Cost of Operations: Humanitarian Access in Hard-to-Reach Areas

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1 Introduction

The primary objective of humanitarian operations is to provide life-saving aid guided by international humanitarian law (IHL) and the four humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence, and neutrality.[1] These seek to ensure that assistance is provided without discrimination to those most vulnerable and in need, irrespective of political interest and independent of any operational support which could undermine the neutrality of the humanitarian operation.

In their efforts to deliver principled assistance, humanitarians face numerous challenges. Interference in programming, pressure to deliver aid to certain groups, and bureaucratic and administrative impediments such as movement restrictions visa delays are among the more common access constraints they face. The security situation, including active conflict, unexploded ordnance and violence against aid workers and their assets, can also pose access challenges, as can the physical environment, including limited or damaged infrastructure.

These constraints can delay or even prevent operations, and situations where they are particularly restrictive require increased time and resources to deliver assistance. Humanitarians employ a variety of efforts to mitigate their impact, from lengthy negotiations with parties to a conflict to investing in transport options such as helicopter flights.

This research is intended to improve understanding of the financial costs of gaining, maintaining or improving principled access, something which one interviewee said the humanitarian community tended to underestimate. It also aims to shed light on the types of input that can build capacity and better address constraints to increase access to populations in need.

When aid workers are unable to circumvent or manage access constraints, it can leave vulnerable people without the basic services or protection they need. Operating in an access-constrained environment can be expensive, but not doing so can lead to vital assistance being limited and even lives being lost in hard-to-reach areas.

1.1 Methodology

The research for this study was carried out between February and September 2023. Field research was conducted in Senegal, which was selected because it allowed for consultations and interviews with humanitarians at the regional level who oversee various country operations.

The research findings are drawn primarily from 12 interviews with humanitarian stakeholders, representatives of UN agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and donors. Remote interviews were conducted with staff in 7 countries including Afghanistan, Colombia, Iran, and Yemen, as well as Norway, Switzerland, and the US.

The findings also draw on a focus group discussion with the Regional Access Task Force based in Dakar, which covers the Central and West Africa region and is co-hosted by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The 29 participants represented more than 20 UN agencies and NGOs.

Given the complexities of the issues studied and the unique nature of each access constraint, this presentation of financial efforts to mitigate them cannot reflect the full range of challenges faced.

The background section contains updated desk research on operational humanitarian access, and a synopsis of recent studies on the impact of constraints on principled access. The cost section analyses findings from the field research to build an evidence base on the financial impact of maintaining or improving access. The mitigation section looks at the coping mechanisms organisations use to minimise these costs on their operations, and the study concludes with a summary of findings and recommendations.

Humanitarian access has a dual function. It is not only important that aid organisations are able to reach those in need, but equally that those in need are able to reach the assistance and protection available. This report, however, focuses primarily on the access challenges humanitarians face, while recognising that the greatest impact of access constraints falls on populations in need.

A displaced child in Al-Kadaha camp.
Taiz, Al-Malka camp, Yemen.
Photo: Khalid Al-Banna

2 Background

2.1 The value of principled humanitarian access

The four principles of humanity, impartiality, independence, and neutrality are universally adopted and enshrined in the very definition of humanitarian access. Without adherence to them, aid may be delivered in ways that reinforce harmful power dynamics, further marginalise disenfranchised groups, increase the safety risk for humanitarian workers and contribute to a war economy or perpetuate a conflict.

The principles, however, are not always interpreted in the same way. Assisting populations in need, particularly those in hard-to-reach areas, in a principled way can look different to different organisations.

This section describes some of the ways in which adhering to the principles in gaining and maintaining access can both incur financial costs and mitigate them.

Humanity

To prevent and alleviate suffering wherever it may be found. To protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being.

The principle of humanity is the driving force behind humanitarians' efforts to respond to the needs of vulnerable communities, including in hard-to-reach areas such as active conflict zones, extremely remote regions and those under the control of restrictive governments or volatile non-state armed groups.

One way in which those in power may challenge this principle is to deny the existence of humanitarian needs, often for marginalised groups. They may choose instead to direct relief efforts elsewhere or reject international aid altogether, making it difficult if not impossible to reach some populations, let alone understand and respond to their needs.

Such situations may be mitigated by lengthy negotiations with governments or other parties to a conflict, alternative if less than ideal ways of gathering data on needs, and advocacy efforts and high-level diplomacy.

Impartiality

To carry out humanitarian action without discrimination, to relieve suffering, giving priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

The principle of impartiality determines that aid should be delivered based on need alone. It drives humanitarians to assess and understand the population dynamics of their operational environment and the needs of all groups, regardless of their race, gender, political affiliations, ideology or where they are located.

One way in which those in power may challenge this principle is by interfering in programming, particularly in the selection of beneficiaries or project locations. They may try to influence activities in a way that favours a certain group, further

discriminates against another, or serves their personal interests. This constrains aid organisations' ability to prioritise the most urgent cases of distress.

Such constraints can be mitigated by the collection of evidence of humanitarian negotiations, lengthy discussions with restrictive authorities and using relationships with other authority figures or donors to influence local powerholders.

Independence

To remain independent from political, economic, military, or other non-humanitarian objectives.

The principle of independence establishes that humanitarian operations must not be influenced by other actors' economic, political, military or personal interests. It motivates humanitarians to establish operational autonomy by, for example, coordinating their work in areas where interventions are impeded by active conflict, or to be able to conduct activities without having to rely on the support of those in power.

One way in which those in power can challenge this principle is by restricting the movement of organisations, personnel or goods. This may include physical restrictions such as checkpoints, or administrative restrictions such as arbitrary travel permits or illegal taxation. This in turn may put pressure on aid organisations to use government or military assets to reach affected populations or expose them to lengthy bureaucratic processes that delay their access to an area.

Such constraints can be mitigated by cultivating independent funding sources and investment in coordination on logistical planning, the recruitment of skilled liaison officers to smooth bureaucratic processes and the procurement of independent transport, warehousing, security and communications capacity.

Neutrality

To abstain from taking sides in hostilities. To refrain from engagement in political, religious, racial, or ideological debates and controversies.

The principle of neutrality relies on getting the parties to a conflict to recognise that humanitarian activities are, by definition, not hostile or partial to one belligerent or another. It motivates humanitarians to engage with all parties to a conflict and prevent the politicization of humanitarian aid by abstaining from political discourse. Neutrality also prevents the non-humanitarian use of aid, for example, using in-kind food donations to support one side of a conflict or allowing governments to choose who gets aid.

One way in which those who wield power can challenge this principle is through violence against humanitarian assets, personnel and facilities. They may also target aid organisations with coercion or theft based on their perceived political affiliation. This makes it difficult for organisations to find a balance between the need to be neutral and threats to staff safety.

Such constraints can be mitigated by investing in humanitarian negotiations, the recruitment and training of principled staff and partners, risk management protocols to counter aid diversion and security capacity to reduce the likelihood of violent incidents.

2.2 The professionalisation of access

A brief history of humanitarian access

Humanitarian access has always been essential to principled relief operations, but it has been evolving and increasing in importance since the 1980s and 1990s. Though no clear event or document identifies the formal emergence of humanitarian access as a distinct area of work, several events raised the profile of the issue and increased attention to it across the sector.

One such event was Operation Lifeline Sudan, an emergency response initiative launched in 1989 and described by USAID as "a negotiated system that allowed humanitarian assistance to reach a vast, previously impenetrable part of the war-affected south".[2] This raised the profile of coordinated access efforts, and in 1991 the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 46/182, which focuses on the UN's coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance.[3]
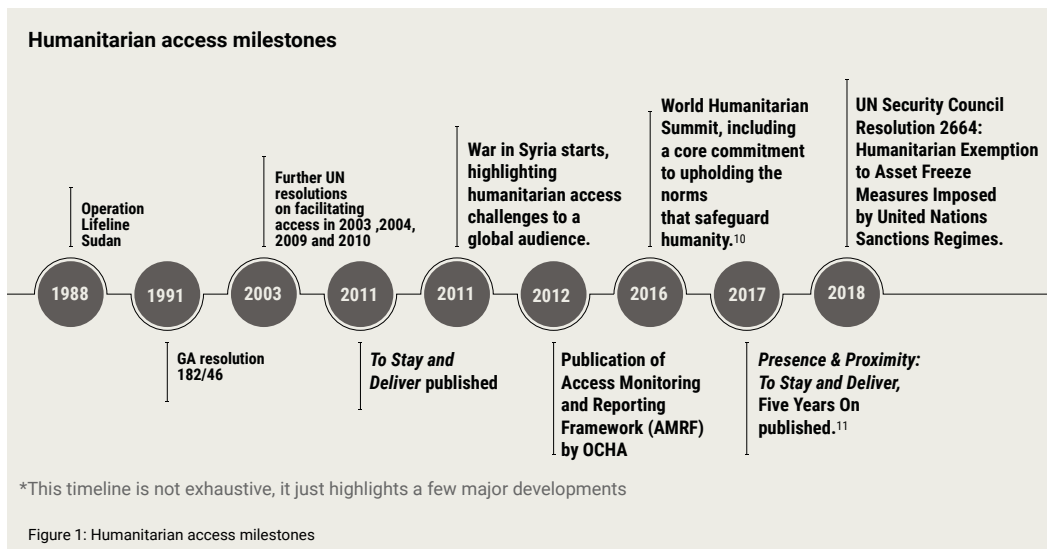
OCHA describes the resolution as central to its leadership on access: "Under GA resolution 46/182, the Emergency Relief Coordinator arranges for operational organizations to access people in crisis-affected areas and provide them with emergency assistance. This access can be obtained by establishing temporary relief corridors, days/zones of tranquillity and other modalities, but all with the agreement of parties concerned."

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) began an access campaign in 1999 in an effort to overcome barriers to the distribution of essential medicines.[4] The UN Economic and Social Council adopted a resolution in 2002 on the "facilitation of humanitarian activities and free passage of relief supplies", and the Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue published an operational manual on humanitarian access negotiations in 2004.[5, 6]

The consolidation of access as a distinct area essential to principled action began in force around 2010, and in 2011 OCHA published an independent study that documented the strategies and practices that humanitarian organisations use to operate in insecure environments.[7] It launched its access monitoring and reporting framework (AMRF) the following year, and the tool, which tracks access constraints, is still relied on today.[8] OCHA's 2010-2013 strategic plan included activities intended to improve humanitarian access, and the issue emerged as a distinct strategic objective in its 2014-2017 plan.[9]

The emergence of large-scale conflict in Syria in 2011 also changed the humanitarian access landscape. Many of the ways in which organisations navigated the constraints of a high-profile emergency with an extremely restrictive operating environment have had lasting effects on global humanitarian responses, such as increased use of remote programming.

As of 2015 only a handful of humanitarian access working groups (HAWGs) - coordination mechanisms usually co-led by OCHA and an NGO - existed in countries such as Afghanistan, but by 2023 there were over 20 active around the world. Or as one interviewee who has worked in access since 2013 put it: "If I compare when I started working in access to now, it has changed a ton. Everybody is taking a piece of it."

Humanitarian access milestones

- **1988** Operation Lifeline Sudan
- **1991** GA resolution 182/46
- **2003** Further UN resolutions on facilitating access in 2003 ,2004, 2009 and 2010
- **2011** *To Stay and Deliver* published
- **2011** War in Syria starts, highlighting humanitarian access challenges to a global audience.
- **2012** Publication of Access Monitoring and Reporting Framework (AMRF) by OCHA
- **2016** World Humanitarian Summit, including a core commitment to upholding the norms that safeguard humanity.[10]
- **2017** *Presence & Proximity: To Stay and Deliver, Five Years On* published.[11]
- **2018** UN Security Council Resolution 2664: Humanitarian Exemption to Asset Freeze Measures Imposed by United Nations Sanctions Regimes.

*This timeline is not exhaustive, it just highlights a few major developments

Figure 1: Humanitarian access milestones

A growing workforce

The growing profile of access as a strategic issue for the humanitarian community is also reflected in the number job adverts in the sector that mention the term. An analysis of those advertised on OCHA's ReliefWeb service as part of the research for this report reveals that only one position with "access" in its title was posted on the site in 2012, the year its jobs listing began. By 2022 that figure had risen to 235, representing over a ten-fold increase, as well as a positive growth percentage every year except 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic (see table below).

	Total Jobs on ReliefWeb	% Increase	Access in Job Titles	% Increase
2012	19,700	95%	57	171%
2013	22,978	17%	66	16%
2014	26,325	15%	74	12%
2015	29,528	12%	76	3%
2016	32,321	9%	76	0%
2017	39,328	22%	140	84%
2018	42,663	8%	144	3%
2019	43,853	3%	158	10%
2020	36,898	-16%	135	-15%
2021	45,896	24%	200	48%
2022	53,995	18%	235	18%

Figure 2: ReliefWeb Jobs: vacancies with «access» in the job title from 2012 - 2022

One interviewee for this research said: "Now we're actually looking like a more professional staff with much more detailed understanding [of access] and the legal frameworks around the principles."

A more strategic approach

The growing interest in humanitarian access is also exemplified by the policies and strategic plans of the largest international NGOs or humanitarian organisations, and UN agencies and donors (see annex 1).

According to the 2022 State of the Humanitarian System (SOHS) report, the six international NGOs with the highest overall expenditure are NRC, MSF, World Vision, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Save the Children International and Catholic Relief Services (CRS).[12] NRC, MSF and IRC identify access as a dedicated global priority in 2023, and the others refer to it throughout their strategies.[13] All six mention the two dimensions of access in strategic plans, operational procedures or status reports on their websites. They also publish reports and calls to action that advocate for better access in specific situations. This is also reflected in UN agencies as well as large institutional humanitarian donors (see annex 1 for more detail).

Why is access increasing in importance?

What has driven the developments described above? We asked interviewees who have been working on humanitarian access for years whether they believed it was the result of superficial factors, such as donor interest, or the reframing of activities to appear innovative, or a genuine reaction to a more complex operational environment.

Some said that at least to some extent, access had received greater attention because it was seen as a trendy topic, or a newly packaged way of working on the same issues humanitarians have always worked on. One interviewee said: "It's kind of sexy, right? Who doesn't want to do access? Irresponsibly cowboying into an area isn't what I would call access. Everybody wants to do it, but some haven't invested enough."

Another said: "I don't know if the environment has become more complicated. The needs have increased. We can better identify access constraints, but it's hard to demonstrate that [access] has become more difficult. On the other hand, donors like to be 'frontline'. With NGOs, it's always 'who will be first in a certain area?' It's hard to say if the operational environment is driving this."

Others, however, believed the developments were a reaction to real changes in the operational landscape. The increased fragmentation of conflict, for example, means humanitarians must invest more in understanding its dynamics and their capacity for negotiations.[14]

Other potential factors include a rise in the number of protracted crises in which access constraints become entrenched and parties to conflict more sophisticated in imposing them; the decline in US hegemony and the growing number of civil wars, which has allowed states such as Russia and China to increase their influence; and growing global phenomenon of displacement, driving populations in need to new areas where they confront different challenges in seeking assistance. https://www. artsenzondergrenzen.nl/documents/171/MSF_OCA_Strategic_Plan_-_Online_version. pdf

Another interviewee said: "We don't know how complex this was 20 years ago. Everything is always better in the past, maybe it was, maybe it wasn't. What has certainly got worse is our lack of leverage with parties to conflict." There appears to

be a growing lack of respect for IHL, and governments in conflict seem less willing to respect humanitarian efforts.[15]

A further factor may be deliberate acts of violence that affect aid workers, the number of which has increased steadily since 1997.[16] Such incidents may be motivated by personal or economic gain, or they may involve the random targeting of individuals. Whatever drives them, they require humanitarians to invest more in conflict analysis, operational planning, security measures and communications and safety equipment.

Zaimati became an IDP settlement in Qala-e Naw city of western Badghis province, Afganistan.
Photo: Christian Jepsen/NRC.

3 Cost of operations in hard-to-reach areas

Costs related to principled humanitarian action in hard-to-reach areas can arise from both internal and external factors. This section first explores how internal choices and processes can result in a more expensive response, with a focus on acceptance, quality operations and self-generated risks. It then explores the impact of the operational environment on costs by applying OCHA's AMRF.

3.1 Internally generated costs

Internal actions that may push up response costs in hard-to-reach areas include factors such as how an organisation recruits and trains staff, how it makes operational decisions and how it engages with communities or local authorities.

3.1.1 Quality access

Humanitarian access varies considerably in terms of quality. In one operation, responders may be grateful for a momentary lull in fighting to deliver life-saving assistance, while in another a close relationship with affected populations may be the minimum acceptable standard.

Put simply, "we have access" can mean anything from "we sent remote cash to that village once last year" to "we've had an office there and worked closely with communities for a decade". No agreed-upon definition of quality access exists, but there is a common understanding within the humanitarian community that the concept of "having access" is not a binary yes/no consideration.

That said, most aid workers would reference some combination of the following if asked about what constitutes quality access:
- A response that respects the humanitarian principles
- A response that respects the principle of "do no harm"
- A response that discusses access at all costs

Respecting humanitarian principles

Observing the humanitarian principles generates acceptance by providing a framework for how and why humanitarians select programme beneficiaries and activities in a way that makes their work more predictable to affected communities.

When a response, or even just one participant in it, permits unprincipled action, such as paying for armed escorts, it can have financial implications for years to come. Since the outbreak of civil war in Somalia in the 1990s, for example, humanitarians have taken to "bunkerisation", or using armed security and large compounds to ensure staff safety. These private security companies are a major expense to humanitarian organisations, and they also create a barrier between them and the communities they work in.

According to one humanitarian visiting Somalia: "When I went in 2019, we spent $500 to cross the street to our compound and I am not exaggerating." There has been no research on the amount of money humanitarian organisations have spent on private security in Somalia in recent years, but an earlier report states: "In 2017, money for security cooperation was conservatively estimated at USD$400m per year."[17] The use of armed security leads to perceptions of humanitarians as militant and political, and it adds to confusion about why they are there in the first place.

Humanitarian action that does not distinguish itself from parties to a conflict can lose community acceptance and invite safety risks to staff. Organisations in Somalia are often targeted by groups such as Al-Shabaab because they are perceived as tools for internal political agendas rather than principled humanitarians.

As one interviewee based in Senegal put it:

"The biggest constraint in West Africa is the authorisation to work and the recognition of the humanitarian principles. In countries like Nigeria, it is illegal to work in some places or talk to some people. Access there is hard to reach, and we need to use helicopters. There are pockets of safety, but you can't talk about the humanitarian principles, so do we have a principled approach? Are we reaching the hard to reach in areas that are not controlled by the government?"

The road to villages nearby Oicha. Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photo: Gianluca Galli.

Observing the principle of 'do no harm'

When considering people's needs and vulnerabilities, it is important to ensure that any assistance or protection provided and the method of provision do not harm them or their communities in the long run.

One way in which "do no harm" can be observed is by understanding the conflict sensitivity of a potential intervention. Analysing how it may affect local power dynamics or draw or push people into riskier settings is vital to a community's safety.

When access is restricted, however, it can be extremely difficult to gather the information required to understand local conflict dynamics and the many characteristics of a community as the basis for upholding the principle. Balancing an awareness of high needs with a desire to understand how to deliver assistance in a conflict-sensitive way can be difficult.

High cost of quality access in Colombia

One interviewee described the importance of "do no harm" in their work in Colombia, and the significant transport and support costs than can be involved when working with hard-to-reach populations. They detailed a specific project where it was too dangerous for their humanitarian mission to travel to a specific community due to the presence of non-state armed groups. Instead, they would bring people from the community to the provincial capital. This was done not only for the safety of the responders, but also to provide an environment in which beneficiaries could speak openly, they said. "We did not bring entire communities out of the H2R areas…These movements were low profile, carefully designed and agreed with project participants."

Doing so involved paying for river transport, accommodation and a per diem rate for the days of work the beneficiaries lost by participating in the project. These costs were deemed necessary to allow them to express themselves safely and so ensure they did not become targeted or harmed in their communities. "It's our responsibility to ensure that whatever we do, prevents them from further harm."

Providing quality programming

Access constraints and the high costs associated with navigating them may result in a more limited range of programming, for example distributing food rather than setting up kitchen gardens. Limited engagement with communities could also lead to beneficiary selection being skewed. In some cases, the cost of operating in a hard-to-reach area is so prohibitive that aid organisations resort to response which porioritize easy access over needs. An example of an access constraint leading to poor-quality assistance is described in the 2022 SOHS report:

"Multiple obstacles stand in the way of providing levels of support commensurate with the severity of need, including transaction costs, organisations' absorption capacity and access. For example, in Tigray, Ethiopia, where access was blocked, just 8% of survey respondents reported that they were satisfied with the amount of aid they received, compared to 39% and 53% respectively in Oromia and Somali regions [which have no block]."[18]

3.2 Legal issues and bureaucratic impediments

Bureaucratic Impediments

One of the most impactful constraints discussed during the research was the effect of legal issues and government policy on humanitarian access and work. Each country has different laws and policies, and as frameworks evolve and governments change, it can put humanitarians and their work in jeopardy. This is especially the case when governments are suspicious of humanitarian organisations.

Several interviewees and focus group participants cited the example of Mali, where a military takeover in 2020 put Col Assimi Goïta in power to the detriment of the country's relations with the international community.[19] Mali also has several extremist groups at its borders causing political unrest in various regions.

The situation culminated in November 2022 with the government banning the activities all French organisations and those with French funding. The move was intended to reduce French influence and discourage international entities from interacting with opposition groups. The ban covered not only humanitarian organisations, but also their development counterparts and private sector businesses.

The humanitarian organisations affected had to send international staff to other countries, paying for flights and accommodation, and had to suspend their programmes. One interviewee said it had been possible to foresee the ban, which had been heard about a few months before it was announced.

A failure to plan accordingly, however, meant it was a scramble to move people out and make decisions about programming. This is an example not only of how policy changes can dramatically affect humanitarian operations, but also a lesson in the need for anticipation and preparedness, which will be discussed later.

Authorities' imposition of movement restrictions and other requirements can also quickly increase the amount of time, money and effort required to implement programmes. One participant said that every humanitarian organisation in Yemen needed a permit to travel between governorates, including for national staff, and sub-agreements with the authorities in both the north and south of the country for all interventions. They said:

> "This can take from four to nine months to sign. The sub-agreements go to an online central authority but get co-signed by military actors. Then every ministry needs to sign off, as well as at the governorate levels."

Such procedures require several liaison officers to process the paperwork and negotiate constantly with the authorities. The same participant also said systemic issues were a daily occurrence, and that the country director had to spend a lot of their time resolving them. These time-consuming efforts increase operational costs and put a strain on budgets before a programme can be implemented.

A participant working in Mali said government approval for interventions could take up to three months, and that once a proposal had been submitted it could not be adjusted to accommodate changing needs. They said the government was particularly

suspicious of protection work on issues such as gender-based violence (GBV), meaning they had to integrate protection into other programmes.

Another participant who worked in Myanmar said their office spent a significant proportion of its time securing travel approvals. They said: "The information, counselling, and legal assistance (ICLA) officer spends 60 per cent of their time negotiating for travel."

They also said that authorities in some countries, such as Bangladesh, required an international staff member to negotiate, because they perceived them as carrying more weight than a local counterpart. Complying carries additional costs for the organisation concerned, despite the fact that a local staff member may be better equipped to negotiate.

Legal issues

Some of the more recent laws and regulations to challenge humanitarian access involve counter-terrorism measures, as seen in countries such as Burkina Faso and Nigeria. To Stay and Deliver discusses this issue:

> "In particular, the study found that the stated or implied policy of some governments and inter-governmental organisations to ban all contact with entities designated as 'terrorist' has severely undermined opportunities for humanitarian actors to negotiate access for aid to civilians."[20]

Some of the most serious issues arise when laws and policies directly harm humanitarians for carrying out their work. One participant described a situation in Cameroon in which their organisation was working in an area controlled by a non-state armed group (NSAG). The government accused it of supporting the group and two staff members were arrested and sent to court, where they could have faced the death penalty.

The organisation had to spend thousands of dollars on legal fees to prove that the staff members had been acting neutrally and impartially. After a case that lasted almost a year, they were cleared of all charges, but by that time the organisation had decided to suspend its operations.

As another interviewee put it: "There are legal risks you put on your staff. It's okay provided nothing happens, but you have to mobilise a lot of resources if something does happen." Another said their organisation had to budget for paying per diems for detained staff members in Yemen because it was such a common reality of humanitarian work in the country.

In a different case in Cameroon, a humanitarian staff member was arrested for concealing information because they had been speaking to an NSAG. All charges were dropped months later, but the interviewee said the incident had put pressure on humanitarian organisations to understand if there were grounds for their staff members' arrest. If there was legislation that banned talking to populations outside government-controlled areas, it put all of those working in hard-to-reach areas in

jeopardy to the detriment of their beneficiaries and ran counter to the humanitarian principles.

Another legal issue that can become a major constraint involves restrictions on humanitarian imports. One participant said their organisation had been unable to clear a shipment of medical supplies through customs in Nigeria for months because of the taxes and paperwork involved. They also said there were sometimes laws that prevented the import of vaccines because authorities wanted to have control over certain medical supplies.

Another interviewee suggested country offices should hire lawyers to help them to interpret legislation and understand legal procedures, particularly in relation to counter-terrorism measures. A lawyer would be able to work on legal issues from resolving customs delays to understanding the grey zones in which humanitarians sometimes operate, particularly in hard-to-reach areas under NSAG-control. The interviewee recognised, however, that the cost of such expertise would be prohibitive.[21]

Legal processes are costly and time-consuming to navigate. As the body of counter-terrorism legislation and suspicion of international organisations grow, humanitarians can become targets. They need to devise ways to protect themselves and their staff as they continue to work in hard-to-reach areas.

Interviewees stressed that assuming everyone knows the humanitarian principles was not enough, and that organisations needed to proactively prove to populations and governments that they were neutral. The next section discusses their failure to do so in environments where acceptance of them is decreasing.

3.3 Loss of acceptance

Acceptance has been a humanitarian access strategy since the formalisation of access work. But as To Stay and Deliver notes:

> "The concept of acceptance – cultivating good relations and consent for humanitarian activities among local populations and key actors – has long been the cornerstone of the humanitarian security approach. However, many agencies in the past have made the mistake of assuming acceptance without proactively cultivating it."[22]

Actively cultivating acceptance involves building trust by meeting communities and authorities, communicating what humanitarian organisations do and what they stand for, and working with communities to implement projects that meet their needs. During interviews and the focus group, it became clear that most organisations do not work this way and that acceptance is declining in west and central Africa.[23] Worse still, humanitarians are the targets of negative news and social media campaigns in some parts of the region, normally spearheaded by governments.

Maintain the humanitarian principles has long been recommended as opening doors to access because it demonstrates that an organisation is not political and is only working to alleviate suffering. During the focus group, however, one participant asked: "Are the humanitarian principles still a good way of gaining acceptance, especially when working in failed states, which are full of issues of impartiality and bias?"

Another said: "We are suffering from the end of the honeymoon period, where we used to be the nice humanitarians, which was a point of acceptance. Now, we cannot benefit from the same amount of acceptance." They went on to say humanitarians were working in ever more complex environments and that more investment in acceptance work was needed.

Another participant described a dilemma in Burkina Faso. They said their organisation talked a lot about acceptance but that access working groups in the country suggested humanitarians keep a low profile. Heeding the advice, the organisation sends private trucks without logos, but this means the community does not see what it is doing. "They talk about low visibility and then are surprised about the levels of acceptance," the participant said.

Another humanitarian working in Nigeria said acceptance was a sensitive topic and that many organisations had stopped working on it altogether. They said the international NGO forum had started a conversation about the issue, but that no one in attendance wanted to discuss it for fear government infiltrators may be present and that doing so could threaten their organisation's ability to work in the country.

But as one interviewee put it: "You can't separate acceptance and access." They went on to say that it must be fostered via open contact and dialogue with all parties to a conflict. This is difficult though in countries where the government maintains strict control and is suspicious of organisations' relations with NSAGs.

One participant said it was illegal in Nigeria to work in certain places or talk to certain people. Another said the government in Burkina Faso would not allow humanitarians to speak to armed groups, and that a workshop on obtaining a humanitarian exemption had been suspended. They went on to say that it was not safe to discuss those matters at all.

Burkina Faso has become a difficult environment for humanitarians. One interviewee said the government had undertaken a social media campaign that raised suspicion of international organisations and aid workers, aligned them with opposition groups and "terrorist" organisations and accused them of promoting anti-government agendas. Another said the idea was circulating that international NGOs were spies and that the public was starting to believe it. Another still said two aid workers had been killed as a direct result of such messaging, and that some comments on social media advocated death to humanitarians.

When asked if they knew of any organisations in the region that were conducting social media campaigns to increase acceptance, the focus group participants said they had not heard of anything of that kind.

A lot of patience and investment is required to foster acceptance, particularly in countries such as Burkina Faso and Nigeria, where the message to humanitarian organisations is that they are either with the government or against it. Some simply choose not to work in hard-to-reach areas or speak about things that could trigger a negative reaction.

One interviewee said that in countries where the government had impeded access, organisations sometimes chose not to work to increase acceptance from the authorities because they had imposed the constraints. As another interviewee asked: "How can you negotiate with people who do not believe in your intentions and have a lot of suspicion?" The previous interviewee noted, however, that not doing so made their work less effective, and suggested organisations continually invest in such relationships.

As suspicions about humanitarians and their work increases, investments are needed in a continuous and holistic approach to acceptance which ensures that authorities and communities trust organisations to do what they say while limiting negative consequences. Another interviewee pointed out that such efforts need to go hand-in-hand with regular humanitarian activities. As they put it: "You cannot pick and choose."

3.4 Externally generated costs

Constraints themselves add to costs, as do the solutions and time investments. The SOHS report says:

> "Access challenges may also be having an impact on cost: in terms of requirements per person, the three most expensive crises by far in 2021 −Libya, Iraq and Syria − were all situations of active conflict, where access to affected populations was extremely constrained."[24]

During complex conflicts, humanitarian access requires negotiation and dialogue with the various parties to them. These negotiations may be with the government, non-state authorities in control of territory and even gangs. They take time, and several liaison officers tend facilitate the conversations. Specific skills and technical abilities are needed for humanitarian work in hard-to-reach areas or conflict zones, and these add to overall programme costs.

3.4.1 What is AMRF?

AMRF is a tool that OCHA created to categorise and measure various access constraints. They include ways in which governments, de facto authorities, the environment and insecurity can impede access. The goal is to use the AMRF to track constraints in specific settings and understand how to mitigate them more effectively. It is also used to report incidents that affect access and humanitarian staff.

In the table below, each of the nine AMRF constraints are discussed in terms of how they can add to programmes costs, with real examples provided by interview quotes. However, it is important to note that if any of these issues are more systemic, costs will increase for the system as a whole because several working groups as well as the humanitarian country team (HCT) will spend time engaging on these issues.

Constraint	Description	How the constraint can add to costs	Country	Example from interviews
1. Denial of the existence of humanitarian needs or of entitlements to humanitarian assistance	Refusal (by host government, de-facto authorities or other actors) to acknowledge humanitarian needs or the need for a humanitarian response (and/or appeal), AND/OR denial of assistance to certain communities (often based on a particular group trait, e.g. ethnicity, religion, or on their circumstances, e.g. having been displaced by a group/in a geographic area that is not recognised to be part of the conflict)	Time negotiating access with government: officer(s)' salary x hours	Burkina Faso	"There are some things that are not measurable. The first humanitarian convoy in Burkina was the result of months and months of negotiations. Negotiations take time and dedicated staff to this issue and we need donors to understand that."
		Advocacy: officer's salary x hours	Myanmar	"The Myanmar office spends a lot of time waiting and going back and forth from [government] offices to advocate for travel to be approved. ICLA manager dedicates 60 per cent of their time to negotiating and advocating for travel. Sometimes we need an expat to work on negotiations, like in Bangladesh."
2. Restriction of movement of agencies, personnel, or goods into the affected country	Bureaucratic and administrative requirements for entry into the country of operation, such as registration for the organisation or visas and work permits for personnel, AND/OR constraints on import of equipment and relief items into the country	Visa for one international staff member: liaison officer's salary x hours + fees	CAR	«There are many more hurdles with visas. Much more time … Visas take two weeks for visitors instead of two days now. In emergencies, it is impossible to bring people in quickly when you have restrictions like that.»
		Paperwork for approval to work in-country: liaison officer's salary x hours + country director's salary x hours + fees	N/A	"'Liaison' expenses do not surface in any financial accounts."
		Registration issue: liaison officer's salary x hours + country director's salary x hours + fees (+ cost of programme delays)	Ethiopia	«Costs of registrations in different countries. In Ethiopia, offices need to go to two different ministries to get approval to get external people into the country. Imagine the extra time and cost to register an organization in some countries.»
		Issues with importing goods: cost of goods + transport costs + (x2 if goods are refused at customs) + logistics/liaison officer's salary x hours (negotiating for approval)	N/A	«There are sometimes challenges in vaccines importation, and laws preventing that. Sometimes there is a lack of access because of security and sometimes you have no access to the supplies you need because authorities want to have control over medical supplies.»

Constraint	Description	How the constraint can add to costs	Country	Example from interviews
3. Restriction of movement of agencies, personnel, or goods within the affected country	Impediments to freedom of movement as experienced by humanitarian actors in-country in order to reach affected populations and transport essential relief. These could include either physical restrictions (such as security checkpoints) or administrative restrictions (e.g. restricted travel or project permits, arbitrary or illegal taxation, etc)	Travel permit delay for one person: liaison officer's salary x hours + fees	Yemen	"Every humanitarian actor needs a permit to travel across governates, national and international"
		Travel permit denied for one person: liaison officer's salary x hours	Nigeria / Burkina Faso	«What we saw in Nigeria and Burkina is that you are either with us [the government] or against us. As an NGO, how can you negotiate with people who do not believe/ trust your work? There is lots of suspicion. It's the same if you look at Burkina. WFP increased their capacity for food in Burkina under the blockade and got three helicopters from BHA [USAID] and after a long negotiation with the government. The government wanted to monitor them and said they needed their people in the helicopters because they are worried they aren't providing aid. There is lots of suspicion from the government, a lot circulating in the news. The general population is hearing that NGOs are spies.»
		Denied field visits: staff salaries x hours + cost of transport	Yemen	«Women can only travel with male relatives. Male staff are stretched thin because women can't travel. Before, women could move in pairs and organisations would pay salaries to another helper woman to accompany them.»
		Change in frontline/ conflict: logistics staff salaries x hours + access staff salaries x hours	Yemen	«Some H2R areas are hours and hours away and there are no hotels. Frontlines can also get in the way [of traveling].»
		Goods stopped/ confiscated: logistics/ liaison officer(s)' salaries x hours + transport cost + fees to get goods back + driver's salary x hours	Nigeria	«We suspended operations at the central level for months because we were unable to import medical supplies because of taxes and the difficulty in getting them out of the customs.»
		Detention of one staff member: liaison officer(s)' salaries x hours + country director's salary x hours + cost of fees/ paperwork (+ salary of detained staff x hours)	N/A	«Legal risks you put on staff as well. It's okay provided nothing happens. But we have to mobilise a lot of resources if something does happen. There is also extra expenditure on legal analysis.»

Constraint	Description	How the constraint can add to costs	Country	Example from interviews
4. Military operations and ongoing hostilities impeding humanitarian operations	Implications of the military activities of the parties to conflict and other weapon bearers for the movement of people and goods. Absence of arrangements to facilitate the passage of emergency relief supplies during active hostilities	Withdrawal of one international staff member: cost of flight + cost of accommodation + salary x hours/days + visa fees + transport costs	N/A	"Conflict is sometimes unpredictable, and we have to work around that, which also costs a lot of money."
		Moving one international staff member to a compound/safe house: transport cost + driver's salary x hours + rent on unoccupied accommodation (or fee for cancelling lease)	Afghanistan	"Operational advice in the future: sometimes evacuation has to happen, but it can be done in a way that saves money and time."
		Transport by helicopter/boat/plane: cost of transport + salaries of staff x travel time	Burkina Faso	«In Burkina, we use UNHAS [UN Humanitarian Air Service] for passengers and a private company for supplies, which is more expensive in terms of flights but the flights have bigger capacity. Some places have their own flights, depending on the size of operations. In Burkina the capacity is not sufficient compared to the needs. For passengers and supplies, it's better to have our own [private] planes/helicopters.»
		Driving in a convoy (two+ cars): transport costs x extra cars + drivers' salaries x extra drivers (+ cost of new car(s) if the organization needs more to drive in convoys) (+ HR cost of hiring new drivers and buying new cars)	CAR	«Convoys or taking two or more cars is planned in the short term but there is a gap in the long run when it becomes a daily reality.»
		Hiring one extra security officer: cost of HR hiring x hours + security officer's salary	N/A	«Recruiting the right staff depends on the right package, the organisation's costs and investment in HR conditions and professional perspective.»
		Conflict analysis: staff hours x time to conduct assessment + time to analyse (repeat often as the situation changes)	Afghanistan	"When the Taliban took over, it was a crisis, but it was foreseen. We could have had a previous analysis – forecast, scenario-planning … and planned the evacuation. For example, having agreements with Tajikistani hotels ... Instead of reacting, having a plan that could include HSS [Health, Safety, and Security], and a holistic approach to response/preparedness plans."
		One suspended programme: days suspended x staff salaries (missed labour) + liaison officer(s)' salary x hours + country director's salary x hours	Burkina Faso/ Cameroon	«Duty of care or the way of mitigating incidents creates greater risk aversion. We had to close some projects because of lack of access, a lot in the region. Burkina, Cameroon… sometimes because of security. Some incidents happened and we did not manage any guarantee to stay and decided to close. In Cameroon, we were suspended by the authorities and we decided to close.»

Constraint	Description	How the constraint can add to costs	Country	Example from interviews
5. Violence against humanitarian assets personnel and facilities	Politically or economically motivated violence as well as exposure to incidental violence directly affecting humanitarian personnel, equipment and facilities. This may include threats of violence, coercion, theft or looting of aid supplies	Training for one person: cost of travel + accommodation + missed labour	Cameroon	"Trainings can be expensive, from flying people out to accommodation. Cameroon cost $10,000 for 16 attendants.»
		Kidnapping of one staff member: staff member' salary (?) + liaison officer's salary x hours + country director's salary x hours (+ cost of programme delay/ suspension?)	Yemen	«We need to continually pay per diems for staff that are detained.»
		Moving to different facility: cost of rent/ buying new space + cost of transport for staff + cost of transport for assets + staff salaries		"A specific incident that was very expensive: Mali made an official statement that all NGOs backed by France or French money or received logistics support from France need to suspend activities. The lack of planning resulted in an improvised plan and organisations sent lots of staff to Senegal (paying flights, paying accommodation). We were working with INSO [International NGO Safety Organisation], if the NGOs had prepared when they were hearing about it months before – it was not impossible to foresee. Lots of them put programmes on hold and sent away their expatriate staff, similar to Afghanistan. They didn't have to do that because all the expatriates are from the region. The configuration of HR allows for more resilience to these things."
		Injury of one staff member: staff member's salary (?) + hospital bills (?) + cost of programme delays (?)	Burkina Faso	«Because of targeting humanitarian staff, they sometimes can't stay the night in certain places and expats can't go everywhere. There has been growing negative perceptions of humanitarians and in some places they are being attacked or killed so organisations need to be cautious when sending staff to the field."
		Transport by helicopter/car/ boat/plane: cost of transport + staff salaries x travel time	CAR	«CAR doesn't use cars at all, only on the very local level due to security related issues. At some point it was so costly that coordination was done remotely, which is not ideal, especially when you have to do capacity building.»

Constraint	Description	How the constraint can add to costs	Country	Example from interviews
6. Interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities	Direct interference (usually by political or military actors) with humanitarian activities during or after their implementation. This may include pressure to work in specific geographic area or insistence to link humanitarian assistance to a specific political or military agenda	Programme delays: hours/days delayed x staff not working x average salaries + liaison officer's salary x hours + country director's salary x hours	N/A	"There is a lack of understanding of the legal framework and anti-terrorism legislation, which has created a general perception of a ban [on working with non-state armed groups/areas]."
		One suspended programme: days suspended x staff salaries (missed labour) + liaison officer(s)' salary x hours + country director's salary x hours	Afghanistan	"There were varying expenditures in Afghanistan. The highest cost was the constant stop-start. But there was also a cost of our reputation with donors because we were losing credibility and had to spend time in meetings with donors trying to explain why there were delays/stoppages."
		Negotiations: liaison officer's salary x hours (+ country director's salary x hours)	N/A	"Resource-intensive constraints are not measured, like spending time negotiating."
		Laws affecting humanitarian activities: negotiation hours x staff salaries	Yemen	"There are new sanctions in Yemen that require a lot of man-hours preparing and advocating for a law that may or may not happen. It's a lot of time discussing implications – like counter-terrorism and politicisation of aid. Donors are greedy with information where they have a lot of political interests."
7. Presence of mines and UXO	Mines, improvised explosive devices, cluster munitions and other unexploded ordnance inhibiting the movement of equipment, goods and personnel or otherwise impeding humanitarian activities	Removing mines: equipment + staff salaries x hours + safety gear	N/A	«[My organization] does not remove mines. We need to call in another company to remove mines, which can delay programmes and add costs.»
		Delays as a result of mines: logistics officer's salary x hours + salaries of staff prevented from working	Yemen	"The bigger issue here on mines is the access of a population to us is at a much higher risk compared to the other categories. Interestingly, for example in Yemen after the so-called truce, the civilian casualty number kept on increasing although the fighting was over, mainly because of all the mines. So humanitarians were not injured or killed at a higher level but civilians were because mines are often in areas where civilians are living; plus climate change, rainy season, and flooding moves mines and UXO. I don't think I've seen locations where we were more vulnerable to mines than the population and a lot of the other scenarios we take as much of a risk as the population … so that doesn't cost us any money if you're looking at it from a financial aspect, it just costs civilian lives."

Constraint	Description	How the constraint can add to costs	Country	Example from interviews
8. Physical environment	Obstacles related to terrain, climate and lack of infrastructure, such as roads, bridges and airstrips	Transport by helicopter/boat/plane: cost of transport + staff salaries x travel time	CAR/DRC	"We are budgeting $700,000 worth of flights in areas that can't be accessed by car."
		Floods or rainy season: Delays in programming + staff salaries + time/ resources to manage stuck vehicles / Cost of helicopters/ flights	DRC	"DRC always has the highest costs because of the physical costs. During the rainy season, the roads are unacceptable, and we can use UNHAS but we need a place to land, prepare the road, and maintenance upkeep of the airport. UNHAS is not the solution."
		Delay of staff getting to work: time delayed x staff salaries + transport costs (if picking staff up)	N/A	«Delays incurs financial costs, even administrative ones.»
		Negotiation time: liaison officer's salary x hours + country director's salary x hours	Yemen	«Systematic issues are a daily issue. Sub-agreements go to an online central authority but get co-signed by military actors. Line ministries need to sign off and so do governorate levels. It costs a lot of time for liaison officers. These sub-agreements need a lot of negotiation time that the country director must spend.»
9. Restrictions on, or obstruction of, conflict affected populations access to services and assistance	All events and practices which interfere with the ability of conflict-affected populations to access assistance and services. These may include forced population movement as well as physical or administrative restrictions that prevent affected populations (or specific individuals or groups) to access services and assistance	Coordination: time spent in meetings x salaries of all relevant staff + tools	N/A	"Logistics clusters have an impact on costs. A good coordinator can save a lot by facilitating agreements ... There is value in coordinating logistics and NGO security and physical access."
		New programme strategy: access officer's salary x hours + country director's salary x hours + programme officer's salary x hours + liaison officer's salary x hours	N/A	"Quality access, avoiding doing harm is very expensive. Quality services, quality assessments or even community-led initiatives cost a lot and might not look useful, but it is. Also, paying beneficiaries who are taking time to help us during times they normally work."
		Facility not being used/programme not reaching beneficiaries: staff salaries x hours (wasted labour) + cost of unused facility/ assets	Afghanistan	"There are costs of being principled. For example Afghanistan banning female staff. Principled, stopping operations and whatever agreement they reach; they have to operate with mahrams [chaperones]. Must pay the mahram something. Very costly. Cost of being principled especially with UN playing that game."
		Setting up in a new location: cost of new facility + HR salary x hours + new staff salaries + cost of training new staff	Afghanistan	«Afghanistan is not the norm when we think of access. There is the cost of establishing a presence, negotiating with the Taliban, then leaving the area, and dismantling the programmes. It is a lot of wasted hours, costs a lot.»

4 Mitigation measures and coping mechanisms

Humanitarian organisations work to reduce access constraints by employing strategies both independently and collectively. They use mitigation measures to decrease the chance of a constraint happening in the first place and coping mechanisms to navigate those that already exist. Interviewees for this study discussed various approaches and how they either reduce or increase the cost of their organisation's operations.

4.1 Coordination

Coordination is a major part of humanitarian work because it helps reduce the duplication of efforts, increases leverage, allows organisations to communicate and share best practices, and opens avenues for better access through cooperative efforts to tackle constraints. There are several coordination bodies that focus on humanitarian access. Some share information on overall constraints and solutions, and others are more technical in nature, focusing on movement strategies or ways to tackle a particular constraint.

Humanitarian Access working groups (HAWGs) are country-level bodies that meet regularly, bringing organisations together to discuss the access landscape, both constraints and opportunities, as well as security concerns. Interviewees and focus group members agreed that coordination was an extremely helpful tool for facilitating and reducing the cost of access work, and gave examples of how this had happened. Some of the benefits include stronger negotiation power with governments and other authorities, and the sharing of information and resources.

Reducing costs

Interviewees said coordination had been helpful for emergency planning and evacuation, discussing lessons learned and security and context analyses, including places to avoid and places with opportunities for access. One said: "It's helpful to learn what worked and what didn't for other organisations and that is cost-free." Another said: "If coordination is formalised, the impact is seen clearly." One focus group participant said proper coordination reduced the time spent on analysis and helped to determine best practices for engaging with specific groups.

Participants also cited logistics clusters as another useful form of coordination to improve access and reduce costs. One said the rapid response group's logistics cluster in Burkina Faso had been very helpful because it met regularly to discuss constraints and how to overcome them. Another said logistics coordination could reduce costs because organisations could share transport and warehouses.

One participant gave the example of Colombia, where they said it was very expensive to transport goods, so the access working group had discussed having a warehouse to store supplies in the field rather than transporting them long distances from the capital each time they were needed. They said warehouses were initially costly but more time-effective and less expensive in the long run, particularly if the logistics

working group was involved and agreed to manage them. "Good coordination can save a lot of time and money and promote better access strategies," they said.

Or as another participant put it: "Collective action works."

Increased costs because of lack of coordination

One interviewee cited the example of Yemen, where the authorities demand payments from humanitarian organizations to work in the country and their various territories. They said each organisation paid different amounts in what they described as a "collective formalised bribe", and that because organisations did not work together to negotiate with the government it ended up being "like a bidding war" for which they had set a collective precedent. They said that if organisations had coordinated they could have negotiated a lower cost that all would pay equally, but that as things stood, UN agencies and international NGOs paid vastly different sums.

The same interviewee also talked about the authorities in northern Yemen requiring women to be escorted by mahrams, or male relatives when they were travelling and working. They said this applied to the female staff of all humanitarian organisations, but that instead of taking a collective position, some simply went ahead and paid for mahrams.

They said their organisation would prefer not to use mahrams because it felt doing so violated the humanitarian principles, but that without coordination it was in a weak position to argue against the policy. As a result, they said, their organisation only sent male staff to the field, stretching its capacity thin.

4.2 HR approaches

Having the right staff in the right positions is indispensable. To Stay and Deliver describes the importance of having senior staff in the correct positions to facilitate access. Not only is the level of staff important. Factors such as nationality can also come into play:

> "Indeed, the aid organisations interviewed in the field who had demonstrated successful secure access all made strong use of their national colleagues' (or partners') information and analysis, consulted them as co-equals in security management, and often had nationals in senior leadership or analytical positions in the security area." [25]

Interviewees and focus group participants expressed similar views. They also said that having the right staff in the right positions could reduce costs, while having the wrong staff in the wrong positions could increase costs and impede access. They noted too that the processes of hiring and training staff could also affect costs. It was mentioned several times that it was hard to measure the time it takes to hire the right people with the right experience, particularly for roles working with hard-to-reach populations and/or in high-risk areas.

Having the correct staff meant better access opportunities and better relationships with authorities, interviewees said. Or as one focus group participant put it: "The long term is affected by human resources ... Sometimes points of access are tied to one person ... It is hard to put a price on personality."

Staff retention was repeatedly mentioned as a challenge. One interviewee said people sometimes only stayed in a job for two or three months before the recruitment process had to start again, and that there were not enough HR personnel to handle that kind of turnover. Another participant said: "There is huge staff rotation every year … there are a lot of factors involved in selecting people and you need to pay more for senior, experienced staff."

Participants often brought up the recommendation to hire senior staff for access positions, because they know what their roles are and have more experience in handling complex constraints and other challenges as they arise. One interviewee gave an example in Niger in which a junior access team member said the government had insisted on armed escorts on some roads, meaning the organisation was unable to access certain locations in a principled manner.

During an unrelated conference a senior employee asked the governor directly about the issue and it transpired there had been a misunderstanding. The interviewee said this was a simple example of how a senior access staff member was able to quickly resolve an issue that had led to programmes being delayed for several months. Or as another participant put it: "You can't measure the immediate value of a senior staff member, but you can see where not having a senior access staff member affects the programming."

Understanding the context is also important in selecting the right staff, given that in some contexts mistrust of certain nationalities or ethnicities can be a challenge. In the example of Mali, an interviewee explained that since their organisation had recruited from the region, it was able to circumvent the government ban on French and French-funded organisations when other organisations had to move their French staff out of the country. Although this political shift was not something that any organisation could have predicted or fully prepared itself for, having invested in national and local staff helped mitigate some of the historical and political challenges of the context.

Another participant noted that changing the profile of the staff they hired affected their access. They said their organisation realised that it needed to do better at matching staff profiles to the population it served. The organisation did this by advertising jobs locally instead of nationally, leading to a significant improvement in its interactions with its beneficiaries.

That was offset somewhat by the fact that the new staff had fewer digital skills, but as the interviewee said, it's "good to have people who can master [the data collection app] Kobo, but if they can't speak with the locals, it's complicated." As To Stay and Deliver notes: "In reality national staffers hired from a different part of the country may be seen as outsiders by the local community in some cases and resented or distrusted as much or more than expatriates."[26]

As well as having the right staff, organisational structure can also affect the effectiveness of roles. Some organisations combine the roles of access advisor and security advisor, while in others the access advisor reports directly to the country director or another department entirely.

One interviewee felt that combining the security and access roles was not ideal because they focus on different objectives and have different risk appetites: "The first person an access advisor needs to influence is security." Security is normally risk-adverse while access requires a certain level of risk and uncertainty. Or as To Stay and Deliver puts it:

"Conscious risk acceptance means taking seriously the possibility of a major security incident, but at the same time understanding that such an incident will not be an institution-shaking, career-ending event."[27]

The reason why an organization merge access and security tend to be as a cost-saving measure, but there are consequences on job effectiveness, and less effective access roles cost more in the long run.

4.3 Training and capacity building

Interviewees identified training and capacity building as highly beneficial and an area that could always use more investment. There are many training sessions and courses that humanitarians must complete, particularly those who work in conflict settings, to prepare them for situations they may encounter and equip them with measures to ensure they stay safe.

One example is hostile environment awareness training (HEAT). Courses cost between $1,500 to $3,000 per person, without flights and sometimes without accommodation, but it has been shown that such investments save money in the long run. They also help staff feel more confident in dangerous situations.

Training is also provided in access negotiations, which prepares people to deal with authorities or armed groups to mitigate constraints and open avenues for humanitarian aid. Without such preparation, and training in access more broadly, one interviewee said there was a danger that staff would not even recognise what constraints were and assume "that's just how things operate."

It is not always easy, however, to measure the extent to which training saves money. One interviewee described a situation in CAR in which an armed group stopped a car and a staff member trained in negotiation skills more broadly was able to avoid a carjacking. Another staff member who received the same training, however, was confronted with a similar situation and was robbed. It is hard to say that more training would have prevented the robbery, or that more training always works, but there is clear evidence of the value of investing in staff capabilities.

One interviewee described providing training in the humanitarian principles to their staff, some of whom subsequently met a governor who was blocking cash projects and were able to change his decision. This came with knowing the stakeholders and understanding how to approach them, something learned from other training, stakeholder mapping and context analysis. Another interviewee said training local authorities on the humanitarian principles had helped to negotiate the release of a humanitarian staff member who had been kidnapped in Mali. The local authorities said that after the training, they understood that that kidnapped person was part of a principled organization, and they wouldn't have gotten involved without having the training.

Training and capacity building can be costly. International staff are often brought in to run workshops and courses and/or staff members are flown to a capital city or another country to participate. One interviewee described a training course that was supposed to have taken place in Libya, but the facilitator was unable to get a visa, so the trainees had to travel to Tunisia. The cost of training in countries with many constraints can be much higher than in other locations. One course run in Yemen in mid-2022 ended up costing around $22,000, accounting for double or even triple the price of training elsewhere.

One interviewee said their organisation had to invest significantly in building the capacity of its local partners, who despite being civil society experts needed training in humanitarian issues. They said the initial extra cost involved was worth it because local partners did not face the same restrictions as international organisations. They also said that working with local partners was a way in which they reduced costs because their partners are better integrated into the communities where they carry out programming. This aids them in quicker responses and less time needed to understand various aspects of community relationships, as well as building trust and acceptance. Capacity building was consistently seen throughout the research as benefitting country programmes and saving money in the long run.

Another participant said the capacity of staff in Nigeria for access work was very limited and that a broad approach to training was required. An interviewee familiar with training echoed this point, saying that while not all staff members specialised in access, many worked on the frontline and experienced the constraints that access staff try to mitigate. They suggested that people working in the field and junior staff in particular should be trained in access issues. They also said that some of the most effective negotiators and well-prepared staff members were those in programming and implementation roles.

One interviewee recommended working with institutions and centres in-country to reduce longer-term training costs. They said that preparing them to be able to deliver courses and workshops would mean international organisations could go to them for training rather than having to deliver it themselves. They also said it was important because national staff stayed in the country and needed their own training capacity.

4.4 Partnerships

The humanitarian system has been discussing localisation and using local partners since before the 2016 Grand Bargain. The approach can be very useful not only for access but also humanitarian work more broadly, and can help to reduce costs in a variety of ways. Local partners, for example, know their context and their communities and do not need to be trained in local customs and norms, and this knowledge and understanding can also help them to mitigate access constraints.

Participants said community-based approaches helped with access, particularly because their partners were in touch with local leaders and informed them whenever issues arose. They said this helped to establish understanding between organisations and the communities they worked in, and created opportunities for problem solving.

An interviewee from a regional organisation said they had been working with local partners in CAR for two years, and that it had reduced costs and improved access because coordination tended to be more effective at the local rather than the national level.

Many participants spoke of the value of local partners, but one interviewee felt they were not a panacea. They said when they work with partners located in the capital, they might find it more difficult to establish acceptance elsewhere in the country because they could be perceived as less neutral and independent than an international organisation. "We don't always see [partnership] as a silver bullet that can respond to constraints," they said. This may be different for partners located in the communities themselves. This may be different for partners located in the communities themselves.

Another participant mentioned that localisation was not always possible because of the education level and background of local partners. They also said that when their organisation received funding for localisation work it did not cover its local partner's operational costs, which in turn did not encourage their development. One participant suggested that funding for partners should cover their operational and administrative costs, allowing them to grow holistically and cover their day-to-day operations.

The major challenge of partnerships and localisation is that international organisation often transfer the risk to the respective partners, which often leaves them vulnerable and at a higher risk. One interviewee with an organisation that works with local partners said that you have to ensure risk sharing over risk transfer, taking a more balanced approach to risk. They went on to say that they believe that having partner staff drawn from the local community is a way to mitigate risk because they are more aware of their context and can adapt more easily to changes or threats in the area. While this may be true, staff safety should be top priority and having local partners must entail conversations about reducing and mitigating risks to their safety.

Despite the potential complications of working with local partners, participants recommended continuing to invest in localisation, because as well as helping to mitigate access constraints, it could also reduce costs and lead to better humanitarian outcomes. More work and implementation has to be done on risk sharing frameworks as are better strategies ensuring capacitated and resourced local partners.

4.5 Security Crisis Preparedness

The humanitarian sector has become more risk adverse over time. When a major security incident took place, it would tend to spark an evacuation of staff and/or the organisation in question pulling out of a country. Latterly, however, the sector has come to view risk and risk appetite differently, and to adopt, as To Stay and Deliver puts it, the "concept of the enabling security approach – an approach that focuses on 'how to stay' as opposed to 'when to leave".[28]

Humanitarian organisations take on board a certain amount of risk by working in conflict or violent settings, and they must navigate those risks instead of evacuating or shutting down operations when a security issue arises.

One way to reduce the likelihood of such outcomes is to be prepared for security incidents and have plans in place for when a crisis occurs. As a senior access team member said, "evacuation at times is a knee jerk reaction due to the lack of business continuity planning." The main pillar of preparedness is to understand the context and keep up-to-date about conflict dynamics and public opinion. Preparedness includes planning for worst case scenarios from response as well as for internal business continuity perspective. Both have to be taken into account to ensure adequate preparation. Preparedness also includes having plans in place for how to manage an evacuation if necessary.

Such plans may include agreements with hotels to receive staff, setting up safehouses and preparing to manage important documents and information if an office needs to be closed. When participants were asked about areas where access constraints have added to their costs, some interviewees focused on the costs of poorly planned evacuations from their experiences.

This was the case in Afghanistan when the Taliban took over in August 2021. One interviewee who was in the country at the time said the main issue was that, despite knowing the takeover was coming, humanitarian organisations were not prepared to stay or evacuate. This left them making last-minute decisions when they decided to evacuate, with one result being that many international staff were stranded in the country until the UN organised their evacuation.

The same interviewee said it would have been a simple matter to have had arrangements in place with hotels in Tajikistan to receive staff, if necessary, but instead, organisations spent many thousands of dollars sending their staff back to their home countries after subjecting them to unnecessary levels of psychological distress.

Another interviewee working in Ukraine said humanitarian organisations should have been better prepared for the war there. They said the conflict had been foreseeable given Russia's build-up of military assets along the Ukrainian border well before it launched its invasion, but that no organisation had tried to engage in dialogue with Moscow or negotiate a humanitarian corridor, which then became a much more difficult prospect once fighting had broken out.

Preparedness leads to better security and safety outcomes. It can also include plans for resuming access after a crisis is over. When things go wrong and there is no plan in place, security becomes the priority and consideration of future access can be pushed aside. Evacuations are expensive, and they also make it expensive to return to a country. One interviewee said it was hard to go back once an organisation had left an area, that programmes could be paralysed and it took a long time to re-establish a presence.

4.6 Humanitarian financing

As humanitarian funding and donors struggle to keep up with humanitarian needs, it is essential to find ways to make the funding that is available stretch further. This can be done by cutting programme costs and making funding more effective. There have been several initiatives to try to do the latter, from donors across humanitarian system to organisations on the ground. This includes the introduction of new funding mechanisms, some of which specifically invest in access and outreach to vulnerable populations. Many donors have committed to making access a priority and have funded access initiatives.

Humanitarian funding has largely plateaued in recent years after record contributions in 2021 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.[29] There is concern about the small number of major donors, and the fact that their contributions are expected to decrease or remain stagnant in the coming years while humanitarian needs continue to grow. Humanitarians are trying to identify and open up new donor fields to fund some of the growing needs, particularly as the impacts of the climate crisis increase. As donors and implementers take on access initiatives, it is important to recognise the costs associated with access and push for the efficient use of funds to promote access work.

4.6.1 Priorities on Access

Donors see the benefit of investing in access and are increasingly doing so. As Sarah Charles, the assistant to the administrator of USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), said in November 2022:

> "Humanitarian access is widely seen to be shrinking ... While insecurity, and humanitarian contexts are growing, and attacks on humanitarian workers continue to rise. ALNAP's report rightly notes that humanitarians are also concerned with the impact of government-imposed restrictions, like sanctions and counter-terrorism measures...This is key priority area for the US government, for USAID, and for BHA."[30]

She also said BHA was working with OCHA and NRC to support NGOs in their tactical engagement with armed actors. The US is one of the biggest donors of humanitarian funds, contributing about a third of the global total in 2021 which makes BHA's focus on access particularly significant.[31]

Other donors that dedicate funding to activities in hard-to-reach areas include the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Other country donors to have shown public support of access include Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Japan, and Norway.

According to OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (FTS), the largest amounts of humanitarian funding in 2021 went to three UN agencies: the World Food Programme (WFP) with 28 per cent; the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) with 12 per cent and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) with seven per cent.[32] Together they accounted for almost half of the global total. There is a similar pattern in terms of humanitarian expenditure. The top 10 international NGOs between them spent $100 million less than WFP alone in 2021. This gives the major UN agencies a lot of sway over the humanitarian system.

Proportions of total international humanitarian assistance provided by the five largest donors and all other donors, 2021-2018

Since 2018 at least half of all international humanitarian funding has come from just five donors each year. Around a third of total funds came from the US in 2021.
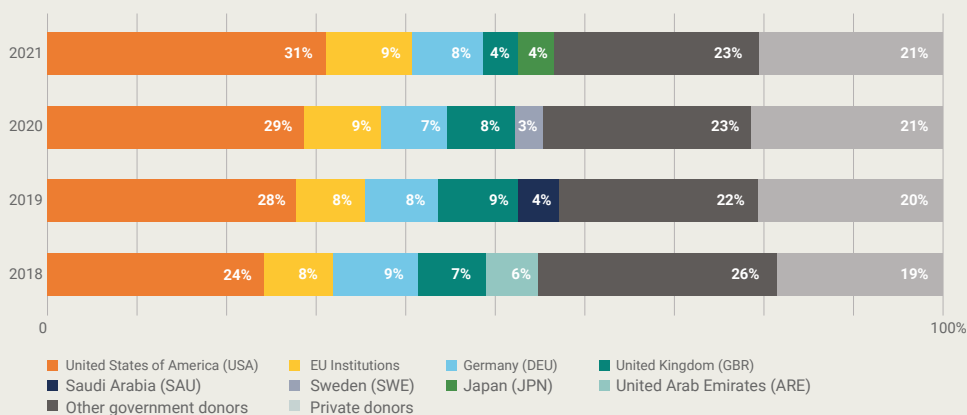
Figure 3: Humanitarian funding by donors (ALNAP)

WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF's policies all mention access as an issue of concern. WFP's strategic plan for 2022-2025 talks about upholding Security Council resolution 2417, which "condemns the starving of civilians as a method of warfare, along with those who wilfully block humanitarian access or impede efforts to move relief supplies". It also highlights that access to populations is vital to ensure delivery of assistance and states that WFP will work towards sustaining access to populations.[33] Its 2022 response plan states: "Humanitarian access to populations in need has become one of the most significant current challenges for humanitarian action." And "Dedicated WFP capacity has been put in place to support Operational Access (OA) and Humanitarian-Military Interaction (HMI) to facilitate humanitarian access and safeguard WFP's humanitarian space." [34]

In UNICEF's core commitments that inform their strategic plan, it highlights humanitarians access as an overarching core programme commitment.[35] It's strategic plan for 2022-2025 also lists access to services in 3 out of 5 of its goal areas, such as access to nutritious diets, access to WASH services, and access to inclusive social protection.[36] UNHCR also lists "access to territory, registration, and documentation" as its first outcome in its strategic directions document for 2022-2026.[37] While it mostly focuses on access to services in its strategic directions, UNHCR has created important documents regarding access, such as a guidance note on humanitarian access and presence in the handbook for protection of IDPs from 2007.[38]

OCHA has integrated humanitarian access into its strategic plan for 2023-2026. Its transformational priority is provide «systematic and predictable leadership on access". It goes on to state that across the organisation "OCHA must make facilitating and supporting access in every context a top priority. It must move from an ad hoc approach to one that is systematic, providing the ERC and humanitarian partners with predictable, sustained and effective support".

The 2022 SOHS report also discusses the growing importance of access in the humanitarian sector, mentioning it as one of the most salient challenges identified in the research.[39] Juliet Parker, one of the researchers for the report, said:

> "Conflict is not only on the rise, but we found consistently the nature of conflict is changing and making humanitarian access more difficult … It is one of the really worrying trends … That's been a long-term trend which we may reasonably expect to become more challenging in this next reporting period and really compromise the ability of the humanitarian sector to deliver assistance. And I think one of the challenges too is that, a lot of solutions sits outside of the humanitarian sector, and it requires, leadership and unity from the international community."[40]

Total international humanitarian assistance, 2021-2012

Total funding for international humanitarian assistance in 2021 was nearly double what it had been a decade before, but funding largely plateaued over the four years between 2018 and 2021.
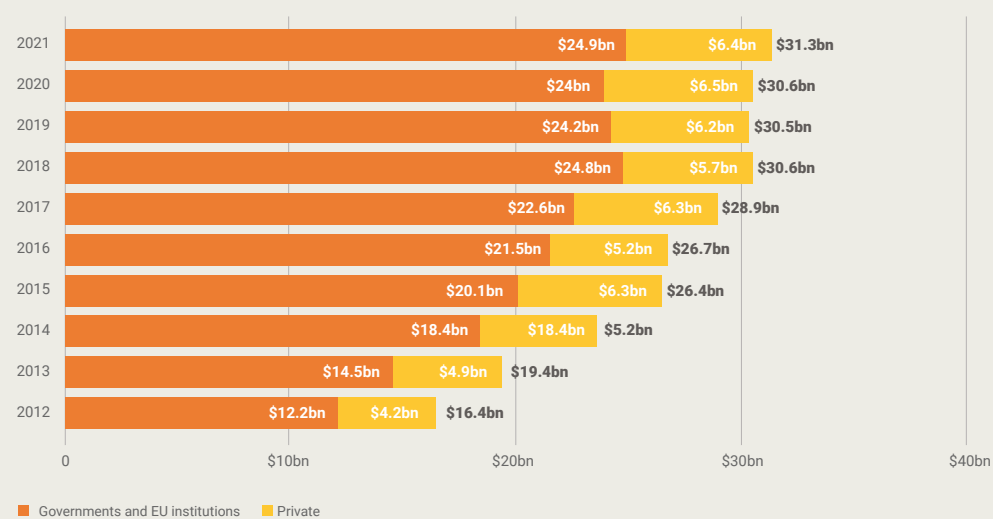
Year	Governments and EU institutions	Private	Total
2021	$24.9bn	$6.4bn	$31.3bn
2020	$24bn	$6.5bn	$30.6bn
2019	$24.2bn	$6.2bn	$30.5bn
2018	$24.8bn	$5.7bn	$30.6bn
2017	$22.6bn	$6.3bn	$28.9bn
2016	$21.5bn	$5.2bn	$26.7bn
2015	$20.1bn	$6.3bn	$26.4bn
2014	$18.4bn	$18.4bn / $5.2bn	
2013	$14.5bn	$4.9bn	$19.4bn
2012	$12.2bn	$4.2bn	$16.4bn

Figure 4: International Humanitarian Funding 2018-2021 (ALNAP)

4.6.2 The Grand Bargain

In order to improve funding to address unmet humanitarian needs, a high-level UN panel on humanitarian financing called in 2016 for a Grand Bargain between donors and implementers to "get more means into the hands of people in need and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian action".[41] Signatories convened again in 2023 to reaffirm their commitment to adjust the humanitarian financing system to better respond to the changing humanitarian landscape.

Its main points focused on a better financing system with increased transparency, more cash programmes, easier reporting mechanisms, less bureaucracy, multi-year funding, less earmarking and greater coordination with local partners and the development sector. Originally a deal between the five biggest donors and the six largest UN agencies, it now has 67 signatories - 25 member states, 26 NGOs, 12 UN agencies, two Red Cross/Red Crescent movements and two inter-governmental organisations.

A five-year review of the undertaking led to Grand Bargain 2.0, with two overarching priorities: quality funding that allows effective and efficient response, and greater leadership support and capacity for local responders and affected communities.

The humanitarian finance system as it stands is very rigid, with each donor having its own set of requirements to approve funding for a project. When a contract is agreed, there tends to be little room for changes and any unexpected situations are supposed to be reported back to the donor. If there are cost increases, donors can decide not to pay them.

Multi-year funding is increasing, but most contracts still last for a year or less, which makes project timelines tight and can disrupt implementation, particularly when staff hired with project funds have to be let go if the contract is not renewed. Sometimes donors renew the same projects, but budgets are renegotiated. Either way, this results in a lack of predictability.

It also creates a time-consuming burden of paperwork and negotiations between donors and implementers and results in stop-start programming. Humanitarian organisations prefer multi-year funding because they feel it gives them more impact and the ability to plan longer-term budgets and programmes.

To improve flexibility, the Grand Bargain suggests that a percentage of donor funding should be unearmarked so that implementers can use it as they see fit, without having to ask for donor approval. The logic behind this is that implementers know their context and programmes and should have the freedom to make the financial decisions they believe most beneficial.

IASC argues that the Grand Bargain proposal for 30 per cent of funding to be unearmarked or softly earmarked does not go far enough and suggests a figure of 40 per cent or more for operational flexibility. It also notes that multi-year funding is not that predictable because amounts are still negotiated annually and funds are still earmarked.[42] Trust is part of the issue here. Donors want to know where their money is going, but IASC is clear that predictable, flexible and timely funding is required and that the humanitarian system needs to move toward that.

The Grand Bargain also suggests greater use of cash programming, because it gives beneficiaries more autonomy and choice about how they address their needs. This type of programming may be in the form of direct cash, which gives beneficiaries most flexibility, or vouchers, which can be exchanged for certain items. Cash programming has increased by 44 per cent since 2018, and all Grand Bargain signatories report using it.[43] The Covid-19 pandemic is thought to have driven much of the increase, and cash has since been used extensively in Ukraine.

Cash transfers are clearly a useful form of assistance, particularly for communities that are impossible to reach by other means. Whether that can be equated with humanitarian access, however, is questionable. Some humanitarian organisations take the view that running remote cash programmes does mean they have access, but they are not able to interact with the target community or understand local needs and markets. Others believe that true access involves direct interaction with beneficiaries.

This research highlights the many ways that programming can become costly in H2R areas and ways that up-front costs and time investments can mitigate long-term costs. The Grand Bargain is one of the major ways that the humanitarian system is attempting to meet humanitarian needs with the challenges of continued or new donor funding. While complex emergencies increase, the need for innovative, effective funding does as well.

4.7 Donor Leadership in H2R Areas

Interviewees and focus group participants had a number of suggestions and recommendations related to interactions in both directions between humanitarian organisations and donors that would make access work easier and more effective. The main point to emerge was a desire for more understanding from donors to save time having to explain access and other constraints to them. One participant from Yemen said almost half of their time was dedicated to coordination and briefing donors, which amounts to a very significant cost.

They also felt more flexibility about project start dates would be helpful, given the unpredictable process of getting programming approved in Yemen. Without it, the organisation often has to ask for no-cost extensions, but without being able to

implement the project, they end up using operational budgets to cover costs until the project is approved, stretching it thin and adding pressure to their programmes.

Another interviewee said the first humanitarian convoy in Burkina Faso was the result of months of negotiations, with staff dedicated only to that issue. They said such time investments were not seen in budget lines, but were sometimes an unavoidable consequence of working in hard-to-reach areas that donors did not necessarily understand.

Another participant said that humanitarian organisations could do more to explain to donors how their investments will be used and the complexities of working in hard-to-reach areas, including that access strategies will not always work and cannot necessarily be measured as "successful" or "not successful". They gave the example of one staff member being able to prevent a robbery by an armed group while another was not.

Another senior staff member echoed this, saying that access work needed to be understood as a process of making impediments more manageable:

> "If it's a process that means that I have on a daily basis issues with delays and impediments on the humanitarian response and one way to deal with it is through additional access resources as part of an operational budget … We won't change the impediments in Sudan, Burkina Faso and Mali, but we need to be able to provide assistance to the people in need."

A participant working in Colombia made a similar point. They said organisations needed to talk to donors earlier about access and the cost of it because support costs in the country were very high. They gave the example of calculating and sharing costs such as the fuel needed to access hard-to-reach areas for a year to show what it takes to operate in such environments. They said they believed donors were flexible when they understood the issues.

Many interviewees expressed concern about donors losing faith in their organisations when they have to explain that things have gone wrong. They felt it was sometimes a double challenge to manage constraints in the field while maintaining good relationships with their donors. In the case of a staff member arrested and subsequently cleared in Cameroon, one participant said: "How do you explain to donors that your staff are being taken to criminal court?"

Donors can help access work by advocating for it, and wherever possible working to reduce the cost of negotiations, and registrations for humanitarians. A senior staff member said they could also invest in up-front costs that would save money in the long run, such as paying for dedicated access roles who work on time-consuming constraints. They said this would save money because it would free up other roles focus on their own tasks, and because having one person coordinating access issues as part of regular engagement would make dealing with delays and impediments more efficient.

They went on to say that having staff untrained in access issues dealing with impediments could lead to self-generated constraints, for example by speaking to an armed group and agreeing to its terms, which could then affect future access negotiations and opportunities.

Donors can also advocate and engage on access in other ways, by using their influence to take a stand for or against certain policies or behaviours. A senior staff member cautioned, however, that this should always happen in consultation with the

humanitarian community to avoid negative impacts on programmes and access that use up valuable time and resources. This also ties back to seeing access as a process rather than a solution. The interviewee said:

> "If you're always focused on solving the problem, because you won't, it's a sovereign country, you won't solve the visa process of Sudan … so don't spend your time trying to find a solution for something where there's most likely not a solution. Spend your time on how you can lighten processes and ensure they're not becoming heavier."

They also said donors had the ability to make space for operational partners to lead negotiations and to back them up when necessary. They gave the example of an organisation negotiating with an armed group by saying the donor would withdraw funding if it did not meet certain criteria. As the armed group wanted aid in their territory, they saw the humanitarians as advocating for continued aid to them, while the donors were the "bad guys" who were threatening to withdrawal aid. The humanitarians leveraged this relationship to change the armed group's behaviour so they could continue aiding them. "'We're here to help you, we want to provide the services, but you need to help us [by changing specific behaviours]', and that worked because the donors took the blame and gave us space to actually work on these issues."

Mine alert sign along a roadside in Mykolaivoblast, Ukraine.
Photo: Catriona Loughran.

5 Recommendations

TO DONORS:

Engage on access issues using information from partners.

Humanitarian access space is complex, and humanitarian practitioners need support from donors to continue to work in hard-to-reach areas. Due to the potential politicization of humanitarian access in some contexts, close coordination between the donor and humanitarian community is required to ensure principled engagement in support of key humanitarian asks. Donors can provide support by amplifying the voices of those working in hard-to-reach areas and sharing the information and stories they gather. This can include discussing access constraints humanitarians face in specific locations and bringing attention to those who need humanitarian support but cannot receive it due to those constraints.

Advocate for dedicated funding to hard-to-reach areas.

Donors can also be allies by advocating for increased financial support to work in hard-to-reach areas. As this research demonstrated, mitigating and coping with access constraints is expensive, especially in areas with systemic impediments. However, this does not mean that humanitarians should not deliver to beneficiaries in hard-to-reach areas; instead, they need more resources to continue their work to bring lifesaving aid to those who are otherwise neglected.

Understand humanitarian access as a process.

Discussions with humanitarians showed that one of their time-based costs is liaising with donors to explain the stop-start or delays in programming. The donor community could better support access work by giving more space to the access and negotiation work required to keep the response going while acknowledging that not all access impediments can be solved. Access is a process that demands consistent engagement at all levels, making qualitative measurements challenging at times.

TO THE HUMANITARIAN COMMUNITY:

Engage in open dialogue and collective action on access constraints.

It is important for humanitarian partners to coordinate their access engagement among each other as well as through an open and ongoing dialogue with the donor community. In an increasingly complex operating environment, partners must address systematic access constraints in a coordinated fashion to collectively push back on impediments and maintain and protect the shrinking humanitarian space.

Include impacts of time-based and non-financial resources used to mitigate constraints.

One thing that humanitarians mentioned throughout this research is that a lot of time-based and non-financial resources go into mitigating access constraints. Yet, these costs are not documented in financial records. One way humanitarians can demonstrate how constraints affect them is to record these time-intensive, non-financial costs. This can be done by recording time-intensive negotiations and explaining the resources used during the process. Having these records can exemplify how access constraints challenge country programs and how much work goes into reaching hard-to-reach populations.

Advocate for principled access and quality programming to beneficiaries in hard-to-reach areas.

Partners highlight that, in certain instances, populations in hard-to-reach areas receive lower-quality programming. The humanitarian community, as well as donors and governments, must advocate for high-quality programming for hard-to-reach populations to ensure that all populations in need are served wherever they are or choose to be. This also includes continually investing in active acceptance. Active acceptance is a vital part of quality programming and the sustainability of long-term, principled access. Humanitarian organizations may face negative consequences without acceptance, leading to self-imposed constraints.

TO GOVERNMENTS AND POLICYMAKERS:

Ensure laws, regulations, and policies do not undermine principled humanitarian action.

Impediments are not only produced in-country but can become part of regulations, laws, and policies, such as counterterrorism laws and sanctions, which increase complexity for humanitarian organizations and require additional resources to navigate ever-increasing legal requirements. In some cases, governments will provide humanitarian exemptions, but this is not always true. It is vital for governments and policymakers to understand their role in creating and mitigating access constraints and how they can best support humanitarian assistance to hard-to-reach areas.

Domesticate Security Council Resolution 2664 and ensure that sanctions are not impeding access either through exemptions or other measures.

Security Council Resolution 2664 states that humanitarian organizations can operate without their asset being frozen or penalized by international sanctions. It says, "the provision, processing or payment of funds, other financial assets or economic resources or the provision of goods and services necessary to ensure the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance or to support other activities that support basic human needs are permitted and are not a violation of the asset freezes imposed by that organ or its sanctions committees." Governments should uphold this Security Council resolution and consistently permit humanitarian work in sanctioned regimes. However, if governments impose bilateral sanctions, they should include exemptions to avoid harm toward principled humanitarian action.

Continue to advocate for governments to maintain humanitarian space and call out when they are preventing aid from reaching populations.

Along with the UN Security Council, governments must continue to advocate for humanitarian space across the globe. The main donors of humanitarian assistance need to lead by example to ensure leverage over actors violating international humanitarian law and principled humanitarian action.

Annex 1. Humanitarian Access Strategies

Organisation	Global strategy prioritises or references access?	Public statements in 2023 referencing access	Notes
6 largest NGOs — Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)	Prioritises	The people of Afghanistan need sustainable solutions to avoid catastrophe https://www.nrc.no/news/2023/august/the-people-of-afghanistan-need-sustainable-solutions-to-avoid-catastrophe/ ""NRC urges the authorities in Afghanistan to uphold their obligations as duty bearers, towards all members of the population, including enabling unhindered and principled humanitarian access and education for women and girls. Further, NRC calls on the international community to sustain humanitarian funding to stabilise the crisis and to step-up diplomatic engagement to find constructive ways forward for Afghanistan as peoples' lives and futures depend on it.'" Humanitarian Access https://www.nrc.no/what-we-do/speaking-up-for-rights/humanitarian-access2/ "States and other actors that control territory have the responsibility to meet the basic needs of their people. If they are unable or unwilling, they should give access to humanitarian actors instead."	NRC Global Strategy 2022–2025 https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/policy-documents/global-strategy-2022-2025/nrc_global-strategy-2022-2025_english.pdf "Working towards our Ambition 2030, NRC's Global Strategy 2022–2025 provides a blueprint for action over the next four years. It defines the change we want to see for displacement-affected people: they have access to quality services and protection, they are safe and can exercise their rights, they can secure durable solutions." "Sub-objective 6: Humanitarian assistance to hard-to-reach populations C. Access coordination and actions that enable others- We work to coordinate and improve sustainable and principled access that helps meet the needs of hard-to-reach populations. We use the full range of operational and advocacy resources available to us to help facilitate humanitarian access for other actors."
Save the Children International (SCI)	References	Ethiopia: Save the Children calls for access for humanitarian aid to families and children in Amhara https://www.savethechildren.net/news/ethiopia-save-children-calls-access-humanitarian-aid-families-and-children-amhara "Save the Children called on Wednesday for access for humanitarian aid to continue in Ethiopia's Amhara region where a state of emergency has been declared after a renewal in violence. Save the Children's Country Director for Ethiopia, Xavier Joubert, said the lives of families and children were being put at risk as the region faced an alarming escalation of conflict about nine months after a truce agreement ended two years of violence. «The wounds from the recent war remain raw, and yet again, children's lives hang in the balance. As a humanitarian organization we call upon warring parties to prioritize the safety of civilians and allow humanitarian aid to reach those in need including 580,000 people in the region already displaced by previous conflict.»"	Save the Children 2022 – 2024 Strategy https://www.savethechildren.org/content/dam/usa/reports/save-the-children-2022-2023-strategic-plan-document.pdf "Focus on closing equity gaps, ensuring 30 million children globally and 107,000 children in the U.S. have consistent access to safe, inclusive and quality learning and child care environments." "Undertake 15 policy changes by multilaterals, U.S. government entities or officials at the national, state and local levels that increase access to social safety net programs and build resilience to global and domestic shocks."

Organisation	Global strategy prioritises or references access?	Public statements in 2023 referencing access	Notes
6 largest NGOs — International Rescue Committee (IRC)	Prioritises	Emergency Watchlist: What should be done? https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/Watchlist%202023_P%26A%20Recs.pdf "The denial of humanitarian access is happening in the dark. Humanitarian organizations operating on the ground are unable to raise alarm for fear of retaliation. Even the UN is constrained in its ability to speak out as access becomes politicized. Those restricting aid are not just nonstate actors, but also UN member states. As a result, the UN Security Council (UNSC) is gridlocked. There is an urgent need for someone to shed light on the weaponization of access and speak truth to power."	IRC Strategy 100: A Strategic Vision for 100 Years of Action https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/6027/ircstrategy100brochure.pdf "Improve the speed and access of our emergency response through regional response teams integrated with community response groups." "Increasing access to education"
Catholic Relief Services (CRS)	References	Peace in the Sahel: Policy Recommendations for the U.S. Government https://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/research-publications/peace-sahel-policy-recommendations-us-government "Work through diplomatic and other channels to improve humanitarian access and urge respect for humanitarian principles by armed actors." Full report: https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/sahel_policy_2_pager_august_2021.pdf	CRS 2030 Strategy https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/usops-resources/181129_crs_strategy_rev_062519_a.pdf "People have adequate and equitable access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene"
Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)	Prioritises	MSF Access Campaign https://www.msfaccess.org/ The Access Campaign is part of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), an international, independent, medical humanitarian organisation. Our work is rooted in MSF's medical operations and supports people in our projects and beyond. We bring down barriers that keep people from getting the treatment they need to stay alive and healthy. We advocate for effective drugs, tests and vaccines that are: available, affordable, suited to the people we care for, and adapted to the places where they live.	MSF OCA Strategic Plan 2020-2023 https://www.artsenzondergrenzen.nl/documents/171/MSF_OCA_Strategic_Plan_-_Online_version.pdf "Expose policies of dehumanisation and promote access to healthcare for people on the move, people in settings of containment and systematically excluded groups". "We seek open and transparent dialogues with all parties, so that we can access those most in need of our assistance."
World Vision	References	World Vision Expresses Deep Concern Over Failed Extension of UNSC Cross-Border Resolution for Syria, Urges Immediate Reconsideration Amid Dire Humanitarian Need https://www.wvi.org/newsroom/syria-crisis-response/world-vision-expresses-deep-concern-over-failed-extension-unsc-cross "Johan Mooij, Response Director for World Vision's Syria Response, has stated, «The escalating food insecurity and malnutrition rates in Northwest Syria necessitate immediate and substantial funding support. Advocacy for unhindered access to all areas is paramount as it enables organizations like World Vision to provide essential nutrition and other crucial services.»"	World Vision's Strategy - Our Promise https://www.worldvision.ie/about/world-vision-s-strategy-our-promise/ "The 'No Lost Generation' partnership is working on these solutions through an ambitious multi-agency approach that puts the needs of this vulnerable group at the top of the agenda. The approach, embedded in national response plans, sets out practical ways for partner organisations to work together to expand access to education and psychosocial support."

Organisation	Global strategy prioritises or references access?	Public statements in 2023 referencing access	Notes
International Organization — International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)	References	ICRC emphasizes humanitarian access and IHL at EHF 2023 https://www.icrc.org/en/document/european-humanitarian-forum-2023 "Under the title «New Global Realities, Shaping Humanitarian Action Together», European Humanitarian Forum (EHF) 2023 focused on issues relating to the funding gap (the difference between available funds and the resources needed to adequately respond to crises and emergencies) and on access (the possibility for humanitarian organizations to reach the communities most in need wherever they are in the world)." Joint AU-ICRC-OCHA Seminar on International Humanitarian Law (IHL) "Preserving Humanitarian Space Under IHL" https://www.icrc.org/en/document/joint-au-icrc-ocha-seminar-international-humanitarian-law-ihl-preserving-humanitarian-space "The aim of the seminar was to reflect on contemporary challenges to humanitarian access and the applicability of IHL, highlight AU policy frameworks and guidelines on the thematic; exchange best practices and challenges in the facilitation of humanitarian access and accountability for serious violence of IHL including reflecting on concrete recommendations based on practical experiences."	ICRC Strategy 2019–2024 https://shop.icrc.org/icrc/pdf/view/id/2844 "Efforts must be made to influence and change the behaviour of parties to conflict; prevent violations of IHL and fundamental rights; change laws, policies and practices that have a harmful impact on people affected; and ensure respect for principled humanitarian action, so that both those in need and those seeking to assist them are accessible."
4 largest UN agencies — World Food Programme (WFP)	References	Nearly one million children in Mali at risk of acute malnutrition by the end of 2023 – UNICEF-WFP https://www.wfp.org/news/nearly-one-million-children-mali-risk-acute-malnutrition-end-2023-unicef-wfp "A combination of protracted armed conflict, internal displacement, and restricted humanitarian access risks pushing nearly one million children under the age of 5 in Mali into acute malnutrition by December 2023 – with at least 200,000 at risk of dying of hunger if life-saving aid fails to reach them." WFP reaches over one million people in Sudan with life-saving food assistance despite insecurity and access challenges https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-reaches-over-one-million-people-sudan-life-saving-food-assistance-despite-insecurity-and	WFP strategic plan (2022–2025) https://executiveboard.wfp.org/document_download/WFP-0000132205 "Working with partners, WFP also seeks to extend its reach and sustain access to affected populations and provide urgent food, cash and nutrition assistance, targeting those most vulnerable with speed, at scale and with the quality of support needed." WFP Global Operational Response Plan 2023 - Update #7 https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000146967/download/ "Dedicated WFP capacity has been put in place to support Operational Access (OA) and Humanitarian-Military Interaction (HMI) to facilitate humanitarian access and safeguard WFP's humanitarian space, in an ever more challenging and rapidly changing operating environment. This includes engaging with civilian, armed, and military stakeholders, working on analysis and leading access negotiations to enable WFP operations in complex contexts."

Organisation	Global strategy prioritises or references access?	Public statements in 2023 referencing access	Notes
4 largest UN agencies UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)	References	The impact of travel to Ukraine on refugees' legal status and access to rights in host countries https://reporting.unhcr.org/ukraine-impact-travel-ukraine-refugees%E2%80%99-legal-status-and-access-rights-host-countries "In 16 out of 38 host countries – 14 of which are EU Member States applying the TPD – travel to Ukraine impacts refugees' access to rights and assistance. Loss of social protection benefits – reported in 11 out of 16 countries – is the most frequently cited impact of return to Ukraine, followed by loss of access to financial services and deregistration of children from schools."	Access to civil documentation by IDPs and IDP returnees in Iraq 2022-2023 https://reporting.unhcr.org/iraq-access-civil-documentation-idps-and-returnees "Missing civil documentation impedes one's ability to access basic services such as education, healthcare, and social security benefits and can lead to restricted freedom of movement, increased risk of arrest and detention, exclusion from restitution and/or reconstruction programmes, and inability to participate in the public affairs of the country." UNHCR Strategic Directions 2022-2026 https://reporting.unhcr.org/unhcr-strategic-directions-2022-2026 Outcome areas: 1. Access to territory, registration, and documentation. 6. Safety and access to justice
UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)	Prioritises	Severe violations of children's rights an 'hourly occurrence' in Sudan, warns UNICEF https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/severe-violations-childrens-rights-hourly-occurrence-sudan-warns-unicef "Restricted movement due to the security situation, administrative barriers and bureaucratic impediments and the denial of humanitarian access, remain key obstacles to delivering much-needed aid to those in desperate need and pose a threat to aid workers." "Without guaranteed, safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian workers, and life-saving supplies, along with urgently needed additional funding, the futures of millions of children will remain in the balance."	UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025 https://www.unicef.org/media/115646/file/Strategic%20Plan%202022-2025%20publication%20English.pdf "Every child, including adolescents: (1) survives and thrives with access to nutritious diets, quality primary health care, nurturing practices and essential supplies; … (5) has access to inclusive social protection and lives free from poverty."
UN Habitat	References	UN Habitat Assembly 2023 https://unhabitat.org/governance/un-habitat-assembly/second-session-2023 "Thematic debates and discussions during the Assembly will focus on the following topics: Universal access to affordable housing: Member States are encouraged to explore mechanisms to achieve the universal right to adequate housing and move towards removing existing barriers to affordable housing."	UN Habitat: The Strategic Plan 2020-2023 https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-09/strategic_plan_2020-2023.pdf "Expanding access to adequate housing, clean drinking water, sanitation, domestic energy, transport, health care, education and public space, with safety and security as key factors to ensure the achievement of truly equal and inclusive cities and human settlements."

Organisation	Global strategy prioritises or references access?	Public statements in 2023 referencing access	Notes
6 largest humanitarian donors US - Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA)	References	Preserving and Protecting Principled Humanitarian Access with Sarah Charles and Jan Egeland – CSIS Sustaining Access: Humanitarian Principles, Practice, and Policy –event https://www.csis.org/events/opening-keynote-preserving-and-protecting-principled-humanitarian-access-sarah-charles-and Sarah Charles - Assistant to the Administrator of USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) "Humanitarian access constraints remain one of the largest hurdles to delivering this support to those most in need. Every day bureaucratic impediments, attacks on aid workers, outright blockades and the politicization of humanitarian aid make it harder for responders to both identify and reach people in need of life-saving assistance. There is almost always a direct correlation between access and need…. We need to leverage our voice - as the US government, we are all keenly aware that humanitarian space is shrinking."	USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance - Strategic Framework for Early Recovery, Risk Reduction, and Resilience (ER4) https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-01/ER4_Framework-10.13.2022.pdf "Important avenues to increasing adaptive capacity include the availability of economic opportunities, varied livelihood strategies, innovative and resilient construction practices and settlement planning, adequate nutrition and health services, access to education, and conservation of the environment." USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance - Factsheet https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-01/BHA_Fact_Sheet-FY2022.pdf "BHA works to alleviate hunger by providing in-kind food, food vouchers, and cash assistance that ensures households, including refugees, have adequate access to a sufficient quantity and quality of food without being forced to resort to negative coping strategies."
EU - European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO)	Priorities	Syria https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/syria_en "More generally, EU humanitarian aid in Syria focuses primarily on addressing critical needs. It also promotes sustainable life-saving assistance or early recovery by improving access to basic services for an increasingly deprived population." "The EU has repeatedly called for the respect of international humanitarian law. It continuously urges parties to the conflict to allow unimpeded and safe humanitarian access to people in need."	Strategic Plan 2020-2024. Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations – DG ECHO https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2020-10/echo_sp_2020_2024_en.pdf "Specific objective 4.2: Humanitarian space is preserved and respect for International Humanitarian Law is ensured. The ability of DG ECHO as a donor to monitor EU-funded humanitarian aid projects is a reflection, in part, of the state of the humanitarian space, and its commitment to work towards access of humanitarian aid to those most in need." Management plan 2023- Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-02/echo_mp_2023_en.pdf "DG ECHO will uphold its efforts also in 2023 to ensure delivery of humanitarian aid even in crises where access to the affected people is restricted or denied, or where assistance is often delivered under very difficult circumstances, characterised by unpredictability, volatility and insecurity."

Organisation	Global strategy prioritises or references access?	Public statements in 2023 referencing access	Notes
6 largest humanitarian donors			
Germany - Federal Foreign Office (FFO)	Prioritises	Statement by the Federal Foreign Office on the situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/ffo-israel-palestinian-territories/2605936 "Israel's military operation in the Jenin refugee camp, which has been under way for two days now, must respect the principle of proportionality under international law. The protection of civilians must always be the top priority, and adequate access for humanitarian aid workers must be ensured. All those who bear responsibility in this situation should now do everything in their power to calm the tense security situation and prevent further violence. Without a political solution to the conflict, it will not be possible to address the root causes of the violence."	Federal Foreign Office Strategy for Humanitarian Assistance Abroad 2019-2023 https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/282228/3cfd87de36f30bb61eed542249997631/strategie-huhi-englisch-data.pdf "Priorities of the Federal Foreign Office: The Federal Foreign Office has defined three concrete topics, which it will develop further and advocate for in the coming years. Improving humanitarian access for humanitarian workers and to those in need. First and foremost, humanitarian assistance and humanitarian organisations need access to the affected population in crises and conflicts. In practice however, this is often not guaranteed. As the need for humanitarian assistance is almost always greatest where people have no or insufficient access to humanitarian assistance, the Federal Foreign Office will focus in particular on improving humanitarian access."
Japan	References	Statement by Mr. Hamamoto Yukiya, Political Coordinator, Minister, Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations, at the United Nations Security Council Briefing On the Situation in Sudan (UNITAMS) https://www.un.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/hamamoto091323.html "First and foremost, Japan repeats its strong call on both parties to stop fighting; allow unhindered humanitarian access; return to a peaceful and inclusive political process; and uphold international humanitarian law and ensure the safety of civilians."	Humanitarian Aid Policy of Japan - 2011 https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/emergency/pdfs/aid_policy_japan.pdf "Inadequate safety of humanitarian aid workers or a shrinking "humanitarian space" has become a concern of the entire international community. Simply put, humanitarian space refers to an environment where humanitarian aid workers enjoy security and have access to the recipients. Ensuring humanitarian space is essential for delivering humanitarian assistance. For this reason, Japan will take every possible step to ensure the safety of humanitarian aid workers and calls on every party to comply with international humanitarian law."
Sweden - Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)	References	State Secretary for International Development Cooperation Diana Janse's speech at the European Humanitarian Forum 2023 https://www.government.se/speeches/2023/04/swedish-state-secretary-for-international-development-cooperation-diana-janses-closing-remarks-at-the-european-humanitarian-forum-2023/ "We will continue to work to ensure effective delivery of life-saving aid. We will continue to call for full, safe and unhindered humanitarian access – always and everywhere. And we will continue to encourage others to join us in these efforts."	Strategy for Sweden's humanitarian aid provided through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) 2021–2025 https://www.government.se/contentassets/97272c97602045dd84165b6074f5a92d/strategy-for-swedens-humanitarian-aid-provided-through-the-swedish-international-development-cooperation-agency-sida-20212025/ "Increased capacity, effectiveness and efficiency of the humanitarian system… • Humanitarian actors have safe, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access to reach crisis-affected people." "Sida will support humanitarian actors in securing access to crisis- and disaster-affected people. Activities will also contribute to strengthening the capacity of organisations working actively to ensure qualitative, continuous and secure access to difficult contexts. This also includes working in close dialogue with the Government (Ministry for Foreign Affairs) on measures to reduce adverse effects of counter-terrorism measures and of restrictive measures against principled humanitarian action."

	Organisation	Global strategy prioritises or references access?	Public statements in 2023 referencing access	Notes
6 largest humanitarian donors	United Kingdom - Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)	Prioritize	The conflict in Sudan is having a catastrophic impact on civilians: UK statement at the UN Security Council - Statement by Ambassador James Kariuki at the UN Security Council meeting on Sudan. https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-conflict-in-sudan-is-having-a-catastrophic-impact-on-civilians-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council President, this conflict requires urgent diplomatic action. We are encouraged by the resumption of Jeddah talks and the subsequent establishment of a Humanitarian Forum. We urge both warring parties to act on their commitment to improve humanitarian access through concrete actions.	UK humanitarian framework 2022 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-humanitarian-framework/uk-humanitarian-framework "We will work to improve humanitarian access and protection of civilians, including through our efforts at the UN Security Council (UNSC). We will also ensure broader security efforts do not hinder humanitarian action, as we did with other UNSC members in protecting humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan from sanctions." "We will use our diplomatic levers to give a voice to marginalised groups in crises and improve their protection, drive prioritisation and coordination of global assistance according to humanitarian principles, lead efforts on humanitarian access, and convene like-minded partners to shape more effective approaches to crises."
	Canada	References	Global Affairs Canada: 2023-24 Departmental Plan https://www.international.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/assets/pdfs/departmental-plan-plan-ministeriel/gac-2023-24-departmental-plan.pdf "In Myanmar, Global Affairs Canada will continue to focus on human rights concerns, full and unhindered humanitarian access, cessation of violence and release of detainees." "Global Affairs Canada will continue to advance key humanitarian policy priorities including advancing gender-responsive humanitarian action; promoting global humanitarian commitments such as the Good Humanitarian Donorship and Grand Bargain; protecting the humanitarian space of impartial humanitarian organizations; assuring safe access and security of humanitarian personnel; advocating for and promoting the protection of civilians and respect of international humanitarian laws by parties to armed conflict; and defending the rights of vulnerable and marginalized populations affected by crises."	Statistical Report - Fiscal Year 2021-2022 on International Assistance https://www.international.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/assets/pdfs/international-assistance-report-stat-rapport-aide-internationale/2021-2022-en.pdf "Today, hundreds of millions of people, especially women and girls, still live in poverty, have unequal access to resources and opportunities, and are disproportionately impacted by these crises." Report To Parliament on the Government of Canada's International Assistance 2021-2022 https://www.international.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/assets/pdfs/international-assistance-report-rapport-aide-internationale/2021-2022/2021-2022-vol1-en.pdf "Providing equal access to education and health care: In 2021-2022, Canada continued to focus on supporting children and youth experiencing forced displacement to access the education they deserve."

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