discussed in the most important coordination forums.

This kind of separation, however, is likely to increase the chances of the HAWG operating in a bubble and its members becoming frustrated. A middle course might be for its co-chairs' superiors to represent the HAWG's work on the HCT or ICCG, but this is not ideal because neither will be as well versed in its day-to-day work.

Structure

HAWGs need to be mindful of how many members they admit. Those with large numbers risk becoming solely information-sharing platforms that struggle to generate meaningful and effective discussions about strategy and policy.

Different HAWG structures can help to mitigate this, and there are four that tend to be used. These are described below, with the first and fourth being the most common. The size of the potential membership pool may be a deciding factor in choosing which structure to adopt.

Single-structure HAWG: This is the most straightforward in terms of organisation. It consists of one group, but membership can range from 10 to 50+ individuals. The bigger the group, the less effective it is likely to be. If it grows beyond 15 to 20 members, one of the structures below should be considered.

Core HAWG + briefing group: This involves a core working group of fewer than 20 members that are committed to dedicating more time to the group's work. The core group is supplemented by a larger briefing group that is mainly used for information sharing. The briefing group is provided with opportunities to feed into HAWG products, but it is less involved in the week-to-week work. There is less need to be stringent in terms of the profile of briefing group members.

Core HAWG + various briefing groups: Similar to the above but with various briefing groups to cater for different working languages. One briefing group might typically by held in English, French or Spanish and another in a further language to embrace as many organisations as possible. As the number of briefing groups grows, however, so too does the effort required to organise meetings.

Core HAWG + sub-national HAWGs: This option may be preferable if certain geographical areas require specific attention that a national working group is not capable of addressing. In this scenario, the national HAWG co-chairs should have a technical line to each of their sub-national counterparts.

A requirement to have one or more briefing groups could be a welcome challenge, because it points to broad interest in the HAWG and its work, but coordinating a large number of organisations fairly but effectively is more complicated. OCHA's staffing capacity is likely to be important in such situations.

Membership

Membership processes

Whether a co-chair is tasked with setting up an HAWG or slotting into an existing forum, deciding on or revising its membership structure is an important step.

Structures that are not transparent, consensus driven and strategic can undermine an HAWG's legitimacy and relevance within the humanitarian community. Ad-hoc, top-down processes can lead to perceptions of there being an elite "in-group" and another that is "out of favour".

Member profiles

- Some guiding principles to select member organisations include:
  - Membership should represent a mix of organisations – UN agencies, national and international NGOs and coordination bodies such as ICCGs and NGO forums – that cover specific expertise in areas such protection, logistics and civil-military coordination.
  - Membership should reflect operational presence in as many as possible if not all geographic areas so that isolated access constraints do not go unreported.
  - Members' work should reflect a range of programmatic interventions. Some sectors may experience access challenges that others do not.
  - Membership should include organisations that intervene directly rather than through partners. These organisations are more likely to be able to speak with authority about the access environment.
- Some UN agencies are less frequently included in HAWGs, but are worth considering:
  - The UN Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS), particularly in higher risk locations given its significant influence over UN agencies' movements
  - UNHAS, in situations where deconfliction mechanisms are in place
  - The UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS), in situations where contamination with explosive remnants of war, unexploded ordnance or improvised explosive devices is significant.
- An HAWG's membership should also reflect the main stakeholders of influence, such as large UN agencies or international NGOs which are part of the HCT and are willing to raise priority issues. These organisations will ultimately decide whether the HAWG's work is endorsed.
- Different HAWGs select different membership profiles in different situations. Some will only have technical access specialists as members, which facilitates more granular discussions. Others will include more influential operational members, which helps to raise the profile of the group but may detract from the technical nature of the discussions. In situations with significant access constraints, having members with advocacy or policy backgrounds profiles can be helpful.
- Regardless of the seniority of positions, it is good to include members that are directly involved in, or support engagement with external stakeholders and which have programmatic responsibilities.
- In situations with high levels of insecurity, access and security can become synonymous and lead to an HAWG having many security experts as members. This has its advantages, but it can mean that non-security access barriers or dilemmas are not given enough attention.

National and local NGO membership

- An HAWG's leadership should ensure that a number of national and/or local NGOs are represented in the group for a number of significant reasons:
  - They are likely collectively to be the largest implementers in a response.
  - They are likely to face access challenges that UN agencies or international NGOs do not.
  - They may be able to access communities and areas that international agencies are unable to.
  - Their decision-making processes and ability to resolve access challenges and dilemmas might differ from those of UN agencies or international NGOs.
- Including a UN agency or international NGO that works through national and/or local partners should not be a substitute for including national and/or local NGOs themselves.
- HAWGs regularly struggle to meaningfully include national and/or local NGOs in their core membership. This is not necessarily because of a lack of effort, but because a different type of effort is required. It should not be assumed that national and/or local NGOs will have the same interests as a large international organisation in being a member, and co-chairs need to reflect on whether they understand and are responding to their motivations of to take part.
- If securing participation continues to be a challenge, they should also strive to make greater bilateral efforts with national and/or local NGOs to seek their input and feedback on the HAWG's work. They might also seek advice from an NGO forum or international stakeholders that work primarily through partners.

Donor membership

Whether or not to include donors as part of an HAWG's core membership is often a difficult decision to make. They are often not included, particularly in situations of armed conflict in which a donor's government may be a party.

Aside from the potential politicisation of the HAWG, members may be less likely to talks about their access impediments and operational compromises in front of their donors. This is likely to be particularly true for organisations that rely on a small number of donors.

NRC's position is that HAWGs should be platforms for operational and coordination humanitarian partners only.

A decision not to include donors should not, however, be equated with a decision not to keep them informed and support their advocacy efforts. Donors often have influence over HCT members and senior humanitarian officials and can be important allies for an HAWG.

Donors that are not included in an HAWG's membership should be kept informed, possibly through a monthly briefing that would ideally be delivered by both co-chairs.

Médecins Sans Frontières and the International Committee of the Red Cross

Some organisations, such as Médecins Sans Frontières and the International Committee of the Red Cross, do not traditionally participate in UN-led coordination structures. They may, however, participate as observers.

Regardless of their membership status, both organisations are important to consult. They often have access to areas and vulnerable groups that others do not have. They are also considered more independent in terms of their funding structures and so can provide a perspective on the access environment that is less influenced by the UN system and large western donors.

Meetings

Like any meeting, running an HAWG meeting is straightforward in many respects but it can be challenging to generate an active discussion among members.

Repeated meetings with one-way communication can lead to frustration among the leadership and members alike. There are several reasons this can happen:

- Members are not comfortable discussing what they perceive to be sensitive topics.
- Agendas are set solely by the HAWG's leadership.
- Members' profiles are not conducive to good discussions. They might be removed from day-to-day operations and might not be well versed in the minutiae of the access environment.

There is no formula to overcome these challenges, but the following could help:

- Stress and demonstrate that the HAWG is a confidential space to discuss issues. Ask members to agree ground rules on confidentiality that might include a commitment not to forward HAWG emails or messages to organisations outside the membership, and agreement that members who violate the rules will be removed. If HAWG members trust each other and communicate openly it will support stronger collective responses.
- Have members contribute to setting the agenda and lead on points they put forward in the meetings. Make it clear as well that over time all members will be expected to lead on some agenda points.
- Call on members for their opinions during meetings if people are not forthcoming. Particularly in online meetings it is easier for people shy away from contributing, but being part of an HAWG should come with an expectation that members participate actively in all aspects of its work.
- While not always possible, try to set an agenda at least a few days in advance to give members time to gather necessary information from their partners or colleagues.

The HAWG leadership should ensure that minutes and action points are disseminated as soon as possible after a meeting, taking care to ensure members' anonymity is maintained. It might also be agreed during a meeting to omit any highly sensitive discussion points from the minutes. A lighter version of the minutes could be shared with the ICCG, the Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator (DHC) and platforms such as CMCoord cells to keep them informed.

Even in extremely sensitive situations, action points from the meeting should at least be circulated to ensure accountability to the action owners and follow-up in subsequent meetings.

Signing off

- A consensus-driven approach is usually the default way for an HAWG to sign-off on a joint position or document, but this method is not without its drawbacks given that it can lead to the lowest common denominator being agreed. Nor is there often much appetite to adopt any type of voting method.
- Despite the drawbacks, there are ways of ensuring that true reflections of HAWG positions are sent to the HCT or ICCG.
  - Disagreements over a position should be addressed in a one-to-one setting to better understand that organisation's position and alternatives acceptable to them.
  - Red-lines or vetoes from specific organisations should be explained and justified.
  - If an HAWG position risks being forced through, concerned organisations should seek the advice of their country director or head of mission on how to address the issue. Members should not let the co-chairs force through work that they disagree with.
  - Major disagreements that cannot be overcome should be documented and included in a presentation to decision-making bodies.

PART 3:

ANALYSING, MONITORING AND REPORTING

Tools/Templates/ Resources to download:
Stakeholder mapping guide, https://bit.ly/4bcdvpk

Buildings in Aleppo, Syria damaged by the 2023 earthquakes

An HAWG's understanding of the situation in which it is operating is crucial to ensure it focuses on the most pressing issues. It is also helpful in providing an evidence base to inform negotiations and advocacy.

In a coordination setting three main structured activities are conducted as the basis for an HAWG's contextual understanding:

1. Stakeholder mapping and analysis
2. Access incident monitoring and reporting
3. Access severity mapping

There are other analysis activities and tools, but these are less commonly used in an HAWG setting.

Access severity mapping and access incident monitoring and reporting are largely considered OCHA-led activities which would often happen even in the absence of an HAWG. A working group, however, can inform the methodologies for such activities and support their implementation.

Despite their essential support in building shared understanding of a situation, these activities regularly face challenges from their design through to implementation and the dissemination and use of the information they generate. An NGO co-chair should seek to play a constructive supporting role.

Contextual understanding is also heavily informed by the routine day-to-day work of meetings, bi-laterals and informal discussions. These are vitally important, particularly in faster moving environments, but they should be backed up by structured, methodologically sound activities.

Stakeholder mapping and analysis

What is it?

Stakeholder mapping and analysis identifies all actors with influence over humanitarian access, both organisations and individuals. It aims to understand their interests and influence, the power dynamics between actors, who key interlocutors are and what the best entry points might be.

Why is it important?

Stakeholder mapping and analysis is a key enabling activity for improving humanitarian access and is relevant to the entire humanitarian community. The information it generates is crucial to inform engagement strategies and tactics. Without the activity, an HAWG's leadership and members will already have a base-level understanding of key interlocutors, but a structured activity is likely to reveal more detailed and nuanced information.

Role of co-chairs and members

Co-chairs should be responsible for articulating a methodology and organising any workshops used to generate the information.

Members potentially have a more important role to play by actively participating in the workshops and offering information on the key stakeholders.

It is also worth considering involving experts from outside the HAWG membership, such as researchers and frontline negotiators who have specific expertise or who are generally more versed in the stakeholder landscape.

Guidance

Despite its importance, it tends to be difficult to secure buy-in and participation for a collective actor mapping and analysis. This is often rooted in HAWG members deeming the information required too sensitive to share openly. They may also be concerned that they might decrease their competitive advantage over other humanitarian organisations by sharing valuable insights that support their individual negotiations. It can also be driven by calculations of the cost-benefit of mapping stakeholders whose leadership is constantly in flux.

Such concerns are understandable, particularly in situations where groups or individuals might be sanctioned or difficult to engage with, and information relating to that actor might have been hard-won over years of engagement.

One way to approach this issue is not to undertake the exercise with the entire HAWG membership. Co-chairs may want to form a separate "taskforce" of interested members. It is also often helpful to generate a ToR for the activity to clarify who is participating, how the information will be gathered and how it will be used.

It is likely that the final product, or at least the most sensitive version, will not be shared with the whole HAWG membership or broader humanitarian community. Making this clear can be one way of encouraging organisations to participate.

Access incident monitoring and access snapshots

What is it?

OCHA's access monitoring and reporting framework (AMRF) is the most common collective tool found in humanitarian settings. It is considered an OCHA tool, but HAWG co-chairs and members can, if needed or requested, play a role in its design and implementation in a specific situation.

Access snapshots are overviews of the access environment based on incident reporting, which draw partly draw on reports submitted through the ARMF. Snapshots too are considered OCHA's remit to produce, but an HAWG may contribute if needed.

OCHA's Minimum Package of Services Manual contains more information on both activities.

Why are they important?

Both tools serve important purposes. The AMRF offers a systematic way to generate an evidence base to inform access priorities, and access snapshots can be a useful tool for advocacy with the HCT, donors and external stakeholders.

Role of co-chairs and members

Co-chairs can promote the AMRF in coordination forums, meetings and visits to project locations. They will often have partners report or discuss access issues with them, and they should use such opportunities to remind partners of the importance of reporting directly into the AMRF. It can be easier to get NGO partners to report into the system if the NGO co-chair is one of the people requesting it. OCHA is usually the secretariat of an HAWG, but the NGO co-chair will take on secretariat functions as well.

In the absence of an AMRF, the NGO co-chair and members should call on OCHA to roll out the tool.

Guidance

AMRF reporting: Lack of reporting is a significant issue and affects the AMRF's implementation. It may be considered an OCHA tool, but it relies on others to succeed.

A number of issues lie behind the lack of reporting. They include failure to include potential contributors in the design and roll out of the framework, a lack of understanding of what the reporting is used for and its impact, and a potential perception that confidential details will be shared with external parties that might jeopardise access.

Reporting tools used by other organisations may also contribute to the AMRF being under-used.

Capacity building: For partners in the wider humanitarian community, efforts should be made to ensure they understand what the tool is and what should be reported. Even for partners well versed in humanitarian access it might not always be clear when something such as a regular bureaucratic process qualifies as a constraint.

Despite its prevalence across large numbers of humanitarian responses, it cannot be taken for granted that the AMRF is understood. Awareness-raising sessions could be organised via NGO forums, groups of country directors or other coordination platforms.

ARMF design: In the rush to roll out an incident monitoring tool, its design may not always be user friendly, which will affect organisations' willingness to report into it.

Before launching a tool it should be tested with the NGOs whose reporting will inform it. This might take some time, but it is better than launching a tool that humanitarians will not use.

Access snapshot narrative: In situations where reporting into the AMRF is poor, it is possible that the snapshot's narrative will not reflect the access landscape as HAWG members see it. In this scenario, HAWG members or the NGO co-chair might play a role in reviewing the narrative before it is published to ensure it reflects their experiences.

In situations where OCHA's capacity is extremely constrained, an NGO co-chair might take on responsibility for drafting the narrative, based on an anonymised summary of the AMRF's reports compiled by OCHA.

Duplication of frameworks: In some situations, a particular access barrier, such as a bureaucratic or administrative impediment (BAI), might pose such an obstacle that an HAWG may consider setting up a dedicated monitoring and reporting system. This could be a way to focus members' attention, but it can also lead to the duplication of efforts.

Before embarking on setting up separate systems, an HAWG should assess whether the AMRF could potentially serve the same function with adjustments. Given that an NGO co-chair will rarely have access to AMRF reports, can an arrangement be made to access those pertaining to a specific impediment with the consent of all involved?

The AMRF is a regular feature of humanitarian responses and should not be eschewed in favour of another system without careful consideration, despite its inherent challenges.

Access Severity Mapping

What is it?

OCHA-led access severity mapping exercise complements access incident tracking by providing a more in-depth analysis of the severity of access constraints across a country or operational area. This analysis is often then overlaid with other relevant data like people in need figures, where organisations are providing assistance, or malnutrition severity figures for example.

The data collection often consists of two steps, preliminary collection of existing data which is then complemented by focus group discussions which might consist various humanitarian actors, civil society and affected populations.

This analysis is often transformed into maps and alongside a summary of the access environment. See an example from Syria below and a link to the same mapping here.

Sometimes these products will be made public but often they will remain private. More information can be found in the OCHA Minimum Package of Services.

Why are they important?

The document can provide an useful overview of an access environment which can be useful for advocacy and engagement purposes and to inform choices about where to provide assistance.

Both tools serve important purposes. The AMRF offers a systematic way to generate an evidence base to inform access priorities, and access snapshots can be a useful tool for advocacy with the HCT, donors and external stakeholders.

Role of co-chairs and members

While considered an OCHA exercise, NGO co-chairs and members might be called upon to advise and comment on the severity mapping methodology, the composition of the focus groups and the final outputs, especially in context's where OCHA is struggling with human resources capacity.

NGO co-chairs and member might also call on OCHA to revise the methodology if they see that previous iterations of the methodology did not accurately reflect the access environment as seen by a HAWG's membership base.

In some cases a steering committee might be established to provide guidance on the process. An NGO co-chair and HAWG members might be good candidates for such bodies.

Guidance

Expectations, Roles, and Responsibilities: It is important that at the beginning of the severity mapping process that there is clarity among HAWG members and both co-chairs about what role the group and the NGO co-chair will play in the process and what level of input they will have into both the methodology and the final output. A lack of shared clarity on this can lead to frustration later in the process. Ideally, all these roles and responsibilities and the methodology will be documented and adhered to.

HAWG members should seek to participate in any focus group discussions that are conducted as part of the process to help ensure their perspectives are incorporated.

Ideally, the HAWG will also have the ability to feedback on the final output – both the narrative and maps produced.

Diversifying inputs: In devising the methodology it is important to ensure there is a diversified range of inputs. There can sometimes be a tendency for UN agencies and INGOs to dominate the inputs so it is important HAWG members push for national and local NGOs to be included.

Operational Relevance: The scale of the access severity mapping exercise can often mean that there it is not feasible to assess very localized access conditions which would be of more operational value to humanitarian actors. As such, the final outputs can often be more of useful for advocacy purposes, rather than operational planning purposes.

SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
Humanitarian Access Severity Overview

Key findings (as of September 2022)

Consolidated access severity scores across all humanitarian partner groups – UN Agencies, International NGOs and National NGOs – reveal that from among the 270 sub-districts across Syria, where 14.6M people in need (PiN) of assistance live, the severity of access was found to be:

- High in 24 sub-districts (representing 4 per cent of PiN - 580K)
- Moderate in 102 sub-districts (44 per cent of PiN – 6.4M)
- Low in 144 sub-districts (52 per cent of PiN – 7.6M)

This third edition of the Access Severity analysis finds that conflict-related dynamics remain the most common constraint faced by all humanitarian partners in the 'moderate' and 'high' ranked sub-districts, particularly those areas in the vicinity of frontlines in the Northwest and Northeast, as well as in Southern Syria. In many of these areas, movement restrictions (of agencies, personnel, or goods) within the country, and interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities, are reported as the most frequent constraints. The presence of mines and explosive ordnances remains a major access impediment. Humanitarian partners continued to report that access is permissible in a majority of sub-districts.

Background and methodology

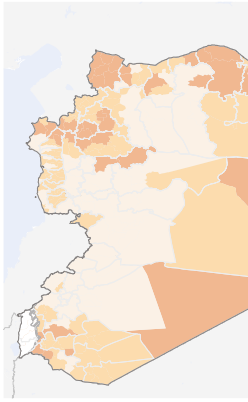
In September 2022, focus group discussions were convened (separately) with UN Agencies, INGOs and National NGO partner organizations from each response modality to collect and distil an agreed understanding by the humanitarian community of the access environment in Syria. Once consolidated, applied to a three-point severity scale – generally the average score per sub-district. This is the third edition of the Access Severity Overview, following the first, April 2022 iteration.

To note: the information presented for the Northeast includes a combined severity scoring based on the expert and collective understanding of the NES Forum coordinated partners and the Syria Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) coordinated partners operating cross-line.

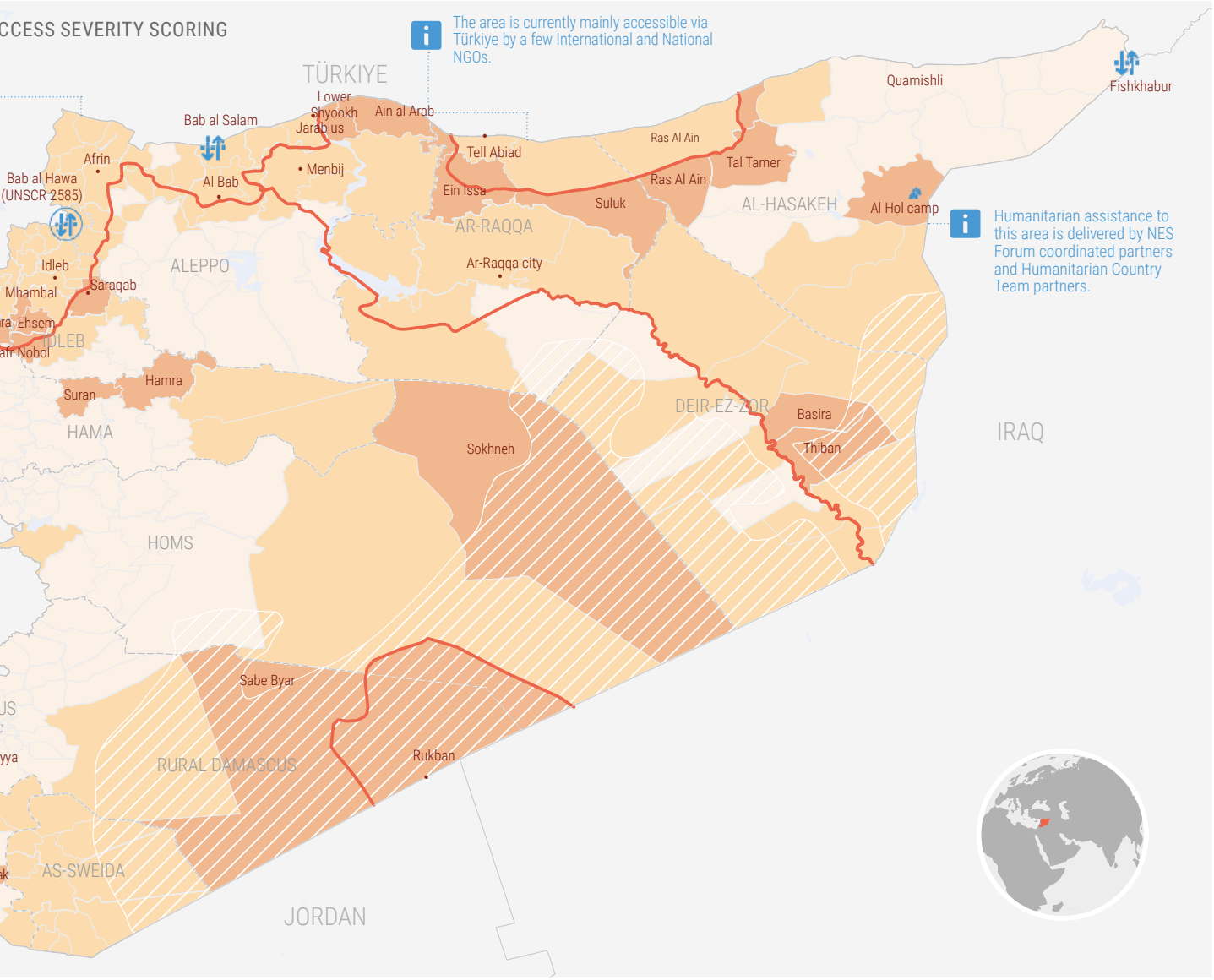
Legend

- **Lower access severity (Level 1):** Relatively few access constraints. Armed actors, checkpoints, or other impediments such as administrative obstacles may be present and may impede humanitarian activities. However, with adequate resources and clearances, humanitarian organisations can still operate and reach all or nearly all targeted people in need.
- **Moderate access severity (Level 2):** Armed actors, checkpoints, lack of security, administrative impediments, or other impediments may be present, and often result in restrictions on humanitarian movements and operations. Operations continue in these areas with regular restrictions.
- **High access severity (Level 3):** Armed actors, checkpoints, high levels of insecurity, administrative obstacles, as well as other impediments are present and very often result in restrictions on humanitarian movements and operations. Operations in these areas face high difficulties and sometimes are impossible.
- **Areas with no or limited population**
- **No data**

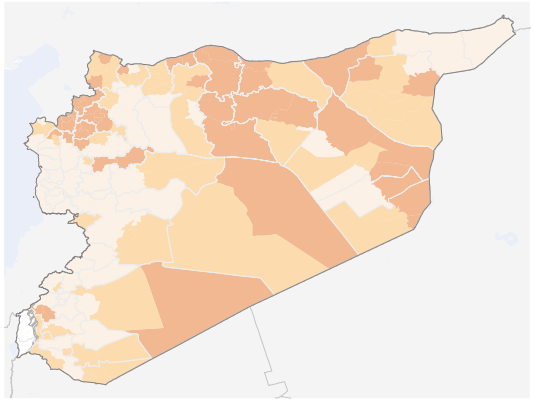
United Nations



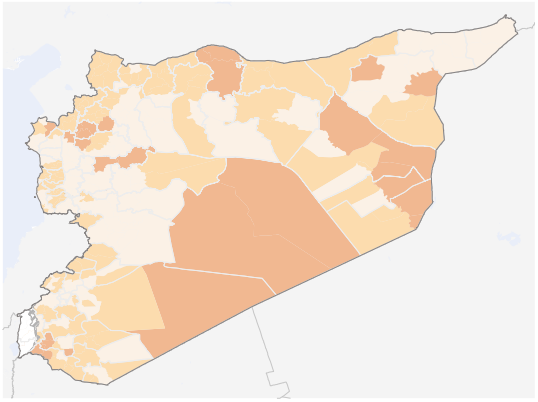
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
Creation date: 19 October 2022 *Feedback: ocharosyr@un.org* *www.unocha.org* *www.reliefweb.int*



International NGOs



National NGOs



PART 4:

PLANNING

Tools/Templates/ Resources to download:
Access strategy template, https://bit.ly/3SujwWJ

With a firm understanding of the main constraints and stakeholders in place, it is time to begin channelling that information and analysis into a strategy and workplan to bring about changes that facilitate humanitarian access.

Water system rehabilitation in Daraya, Rural Damascus, Syria

Developing and supporting the implementation of an HCT-endorsed access strategy is one of the most important tasks an HAWG can undertake. It is also one of the most difficult, because such a strategy is will involve trying to mobilise senior humanitarian staff to engage on potentially sensitive or divisive issues.

An access strategy should also be complemented by a clear action plan that sets out roles and responsibilities for HAWG members, the HCT and others.

Access strategy

What is it?

An access strategy should articulate how the humanitarian community intends to address the most serious access challenges, operational dilemmas and/or compromises to humanitarian principles present in the country or area of operations.

It is not an internal HAWG document. An access strategy is HCT-endorsed and owned, and informs an HAWG's work.

Why is it important?

An access strategy is important because it provides both a common picture of the access challenges the humanitarian community faces and how they will be collectively and systematically addressed.

Without a strategy or with a poor strategy, access challenges risk being addressed in ad-hoc and reactive ways by individual organisations or not addressed at all.

Role of co-chairs and members

The co-chairs should play a key role in securing the HCT's mandate to develop or update a strategy and be closely involved in organising the consultation, drafting and feedback process. OCHA should lead the process, but the co-chairs should be heavily involved and ensure that operational partners' views are reflected in the strategy.

Members should contribute to the methodology, consultations and feedback processes.

The active participation of all HAWG members is crucial to ensure buy-in during the implementation phase.

Guidance

Securing a mandate: The mandate for creating an access strategy should come from the HCT, with the HC's support. An HAWG should not spend time developing one without this clear mandate.

If an HAWG feels there should be an access strategy or an update to an existing version, but there is no mandate from the HCT then the co-chair and members might consider lobbying influential HCT members, donors and others to call for a strategy to be developed.

The issuing of a mandate should not be a seen as the HCT's only input until a draft is ready for review. It should be involved throughout the development process. Consider also having the HCT sign off on a strategy format and methodology. Such a step-by-step approach is likely to make the final endorsement process easier.

Consultation: Once a mandate to develop a strategy is secured, co-chairs can choose to pursue a more informal consultation process of bi-lateral meetings with key stakeholders or a more structured and time-consuming process.

For the latter, they might consider forming a steering committee with a ToR to lead the strategy development in consultation with HAWG members. Such a committee should include influential and well-informed individuals from across the humanitarian community. Engaging these stakeholders lends further credibility to the process and eases the sign-off process. Consider developing a workplan for the consultations and brief the HCT on findings as they emerge, whether in writing or through briefings. This feedback and the reaction to it will give an early indication of how easy or difficult the sign-off process is likely to be.

Regardless of the method chosen to conduct the consultations, there should also be a diversity of geographical input, ideally from all regions the strategy intends to cover. Consultations should not only involve stakeholders based in the capital. Area-based coordination structures, such as local HAWGs, can be forums to work through to gather input.

Nor should strategy just represent UN and international NGO perspectives. National NGOs should have a strong voice in the process too, given they will be implementing most of the programmes.

Identify organisations that could be spoilers for the strategy development process, and rather than sidestep them try to involve them early on. Giving them a voice as part of the formal process will avoid having them "shouting from the side lines". This is particularly important for stakeholders who have influence over the HCT's endorsement of the strategy.

It is also important to include stakeholders who have influence over others more generally. UNDSS, for example, has a significant say in deciding which areas UN agencies will be allowed to access.

The consultations should broadly cover the following areas:

- What are the most serious access issues, dilemmas or compromises to principles that partners face?
- Which stakeholders have most influence over these issues? Who has influence over those stakeholders?
- Which practical changes in policy, practice or law might help to mitigate or avoid the issues identified? This could also include changes within the humanitarian system.
- Which activities, interventions and stakeholders could bring about these changes?
- How should activities be sequenced, and who will lead on them?
- What resources can organisations dedicate to implementation?

This information should be gathered in a number of ways, from existing sources such as the AMRF and the collection of new data through interviews, focus groups or surveys.

Regardless of the data collection method, participants and interviewers should have a common understanding of what an access strategy is and is not.

Identifying gaps and needs: An access strategy and workplan should be informed by data on humanitarian needs and a gap analysis. If such data does not exist, the HAWG should recommend to the HCT that the cluster coordination structure collect it as part of the strategy. This will subsequently inform the HAWG about which areas and impediments to focus on to address the most urgent needs.

Drafting: Once feedback from the consultations has been gathered, the co-chairs should work with the chair and maybe the steering committee members to analyse and distil key insights.

Depending on the breadth of the consultations conducted it might be helpful to use analysis software to code the consultation notes.

This is not a requirement, but it could help to identify the following:

- Most common access issues raised
- Priority issues per type of organisation or area
- Preferred approaches and activities
- Areas of disagreement or contradiction
- Needs and gaps

This kind of structured sorting and analysis can help to show that the consultations are not a tick-box exercise by ensuring the draft accurately reflects the inputs provided.

Articulating the strategy's objectives can be a difficult step in the process. They are often worded as activities and do not explain the change the strategy intends to bring about. This should be avoided. Providing training, monitoring access constraints and negotiating with armed groups, for example, are activities not objectives. Many strategies, however, fail to make this differentiation.

In wording objectives, it is also important that they are realistic. They should be ambitious, but they also need to reflect the influence the humanitarian community can bring to bear on an issue. Here it is important to understand the internal dynamics and context of the humanitarian response.

If an issue has been raised during the consultations for which there is no clear solution or measurable objective, then consult HAWG members, the steering committee and those who raised it again to help articulate it.

The draft should be of manageable length to increase the chances of it being read and understood. It should be between five and eight pages long. More than that and it risks being too long and may ultimately be ignored. Removing or annexing sections that regularly appear in other coordination documents is one way of reducing length if necessary. The main body of the strategy should be concise and focus on unique information.

An access strategy should also have an action/workplan. Proposed activities should be as specific as possible and time-bound. It should also be clear which individual and coordination structure is accountable for delivering the proposed activity. That individual might delegate

work to others, but one person or position should be specified. Nor should someone be made responsible for an activity unless they understand what is expected of them and agree to take it on.

A commitment to monitor and evaluate the strategy's implementation should be included in the workplan, including periodic check-ins with the HCT to keep it informed of progress.. Clear accountability moments such as these are needed to ensure an endorsed access strategy is implemented as agreed.

Sign-off/endorsement: The foundations of the endorsement process should be laid at the very start of the strategy development process.

By the time the draft reaches the HCT, all key stakeholders should be aware of what is coming their way. At that point it should have already addressed whatever issues people may have raised to the greatest degree possible.

PART 5:

IMPLEMENTING

If an HAWG has successfully put robust structures in place, conducted a thorough context analysis and supported the development of a HCT-endorsed access strategy then it already has gone a long way to being an impactful access coordination forum.

Kindergarten and residential houses in Lviv, Ukraine damaged by missile attack

From there, many HAWGs find themselves leading or supporting a range of activities. This section covers some of the most common, important and also more difficult activities. HAWGs may not have a large role to play in access monitoring or access severity mapping, but they are regularly a driving force behind the following:

1. Developing common positions and policy
2. Engagement frameworks
3. Joint operating principles
4. Negotiations
5. Training
6. Advocacy
7. Monitoring and evaluation

Developing common positions and policy

What does this involve?

Across any humanitarian response there will be access constraints or operational dilemmas that require humanitarians to take a common approach to avoid creating precedents that could compromise the access environment. An HCT will often delegate the development of such context-specific positions to its technical advisory body, the HAWG.

There are a range of issues that regularly confront humanitarians and that may require a common context-specific position. These include:

1. The use of armed escorts
2. Requests for project information or staff's personal information
3. Interference in hiring processes
4. Interference in beneficiary selection
5. Demands to pay arbitrary taxes and fees
6. Restriction on female participation in a humanitarian response

Why is it important?

Common positions help to strengthen the humanitarian community's ability to protect the space it works in by presenting a unified front to external stakeholders that may seek to constrain humanitarian action.

Adherence also reduces the chances that partners will set negative precedents that other organisations might find hard to avoid in the future.

Some HAWG leaderships consider the development of common positions particularly important, especially in scenarios where authorities make numerous problematic demands on humanitarian partners.

Role of co-chairs and members

Co-chairs need to be attuned to the operational environment and the issues that might require a common position, and should facilitate and lead on its drafting.

Members have if anything a more important role to play by helping to identify the issues that need attention, draft positions, give feedback and ensure an endorsed position is understood throughout their organisation and by their partners.

Guidance

Identifying the issue: An HAWG should not rely on the AMRF and periodic HAWG meetings to identify which issues require a common position. These should be supplemented by regular monitoring of the operational environment and requests from partners, the ICCG and/or the HCT.

External bilateral meeting could also be a useful source of information and include humanitarian and political officials who regularly engage with armed actors, de-facto authorities, governments and others who influence humanitarian access. They might have valuable insights that HAWG members do not.

There should be a credible rationale for developing a common position based on clear evidence. Does the issue affect one organisation in one area or various organisations in a number of areas? The broader or more serious the impact, the stronger the rationale for a common position.

If the evidence upon which the common position is justified and based is anecdotal, this should be clearly stated.

Developing a position: One objective in developing a common position is to ensure a wide range of organisations abide by it. If time is not an issue, the co-chairs should strive to gather inputs from all HAWG members and other humanitarians, particularly national NGOs who are likely to be most affected by the issue but might have least access to coordination forums such as an HAWG.

If the issue is more time-sensitive, the views of organisations that are not HAWG members could be gathered through NGO forums that might have a better understanding of their members' positions.

Input should also be sought from individuals outside the HAWG who have a good understanding of the issue or who will play an important role in signing off and implementing the common position. These might include HCT members and other coordination bodies such as

local access working groups, NGO forums and the protection cluster.

A common position is unlikely to be a perfect solution for all concerned. Some form of compromise is likely to be required during its development. To help reach one, ask HAWG members to articulate what their ideal solution is, what their red lines are and what acceptable solutions lie in between.

Signing off: A clear sign-off procedure should ideally be agreed before a common position is developed. This could entail endorsement by all HAWG members or just a quorum. Organisations should be explicit either at the HAWG or the HCT about whether they are committed to the position or not.

A position should not be sent to the HCT if there is major disagreement at the HAWG level, particularly if those who disagree with it are also HCT members and will be involved in the higher-level endorsement process. Only once the HAWG membership clearly agrees on a position should the co-chairs present it to the HCT.

Promoting accountability: Securing clear endorsement of a common position is an important step towards improving accountability, but it is only one of several. HAWG members should also commit to a plan for disseminating the position within their organisations and to their partners.

They should also be actively involved in deciding how divergence from the position will be addressed. It should not be a top-down decision from the co-chairs.

Preserving institutional memory: Over the course of several months or years, an HAWG or HCT might agree to numerous common positions on access constraints and dilemmas. These issues may recur over time, but staff turnover means it can be easy to lose sight of previous positions taken. With this in mind, the co-chairs should document them rigorously.

This resource would equally serve to show new HAWG or HCT members the common positions that have been agreed to in the past and need to be maintained.

Joint operating principles

What are they?

Joint operating principles (JOPs) provide guidance for humanitarians on how to navigate their operating environment. In essence they articulate the practical application of the humanitarian principles in a given situation. Previous examples include the following:

- North-West Syria Joint Operating Principles, June 2022
- Afghanistan Joint Operating Principles, August 2021
- Joint Operating Principles and Minimum Standards for Humanitarian Actors Working in non-Government Controlled Areas of Ukraine, December 2021

In many ways, they are a collection of common positions, existing guidance and legal frameworks that the humanitarian community is committed to adhere to create consistency in how it positions itself vis-à-vis external stakeholders.

The development of JOPs should be seen as only the beginning of a process that will also include structured efforts to sensitise humanitarian partners on how they should be put into practice.

Depending on where humanitarian principles are most at risk of being compromised, JOPs can be specific, focussing on a particular stakeholder or geographical area, or they can cover an entire humanitarian response.

Why are they important?

Similarly to common positions, JOPs are important because they are intended to reduce the chance of a humanitarian stakeholder setting negative precedents for their peers.

Role of co-chairs and members

An HAWG's leadership should be central to the consultation and drafting process. Depending on priorities they might also play a central role in sensitising the wider humanitarian community to the endorsed document.

Members should contribute to drafts and play an active role in ensuring the endorsed JOPs are understood and adhered to by their organisations and partners.

Guidance

Preparatory work: Because JOPs articulate what principled ways of working look like, it is useful to understand the wider adherence to principled humanitarian engagement across the response. More unprincipled responses or country teams transitioning from a development to a humanitarian setting are likely to need additional support to ensure humanitarian principles are promoted and protected.

That is not to say that partial adherence should be condoned, but more that it is useful to understand the situation within which the JOPs process takes place and the risks associated with them.

Mandate: Similarly to an access strategy, there should be a clear mandate from the HCT for JOPs to be drafted or updated. This should also include a mandate for implementation. Without a commitment to put JOPs into practice, the process risks becoming a "tick-box" exercise.

As such, the mandate should be to produce both a "higher level" JOPs document and a second more detailed implementation framework that incorporates risk analysis and mitigation, monitoring and red lines.

Consultation:

- Consider forming a steering committee or taskforce to guide the JOPs process rather than just working through the HAWG. The group should be diverse in terms of types of organisation and position and levels of seniority. It should, however, be uniform in terms of its motivation to contribute to the process and its ability to facilitate the endorsement and application of the JOPs.
- Consultations should include those at the forefront of the humanitarian response who, in theory, are the most likely to be affected by the JOPs. If these stakeholders are not involved in the development process they are less likely to abide by them once the HCT has endorsed them.
- The consultation process can also be used to test whether stakeholders would be comfortable adhering to the ways of working that emerge.
- Be mindful not to make the consultation process too expansive, given the effort it requires and potential that a smaller group of well-informed organisations will know as much as a larger group.

Drafting: Thought it often is, the drafting process should not be time-consuming. Many JOPs are very similar in their content because they cover access constraints that occur in many humanitarian settings. More time should be dedicated to articulating how the JOPs will be rolled out and implementation monitored, rather than the initial drafting.

Sensitisation: The HCT-endorsed JOPs should not be an end in and of themselves, but the start of a more extensive process. Commitments should be sought from HAWG members to conduct area-based workshops, ideally through existing coordination structures to roll out the document and disseminate implementation guidance.

Humanitarian negotiations

Resolving an access constraint will at some point require negotiations between humanitarians and an external stakeholder such as an NSAG, de-facto authority or government. For issues that affect a broad section of the response, a senior official such as the HC, DHC or an OCHA head or deputy head of office is likely to lead the negotiations, depending on the seniority of their counterpart. An HC, for example, is unlikely to lead negotiations with a local NSAG commander.

An HAWG's role in such negotiations and that of its leadership varies from one setting to another. The co-chairs should lead negotiations at the operational level and provide input and advice for strategic negotiations led by senior officials. Talking points might also be drafted if requested and time permits.

It is more likely that an OCHA co-chair will be involved in negotiations given their UN role, but we should be careful not to assume that means an HAWG's interests will be represented in the discussions. In such circumstances the HAWG has an important role to play in preparing the negotiations and receiving a readout afterwards to understand the required follow-up.

What are humanitarian negotiations?

Humanitarian negotiations are intended to facilitate people's access to assistance and protection. They should be conducted in a principled way with purely humanitarian objectives that do not legitimise or show support for any actor.

Negotiations take place with state and non-state actors who affect humanitarian access. They also take place at a variety of levels, from facilitating access for humanitarian convoys at a checkpoint or across a frontline to high-level discussions with heads of state.

Negotiation resources

Many organisations have developed detailed resources on how to prepare for and conduct humanitarian negotiations. These are a must-read for any access practitioner given the guidance and tools they offer. This section does not try to summarise them, but some of the best known resources include:

- OCHA Guidelines on Humanitarian Negotiations with Armed Groups
- Humanitarian Access in Situations of Armed Conflict: Practitioner's Manual
- Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation: Field Manual
- HD Humanitarian Negotiation Handbook

There are differences across these resources, but many of the fundamentals are similar.

There are a number of activities an HAWG can engage in on the topic of collective humanitarian negotiations:

- Direct support
- Providing clarity
- Encouraging accountability

This section looks at each one in turn.

Direct support

In this best-case scenario, a co-chair either takes an active part in negotiations or provides analytical, planning and engagement support to a senior negotiator such as the HC.

Guidance: In many cases, securing co-chair representation in, or support for humanitarian negotiations will come down to demonstrating the added value they can bring. This does not necessarily require significant new strands of work. If we consider the negotiations as consisting of four stages – analysis, planning, engagement and monitoring – then much of an HAWG's core work is very relevant. For example:

1. **Analysis:** the co-chair should be able to provide or facilitate an in-depth understanding of the situation, constraints, key stakeholders and their motivations and interests, and humanitarian partners' previous experiences in negotiating with certain parties.
2. **Planning:** the co-chair should be able to advise on who best to engage with, and to define objectives and acceptable positions for HAWG and HCT members.
3. **Engagement:** the co-chair should be well-placed to represent the views and positions of the humanitarian community, but there might be some negotiations which they are not senior enough to lead.
4. **Monitoring:** the co-chair and HAWG members should be well-placed to monitor how agreements are implemented at the project level by reporting adherence and violations back through the HAWG and ARMF.

The analysis and planning stages cover a lot of the work an HAWG is likely to have conducted in parts 3 and 4 of this toolkit. If it has not, a co-chair will have to rely more on the goodwill of more senior negotiators. Like many aspects of a co-chair's work, this scenario also highlights the importance of fostering relationships with senior humanitarian staff outside the HAWG.

Providing clarity: Whether an HAWG's leadership is directly involved in negotiations or not, it should provide its members with an overview of who in the humanitarian system is engaging with which actor on which access issue.

A fictionalised example of this engagement matrix could look like the following:

ACCESS CONSTRAINT
Interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities

KEY INFLUENCERS TO ENGAGE WITH

Government: state governor, ministry of humanitarian affairs

Military: defence ministry, district commander

Others: traditional community leaders, religious leaders, NSAGs

LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT

Tactical level: humanitarian partners

Operational/state level: DHC, operational HCT

Strategic/federal level: HC, HCT

Such a matrix should cover all access constraints and issues that might be comprising adherence to the humanitarian principles. It may be that some key influencers are not being engaged with, so the exercise can also serve as a means to prompt an HC or OCHA to reflect on whether they are in touch with all relevant stakeholders.

Encouraging accountability

As an extension of the above, an HAWG's leadership should also provide members with running updates of how the HC or other senior humanitarian officials are addressing collective concerns that have been raised to their level. Though these updates could be provided outside the HAWG's structures, going through the group helps to showcase its added value as a coordination forum.

It might also be useful at times to invite a senior humanitarian official such as an OCHA head of office to brief HAWG members on specific negotiations or issues of concern.

Negotiations with NSAGs

The fundamentals of negotiations, be they with an NSAG or a state, are largely the same. All require good analysis, planning and follow-through.

One issue specific to NSAGs and de-facto authorities that has been increasingly challenging for HAWGs is how states' counter-terrorism measures affect principled humanitarian action.

Layers of domestic and international legal measures make it difficult for HAWG members to ascertain what type of engagement is permitted with designated terrorist groups or individuals. Counter-terrorism measures not only apply to humanitarian organisations through legislation at various levels, but also through clauses in donor agreements.

The overlapping legal landscapes are complex and contribute to a "chilling" environment when it comes to humanitarian interactions with NSAGs and de-facto authorities. Partners may not be aware of what is permitted, or they may choose not to engage at all or rely on OCHA to negotiate on their behalf.

In such scenarios an HAWG can play a valuable role in bringing in external experts to inform partners about the scope of counter-terrorism measures that apply in a given situation. HAWGs themselves tend not have such legal expertise among their members.

NRC has been at the forefront of examining the effects of counter-terrorism measures on principled humanitarian action. If you would like to discuss the topic further, please contact cherise.chadwick@nrc.no

Training

A HAWG's work is often affected by humanitarian partners not having the requisite skills and experience to address access challenges themselves, whether it be negotiating with an armed actor or weighing up the cost of compromising a humanitarian principle.

It may emerge through strategy consultations that there is a need to build the capacity of HAWG members or other partners on different aspects of humanitarian access, particularly those who are heavily engaged in frontline negotiations, those unable to deliver their own training or those new to the humanitarian coordination system.

To support such efforts, NRC has made some of the training resources it uses available:

1

Unlocking Humanitarian Access: online training course

This interactive scenario-based course is designed for humanitarians working in operational and management roles in H2R areas. It provides them with the tools, knowledge and skills to promote safe, sustainable and quality access. It is also relevant to all humanitarians wanting to learn about access. The course is available in: English; Spanish; French.

2

Introductory workshop on humanitarian access and the humanitarian principles

This two-hour workshop is designed to help participants improve their understanding of the humanitarian principles and identify challenges to them. The scenario-based activities give participants an opportunity to apply the principles to access dilemmas and understand the effect of different approaches.

The following materials are designed to allow anyone to run the workshop with their teams:

- Facilitators guide: timing, tips and talking points
- Workshop presentation
- Scenario handouts for discussion

3

Workshop on how to conduct an actor mapping

This two-hour workshop is designed to help participants identify, categorise and analyse the stakeholders who have influence over humanitarian access. The scenario-based exercise allow participants to apply these skills to a situation to improve their ability to make informed decisions based on stakeholder engagement. The following materials are designed to allow anyone to run the workshop with their teams:

- Facilitators guide: timing, tips, and talking points
- Workshop presentation
- Scenario handouts for discussion

Register for NRC's humanitarian negotiations training

NRC's four-day training course is co-facilitated with the International NGO Safety Organisation (INSO) to equip frontline humanitarians with the skills to handle access and protection negotiations. The simulation-based activities teach participants to:

- Initiate, plan and implement humanitarian negotiation strategies
- Use communication tools and ethical influencing techniques
- Interact effectively with difficult interlocutors
- Resolve access dilemmas
- Lead or advise on negotiations

The course is delivered in English, and all participants are provided with training materials, reference guides and a completion certificate at the end of the course.

Get in touch for more information on NRC's capacity building on humanitarian access

NRC regularly facilitates training and workshops for the humanitarian community on a wide variety of topics related to humanitarian access and negotiations.

NRC's dedicated humanitarian access learning adviser provides tailored contextual training and supports capacity building across the entire humanitarian system, particularly for local organisations who might have less access to training opportunities.

NRC also delivers training to external interlocutors such as local authorities to increase their knowledge of humanitarian action.

If you would like to find out more about how NRC can support your training needs, please contact theodosia.papazis@nrc.no

Houses in Herat province, Afghanistan destroyed by the 2023 earthquake

Monitoring and evaluation

What is it?

The basic concept of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is no different for HAWGs than for any other part of the humanitarian system. It is the structured and ongoing tracking of how an HAWG is progressing in its work and the impact of the activities it leads or supports.

Why is it important?

M&E serves both as a means of hold an HAWG's leadership and members and HCT accountable for the work they have committed to, and to improve the HAWG's future work.

Without an M&E system in place, it becomes more difficult to hold people accountable and the HAWG is deprived of a chance to make evidence-based changes to its work.

Role of co-chairs and members

The co-chairs should be the driving forces behind all M&E activity. Members should contribute input, but the leadership should develop the tools and approaches.

Guidance

M&E falls into two categories. The monitoring refers to a continuous process of data collection to track how activities are being implemented. This is most likely to track the implementation of an HCT-endorsed access strategy and its associated workplan. It should also include work an HAWG is engaged in but falls outside an agreed upon workplan.

Regular HAWG meetings, comprehensive meeting notes and/or a work tracker are all useful monitoring tools. An HAWG should also look to provide the HCT with monthly or quarterly updates on the implementation of the HAWG and HCT's access work.

The evaluation component involves a periodic assessment of the HAWG's activities, outputs, outcomes and impact. It should be holistic in nature and not just assess whether an HAWG has completed the list of tasks set.

As a rule of thumb an evaluation should be conducted annually. This might include a survey for HAWG and HCT members and donors, focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

If resources allow it might be useful to have someone external to the HAWG and the wider response conduct the evaluation. In designing one, it is important to avoid it becoming a critique of specific individuals. It might be easy, for example, to criticise a co-chair for the HCT's failure to implement an access strategy, when in reality a HAWG's leadership may have little influence on these higher-level dynamics.

It is a fine line to tread to ensure there is a mechanism in place to hold an HAWG to account while avoiding misplaced feedback, but it is a an activity that should be embraced.

Advocacy

HAWG advocacy is likely to take place on two fronts, one more external facing and the other more internal to the humanitarian coordination system.

1. Improving affected populations' access to protection and assistance by influencing stakeholders' policies and practice

2. Strengthening an HAWG's space and role within the humanitarian coordination system

An HAWG will play a key role in identifying issues that require advocacy at the national, regional and even global level through its analysis, monitoring and reporting work. Many of the issues that humanitarian advocacy focuses on are at their heart access issues, from sustained bureaucratic impediments that affect humanitarians to violence that restricts' civilians' access to life-saving assistance.

Given the range and importance of topics that fall under the umbrella of humanitarian access it is invariably a crowded space, but it is important that key strategies and messaging involve the input and guidance of access specialists. A country-based HAWG or the Global Access Working Group have significant added value in this sense.

Advocating for an HAWG's space within the humanitarian coordination architecture is likely to consume more of a co-chair's time than engaging with external parties such as donors, de-facto authorities or NSAGs or supporting advocacy with them.

Given that HAWGs are not forums mandated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), they often find themselves advocating for a role in genuinely supporting decision makers. That connection should not be taken for granted and needs constant reinforcement through the HAWG's ToRs and relationship building with senior UN and NGO staff.

NRC's e-learning on humanitarian access

Improve your knowledge on humanitarian access and learn how to address access dilemmas. This interactive scenario-based e-learning is designed for humanitarian working in hard-to-reach areas. It provides humanitarians with the tools, knowledge, and skills to promote safe, sustainable, and quality humanitarian access. While it is relevant for all humanitarians wanting to learn about access, it is especially designed for colleagues in operational and management roles working in hard to reach areas.

Take the course now in: English, Spanish, French, Arabic