Humanitarian Access

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World Vision Australia’s
Public Policy Position
World Vision Australia’s position on humanitarian access

World Vision Australia’s ability to provide life-saving assistance to people in need in conflict and disaster contexts is affected by obstacles to humanitarian access, such as bureaucratic restrictions, inadequate infrastructure, violent hostilities in civilian areas, absence of ceasefires and safe passage routes, and attacks on humanitarian personnel and facilities.

World Vision Australia condemns all deliberate obstacles to populations in need, particularly attacks on humanitarian workers, goods and facilities. World Vision Australia advocates for accountability for violations under international law as an essential aspect of protecting civilians during times of conflict or natural disaster.

Full, unimpeded and sustained access is essential for World Vision to fulfil its humanitarian mandate to provide impartial assistance and protection to children and families affected by natural disasters and armed conflicts. As many of the obstacles to humanitarian assistance cannot be overcome through programming alone, World Vision develops policy solutions and advocates for the removal of barriers to access.

World Vision has developed innovative programming solutions to reach people in places where access is difficult, such as mobile health and nutrition clinics, mobile child protection teams, multi-sectoral rapid response teams, cash-based programming and remote program management. Working through an extensive, vetted and trusted network of local partners gives World Vision access to areas that are off limits to other actors. World Vision’s Fragile Contexts Expansion Strategy seeks to increase our operational ability to reach the most vulnerable children and their families in fragile contexts which typically involve a range of access challenges.
World Vision Australia’s policy recommendations for change

World Vision Australia calls on the United Nations Security Council to:

1. Systematically remind parties to conflict of their obligations to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded humanitarian assistance and to respect and protect humanitarian personnel and installations, and encourage states to promote respect for humanitarian principles.

2. Systematically condemn any deliberate obstacles to the provision of humanitarian assistance, especially attacks on humanitarian workers and facilities, and emphasise that such acts constitute violations of international humanitarian law.

3. Apply targeted measures against individuals obstructing access to humanitarian assistance, including attacks against humanitarian workers and facilities.

4. Refer grave and prolonged instances of the deliberate impediment of humanitarian assistance, especially attacks against humanitarian workers and facilities, to the International Criminal Court.

5. Call upon member states that have not done so to ratify and implement the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel and its Optional Protocol.

World Vision Australia calls on the Australian government to:

1. Consistently urge states and non-state actors in control of territory to allow full and sustained humanitarian access by humanitarian actors in order to assess needs and deliver services.

2. Exert diplomatic influence in conflict situations to achieve temporary suspension of hostilities, safe humanitarian corridors, ceasefire, and peace agreements.

3. Encourage a spirit of reflection and innovation within the United Nations and amongst donor governments concerning access challenges, especially in complex security environments.

4. Ensure its donor policies, especially in relation to anti-terror provisions, do not create unnecessary restrictions on humanitarian access.

World Vision Australia calls on parties to conflict and states experiencing natural disasters to:

1. Meet the essential needs of the civilian population under their control.
2. Fulfil their obligation to allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access, and remove all bureaucratic impediments to access.

**World Vision Australia calls on humanitarian organisations to:**

1. Work collaboratively and inclusively with local partners and beneficiaries to identify obstacles to humanitarian access and develop programmatic and policy solutions to overcome them.

2. Document and condemn the deliberate impediment of humanitarian assistance, especially attacks against humanitarian workers and facilities.
Background

States have the primary responsibility to ensure the basic needs of their citizens are met, including in times of conflict or disaster. When states are unwilling or unable to fully meet this responsibility, humanitarian actors may offer assistance. States (or non-state actors in control of territory) cannot arbitrarily refuse such offers and are obliged to allow and facilitate impartial humanitarian assistance without delay. Humanitarian workers must be respected, protected and assisted to the fullest extent practicable.

‘Humanitarian access’ refers to two inter-related concepts:

1. Humanitarian actors’ ability to reach people affected by conflict or natural disaster and provide humanitarian assistance; and
2. Affected peoples’ right to access humanitarian assistance.

Access to populations in need is essential for effective humanitarian assistance and protection of civilians. Adherence to the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence is crucial in gaining and maintaining humanitarian access.

The major obstacles to humanitarian access in conflicts are bureaucratic restrictions on personnel and humanitarian supplies, including donor government anti-terrorism regulations, active fighting in civilian areas, and increasing attacks on humanitarian personnel and facilities.

The United Nations Security Council frequently calls upon states and non-state parties to conflict to ensure immediate, full, and unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance. Nonetheless, obtaining sustained humanitarian access, especially in conflict situations, is increasingly difficult. In some conflicts, actors responsible for meeting the basic needs of civilians (states or non-state parties in control of territory) deliberately obstruct humanitarian access.

In disaster contexts, the most common barriers to humanitarian access are caused by bureaucratic obstacles, such as delays in processing visas, clearing relief items through customs systems and taxing humanitarian relief.

Poor road access, and physical inability to reach areas due to terrain or weather conditions can be further obstacles to humanitarian access in both conflict and natural disaster contexts.
Key resources & references

Key resources


References


4 Such as international and domestic non-governmental organisations and inter-governmental agencies.


8 Such as United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, and humanitarian non-government organisations (NGOs). Humanitarian actors must comply with the humanitarian principles.


In the case of natural disaster, international human rights law (such as the right to life, food, water, and health) establish the case for humanitarian access where the state is unable to fulfill these basic needs.

