

Introduction to OCHA and Humanitarian Access

Access is a fundamental precondition to effective humanitarian action and it is central to the Emergency Relief Coordinator's mandate.¹

It is important to remember, however, that in situations of armed conflict, primary responsibility for the well-being of the civilian population lies with the parties to conflict. If they are unable or unwilling to meet the basic needs of the affected population within their control, international humanitarian law requires them allow and facilitate relief actions.

Whose access?

When we speak of humanitarian access, we are referring to humanitarian actor's access to affected populations as well as affected population's access to humanitarian aid.

Constraints on Access

Multiple types of constraints affect people's ability to have full access to humanitarian aid as well as our ability to reach people to provide aid in situations of armed conflict.²

These include, for example:

- Bureaucratic restrictions on personnel and humanitarian supplies
- Impediments related to climate, terrain or lack of infrastructure
- The diversion of aid and interference in the delivery of relief and implementation of activities
- Ongoing hostilities and military operations
- Attacks on humanitarian personnel, goods and facilities.

It is important to note that not all constraints on access are deliberately obstructive and not all constraints constitute violations of international humanitarian law. In addition, access constraints tend to fluctuate over time. In many instances, it is a combination of constraints on access (rather than a single kind of constraint) which, together, combine to create a limited access situation.

Addressing constraints on access

There is no single remedy to increase humanitarian access and no blanket solutions to resolve access constraints. The diverse nature of various constraints on access means that context-specific strategies to address particular types of constraints are needed.

Access commonly requires concerted efforts to achieve and sustain, including through liaison and negotiation with the relevant parties. Given that crises evolve over time, such efforts need to be ongoing. Maintaining compliance with humanitarian principles, as well as promoting understanding and respect for them by others, is essential to achieving and sustaining access.

¹ **Mandate of Emergency Relief Coordinator on Access.** [A/RES/46/182]

“Actively facilitating, including through negotiation if needed, the access by the operational organizations to emergency areas for the rapid provision of emergency assistance by obtaining the consent of all parties concerned, through modalities such as the establishment of temporary relief corridors where needed, days and zones of tranquility and other forms;”

² See **Types of Constraints on Access**

Access monitoring and reporting

Given the significant constraints we face in several situations of ongoing armed conflict, OCHA seeks to establish systematic monitoring and reporting on access in order to better inform policy concerning access as well as operational solutions on the ground, including negotiations.

OCHA's Access Monitoring and Reporting Framework³ was developed out of an inventory, involving consultation with several OCHA Field Offices and other humanitarian actors, to identify constraints on access as experienced by humanitarian actors on the ground as well as to map existing monitoring and reporting practices.

This framework is also the basis for the development of a database to support systematic and consistent collection of relevant information to understand access trends.

Effective access monitoring involves:

- The identification of specific access constraints and relevant indicators
- Consistent collection of such information to establish patterns and understand trends over time
- Establishing the relationship between the prevalence of constraints and their implications for humanitarian operations as well as the humanitarian consequences of limited access

Specific commitments of the ERC concerning humanitarian access:

"...to follow and assess more systematically the reasons for and consequences of such denials or restrictions and report instance of grave concern back to this Council..."

[ERC's briefing on the protection of civilians to the Security Council, June 2007]

"Improving access in concrete and practical terms will be a key priority of my tenure." [ERC's closing remarks to ECOSOC, July 2007]

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³ See OCHA's Access Monitoring & Reporting Framework