



Towards the implementation of the Political Declaration

REPORT – Online Workshop – 30th May 2024

How Can the Political Declaration on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas Promote Safe and Principled Humanitarian Access?



Acknowledgement

This advocacy report is published by Handicap International - Humanity & Inclusion (HI), with financial support from the European Union and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The report is the result of a multi-stakeholder consultative process led by two consultants, Delphine Valette and Anna de Courcy Wheeler. They conducted a desk review and key informant interviews, contributed to the preparation of the workshop, and drafted the report.

A group of diverse experts with backgrounds in the humanitarian, disarmament and security and access management sectors participated in the workshop's preparation and provided valuable feedback for the report. Additionally, a wider group of participants was involved in the online workshop, sharing their knowledge and expertise, which directly influenced the recommendations presented in this report. Several HI staff also contributed to both the drafting of this report and to the workshop.

HI would like to express its deepest gratitude to all those contributors, acknowledging not only the quality of their input, but also their constructive team spirit and their commitment to promoting the protection of civilians in contexts where explosive weapons are widely used.



**Funded by
the European Union**



Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs

List of acronyms

CPP	Conflict Preparedness and Protection
HI	Handicap International – Humanity & Inclusion
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
INEW	International Network on Explosive Weapons
EORE	Explosive Ordnance Risk Education
EU	European Union
EWIPA	Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas
HCT	Humanitarian Coordination Team
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organisation
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UN	United Nations
UN-CMCoord	United Nations Civil-Military Coordination
WG	Working Group

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Executive Summary

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) has reached alarming levels, with staggering short and long-term consequences for civilians and humanitarian actors. In 2023, 47,476 deaths and injuries were reported¹ from explosive weapons globally, representing the highest number since records began in 2010. When explosive weapons are used in populated areas, some 90 per cent of the casualties are reported as civilians. Victims and survivors face long-term challenges, including disabilities and psychological harm. The use of EWIPA also results in extensive destruction of and damage to essential civilian infrastructure including hospitals, schools, and water and sanitation facilities. Women, children, persons with disabilities, older people, and other groups face specific risks, as well as those relentlessly trying to assist them.

The adoption and endorsement of the Political Declaration on the protection of civilians from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas in November 2022 raised hopes that the use and effects of such violence would be curbed in the years to come. Current trends, however, instead indicate an increased use of EWIPA more globally, leading to an unprecedented number of deaths of civilians and humanitarian actors, with local and national staff and volunteers particularly affected: in 2023 there were at least 470 attacks that affected humanitarian aid efforts across 11 countries and territories.

The Declaration has to-date been endorsed by 87 states. It is the first formal international recognition that the use of EWIPA has severe immediate and longer-term consequences for affected individuals and communities – effects which must be urgently addressed. Notably, and in recognition of the vital role played by aid workers in assisting civilian populations in contexts where explosive weapons are or have been used, the Declaration includes commitments (paragraphs 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6) to facilitate rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access and assistance as well as to facilitate the work of humanitarian actors.

It is against this background that, at the beginning of 2024, Humanity & Inclusion - Handicap International (HI), Article 36 and Insecurity Insights, members of the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW), initiated a multi-stakeholder process that aims to support the effective implementation of the Declaration's commitments². The [Explosive Weapons Monitor](#), an innovative project to collect, analyze, and share data and analysis on the direct and indirect impacts of explosive weapon use on civilians and civilian infrastructures has also been launched.

Driven by the need for collective, coherent, strategic, and sustained action, this initiative brings together a wide range of actors across relevant sectors, who are critical to supporting the implementation of the Declaration's commitments. The process is structured around four key humanitarian issues³ chosen to reflect areas where there are particularly acute challenges in EWIPA contexts and where there are notable gaps in awareness, understanding and decisive action.

¹ [Action on Armed Violence \(AOAV\) – Explosive Violence Monitor 2023](#)

² [Presentation of the project](#)

³ The four key humanitarian issues are detailed p.4

The first event took place online on the 30th of May 2024. It focused on the key and overlapping challenges related to safe humanitarian access by local and international humanitarian actors including health workers, in EWIPA contexts, both during and after conflict. It also considered examples of best practice and explored opportunities for practical measures to enhance the safety of humanitarian actors, and by doing so, ensuring access to affected communities. Participants across sectors, and representing various constituencies, including donors, UN, INGOs and LNGOs, and survivors, recognised the fundamental limits of risk mitigation strategies for humanitarian workers in conflict-settings where explosive weapons are being or have been used. They nevertheless identified specific areas for improvement and provided some initial recommendations. There was also a general agreement that humanitarian safety and access in EWIPA contexts is complex and requires greater engagement and deliberate efforts across constituencies and sectors to address the current siloed response and action. Based on the discussions, the workshop resulted in the following core recommendations:

- Humanitarian actors engaged in delivering lifesaving assistance to conflict affected communities should increase signatory and non-signatory states and non-state armed actors and donors' understanding and knowledge of the specific risks and impacts of EWIPA on principled and safe humanitarian access. Greater collective advocacy is also needed for a safer environment for health and humanitarian workers in EWIPA contexts to deliver aid, both as part of the Political Declaration implementation and universalisation, and in relevant national, regional and global policy processes.
- Humanitarian organisations, donors and other concerned actors should prioritise the safety and protection of local humanitarian and health workers in EWIPA contexts, including by adequately resourcing and adapting and improving existing safety and security management processes and policies. This includes funding support for robust security risk management as well as EWIPA tailored training and appropriate duty of care policies for INGOs' local staff and partners.
- National authorities, armed actors and security forces, humanitarian and mine action sectors, and civil society actors operating in EWIPA contexts must strive to increase information-sharing, foster greater and more efficient coordination and increase joint risk management efforts. A consistent, adapted and 'do no harm' harm approach and implementation of humanitarian arrangements in EWIPA settings should be further developed. Humanitarian organizations and military actors should engage in continuous dialogue to build mutual understanding and acceptance, ensuring that humanitarian principles and compliance with IHL are upheld in all interactions, with a strengthened role of trusted intermediary actors.

This document provides an overview of HI's project on advancing the implementation of the Political Declaration's commitments related to humanitarian access, assistance and cooperation, and in particular the four main issues that it will focus on. It then summarises and reflects on the proceedings of the first project event, and concludes with a set of recommendations for consideration and action by all relevant actors for collective action towards the effective implementation of the Political Declaration and protection of civilians in EWIPA settings.

Fostering the implementation of the commitments of the Political Declaration

While the adoption and endorsement by 87⁴ states of the Political Declaration to date is a significant milestone towards reducing human suffering caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, it also marked the beginning of a long and complex journey that, it is hoped, will lead to tangible actions and a positive impact on the protection of civilians and those who assist them.

Working alongside committed actors, HI is leading the development and delivery of a multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral process that aims to collectively provide guidance and best practices to help implement the commitments of the EWIPA Political Declaration related to humanitarian access, assistance and cooperation. This process is articulated around four identified specific humanitarian topics that specifically pertain to the humanitarian consequences of explosive weapons on humanitarian access, victim assistance and explosive ordnance risk education as set out in the Declaration.

The process is driven by a combination of research analysis, stakeholder consultations, and the organisation of in-person and online workshops resulting in the development and dissemination of advocacy reports setting out key recommendations aimed at all concerned and engaged actors. As a precursor to in-depth evidence-reviews and analysis, a scoping exercise was carried out to inform the identification of four priority issues. The scoping research considered three main criteria for the topic selection: (1) The topics must address current or emerging trends of particular humanitarian concern in active conflict contexts where EWIPA is used; (2) they must be directly related to one or several commitments on mine clearance, humanitarian access, assistance and cooperation as set out in the Declaration and; (3) they should provide strategic opportunities for all actors across relevant sectors to collaborate, coordinate and act collectively. The four selected topics are:

1. **Principled and safe humanitarian access in the context of the widespread use of EWIPA:** how can the Political Declaration on Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas promote safe and principled humanitarian access?
2. **Healthcare access for EWIPA-affected populations:** how to foster a resilient healthcare in EWIPA settings?
3. **Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) and conflict preparedness and protection (CPP):** how to strengthen synergies between sectors and actors to prevent harm before, during, and after hostilities?
4. **Vulnerable groups and specific needs of EWIPA-affected populations:** who are the most exposed and impacted by the use of EWIPA?

The process relies on extensive engagement and consultations with all relevant sectors and actors, favouring diversity of thought, expertise, skills and experience to generate the guidance, primarily through the organisation of four workshops that aim to strengthen existing analysis and

⁴ <https://ewipa.org/endorsement>

evidence and foster much needed cross-sectoral and multi-constituency engagement. This is done through the active engagement of experts in the planning and delivery of workshops, and the participation of a wide range of actors in those.

Topic 1: Principled and safe humanitarian access in EWIPA contexts

The project's first priority issue focused on safe and principled humanitarian access in EWIPA contexts, which was explored in an online workshop held on 30 May 2024, gathering a diverse audience of 45 participants. The workshop's main objectives were to:

- **Strengthen a collective and common understanding** of the main and overlapping challenges related to safe humanitarian access in EWIPA contexts by local and international humanitarian actors during and after conflict.
- **Share best practices and opportunities** with regards to practical measures to enhance safe humanitarian access in EWIPA contexts.
- **Identify initial recommendations and steps** that should be taken by States and other concerned and relevant actors (INGOs, donors, etc.) to advance safe humanitarian access for international, national and local humanitarian and health workers.

Guiding questions were considered in a background note document reviewed by a group of experts and explored during the workshop through "interviews with experts" and three working groups, under the Chatham House rule. The three main topics examined during the workshop included data and cross-sectoral multi-stakeholder coordination considerations throughout the discussions as cross-cutting issues.

How are EWIPA specific safety risks for humanitarian and health workers impacting humanitarian access?

The security threats to humanitarian operations and harm to humanitarian and health workers and their consequent inability to deliver lifesaving assistance to populations has immediate and longer-term implications for civilians' lives, not least because it affects people's ability to access essential aid and critical services, including healthcare and protection.⁵ Humanitarian relief personnel and objects used for humanitarian relief operations must be respected and protected under International Humanitarian Law (IHL). In particular, the obligation to "protect" implies a positive obligation to take steps to ensure that humanitarian personnel can carry out their activities. Despite this, humanitarian actors - especially local humanitarian and health workers⁶ - and systems face severely heightened security risks in EWIPA contexts. Explosive weapons have wide area and indiscriminate effects due to their large blast and fragmentation radius, inaccuracy, or delivery of multiple munitions at the same time. This causes a clear pattern of harm to civilians and civilian infrastructure, even in contexts where cutting-edge technologies such as 'precision'

⁵ Humanity & Inclusion, Action Against Hunger and Médecins du Monde (2023). ['The risks we face are beyond human comprehension': Advancing the protection of humanitarian and health workers.](#)

⁶ Insecurity Insight (July 2024). ['The Effects on Health Care of the Use of Explosive Weapons in 2023'](#).

weapons are reportedly being used.⁷ It also poses a specific challenge to humanitarian workers or populations in need of services as access is often severely hindered by, for example due to the resulting rubble, destroyed or damaged roads and other infrastructure, and unexploded ordnance. Safety concerns and damaged infrastructure can severely limit the movement of humanitarian workers and their ability to reach affected populations.

These impacts not only significantly delay and hinder safe humanitarian access but they also increase the likelihood of harm to humanitarian and health workers, the destruction of critical infrastructure and the disruption of essential services. This is especially the case for [health facilities](#) (including their medicines supply chains or their electricity or water provision for a functioning system), as well as aid convoys, distribution points and ambulances, which are often and increasingly being deliberately targeted, damaged or destroyed by the wide area effect of explosive weapons used in populated areas. When [humanitarian workers and affected populations are at risk of harm, \(international\) humanitarian organisations may cease or pause operations](#), and relocate/evacuate their international staff, leaving civilians with the most acute needs without vital access to aid and medical care, including vital specialised healthcare in the context of EWIPA injuries. When aid is delivered, [it is most often by local and national humanitarian and health workers, making them especially vulnerable and at risk](#), in addition to them being at risk when “off-duty” and trying to keep safe. Also, the chaotic and hazardous nature of EWIPA contexts complicates coordination among different humanitarian actors and organisations. In addition, institutional donors may sometimes halt funding for humanitarian programmes and actors in the field pause activities in areas under bombardment or recently targeted.⁸ As a consequence, local humanitarian and health workers lose their [income](#) and affiliation with international aid agencies when they and their families are facing heightened [personal risks](#), while [volunteers](#), who usually do not benefit from any protective or safety measures, are left to deliver assistance to conflict affected communities.

The continued presence of [unexploded ordnance](#) during or after conflict may also increase the risk of injury and death of humanitarian and health workers while accessing affected populations. The use of EWIPA also has profound longer-term impacts on humanitarian assistance due to additional pressure (shortage or loss of workers and infrastructure) on already [impacted essential services systems](#), while EWIPA victims and survivors require specialists, with lack of or poor quality medical treatment and other types of aid, including for instance, food, shelter, protection, water, hygiene and sanitation and education.

Some **challenges** increasing the disproportionate safety risks and vulnerability faced by humanitarian workers in EWIPA contexts were discussed during the workshop. They include:

- *A lack of knowledge, understanding and enforcement of IHL putting healthcare and humanitarian and health workers in danger:*

⁷ Article 36, PAX (2016) '[Areas of Harm: Understanding explosive weapons with wide area effects](#)'.

⁸ See for example: <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/aid-workers-killed-gaza-ukraine-1234999894/>; <https://apnews.com/article/world-central-kitchen-gaza-humanitarian-aid-suspension-4a2d5bfa131ccd9984fe47076880b6b9>; <https://www.hi.org/en/news/escalating-conflict-in-eastern-drc-raises-concerns-for-civilian-safety-and-humanitarian-access>

- The increasing use of EWIPA in recent conflicts raises serious concerns over how armed actors are interpreting and applying the rules of IHL, in particular the prohibition on indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks. The [ICRC noted](#) it is “very difficult” to use EWIPA whilst also abiding by these rules. Deliberate attacks (often using explosive weapons) on humanitarian and health workers have also been a notable feature of recent conflicts. Exacerbating this is the fact that in the current geopolitical landscape, there are few vocal champion states of IHL. Participants believed that as long as this state of affairs continues, efforts and good practice towards better protection of health and humanitarian workers will be of limited impact.
- Gaps in how humanitarian workers are identified and labelled among the general public or belligerents are complicating efforts to better protect them. Whether characterised as ‘terrorists’ or ‘civilians participating in hostilities’, the lack of clarity around their status as health and humanitarian workers negatively affect their protection, distinction and acceptance by parties to the conflict.
- *Lack of understanding of coping strategies used by affected populations:*
 - Participants underlined the insufficient effort made by humanitarian actors to understand coping strategies used by affected populations in their access to health and humanitarian services in EWIPA settings, which could inform a better design, preparation and planning of humanitarian assistance.
- *Lack of mental health support for humanitarian and health workers and the difficulties in providing other kinds of support including when such workers – especially local workers – are directly affected by the conflict, for example by being displaced, separated or losing family members.*

During the workshop, and drawing on experiences ranging from Ethiopia, Iraq, Ukraine, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar, several examples of good practices relating to mitigation and adaptation measures were identified. Emphasis was, however, put on the need to consider and understand the local context and dynamics when seeking to increase the protection of humanitarian and health workers: what was viewed as ‘good practice’ in one country or health facility setting did not necessarily translate directly to other country situations. Some examples of **good practices** include:

- *Decentralising services and the use of mobile teams:*
 - By conducting activities in smaller numbers and units, humanitarian and health workers hoped to be less exposed or less targeted by reducing any appearance of being a military gathering or other potential targets.
 - In other contexts, moving essential services underground or separating and decentralising them – by, for example, having separate hospital functions in different locations rather than centralised in one building – was believed to help in reducing deliberate targeting of such services. Participants in the workshop also referred to steps being taken to ensure that some healthcare or humanitarian aid facilities and services are not identifiable or given too much visibility to minimise or reduce exposure.

- *Better coordination and sharing of data:*
 - There are various data collection⁹ systems on the harm caused by EWIPA on humanitarian workers and the direct and indirect effects of explosive weapons on humanitarian infrastructure and facilities. However, there is an unequal understanding and knowledge of existing EWIPA data collection mechanisms. Current systems also tend not to collect disaggregated data including on the gendered dimension of safety and security challenges, and local actors often do not have timely access to available information and resources to enable accurate risk-assessment and decision-making. In addition, while sharing data can make a significant difference, including in anticipating certain challenges or attacks, a key constraint in data sharing of security incidents is the sensitive nature of this type of information and the challenge of balancing confidentiality with coordination imperatives.
- *Effective storytelling and communication on the impact of EWIPA on humanitarian workers' protection and access:*
 - A recent example of an international medical NGO sharing (via social media) the challenges that its local staff were facing through short videos and WhatsApp messages was praised as an innovative way to draw attention to attacks on local humanitarian workers and the difficulties they face when operating in contexts where explosive weapons have been or are currently being used. Overall, the voices and experiences of those facing daily death threats when operating in EWIPA contexts remain unheard and untold. More needs to be done to provide local and national humanitarian and health workers access to influencing platforms and for international actors to do more to amplify their stories and their realities, especially, as very often, the toll of the use of EWIPA on [local aid workers](#) does not get the same level of attention from world leaders and the media as it does when international workers are the victims.

Many of these examples of 'good practices' were borne out of necessity due to attacks on healthcare and humanitarian facilities and a perceived lack of respect for IHL by belligerents. The need to promote and maintain neutrality of civilian infrastructure remains vital in order to minimise their risk of being targeted. Ensuring that these facilities are recognised and respected as neutral zones is essential for the access and safety of patients, healthcare providers, populations in need and humanitarian workers. Greater advocacy on enhancing accountability for attacks on civilian infrastructure, including medical facilities, is critical at a time where deliberate attacks on vital services have become a tactic of war. This was recently echoed in a [UN Security Council's press statement](#) following the killing of seven international aid workers in Gaza by Israeli Defence Forces airstrikes, with members noting the need for accountability for all the deaths and underscoring the need for investigation into the attacks. Yet, outrage and calls for greater accountability must reflect the disproportionate toll of explosive weapon attacks on local humanitarian workers in their diversity - volunteers, INGO local staff, partners' staff, unaffiliated health workers. The emergence of campaigns and advocacy initiatives provides an opportunity to push for an inclusive narrative

⁹ Including the [Conflict & Humanitarian Data Centre](#)

that can support accountability for aid workers' casualties and attacks on civilian critical infrastructure and essential services in EWIPA contexts.

How is the use of EWIPA challenging the humanitarian system, operations and security mechanisms?

Humanitarian safety is a prerequisite for access and delivering life-saving aid and healthcare and had, until recently, been gradually improving in many conflict contexts. However, the increasing urbanisation of war, the widespread use of EWIPA and recent increase in rapid onset conflicts (such as Sudan and the Occupied Palestinian Territories) present increasing security risks for humanitarians. The use of EWIPA has challenged the international community's existing ways of working to humanitarian delivery, including INGOs' duty of care policies for their local staff and partners, and security risk management policies and practice, as well as donors' approach to operational security and project funding.

The increasing use and specific impacts of EWIPA in and after conflict have also led an international agenda to increase the use of local partners as a "an adaptation approach", with this shift arguably encouraged by international agencies' commitments to supporting and implementing locally-led humanitarian aid - as set out in various policy instruments, including the [Grand Bargain](#) and [Charter for Change](#). Yet, this change in ways of working, often done under an "equitable partnership" heading, has, for the most part, not come with specific measures and policies that integrate the risks of their partner organisations. There are therefore significant gaps in international agencies' security risk management and duty of care's policies and practice, especially to better protect and support partners' staff. For example, a power imbalance and financial needs can induce partner organisations to accept to bear security risks that would be deemed unacceptable for international staff. This, despite not having adequate security risk management capacities and resources, and not being provided with protection and evacuation measures accessible to international aid workers.

Funding to support robust security risk management for national partners, staff, volunteers, and local organisations is also insufficient. The funding gap on aid workers' safety is compounded by donors' reluctance to fund security costs and staff for local actors. Duty of Care policies, as well as security management support (e.g. training), also remain largely reserved for international staff or not equally applicable to partners. While being an issue across all types of armed conflict, because of their specific and unique patterns of harm, the exposure of humanitarian and health workers and the security risks they face are severely magnified in EWIPA contexts, given their proximity to the most exposed areas. Yet, they often lack security risk management capabilities and resources and are not being provided with all of the protection and evacuation measures accessible to international humanitarian and health workers. Some of the unique characteristics of explosive weapons and how they are delivered are also forcing aid agencies to adapt security risk management strategies. The workshop provided an important forum for these **challenges** and other limitations to be discussed, including:

- *The fundamental limits of risk mitigation strategies in EWIPA contexts:*
 - Certain explosive weapons have a very large impact radius, and as such, affect large sections of an area in a single attack. Others are designed to affect a wide area by relying on multiple warheads or firings, or have a high degree of inaccuracy of delivery,

meaning they may land anywhere across a wide area. These characteristics - unique to explosive weapons used in populated areas - not only increase the likelihood of direct civilian casualties, but also limit the effectiveness of “traditional” risk mitigation strategies employed by organisations to try to increase the security of humanitarian workers and eventually their access.

- *Difficulties in assessing explosive ordnance contamination and conducting risk education during ongoing conflict, especially in front-line areas:*
 - Explosive weapons significantly damage or destroy buildings and other critical infrastructures, generating large amounts of rubble - a staggering [37 million tons](#) in Gaza, which could take more than a decade to remove. Rubble is often contaminated by explosive remnants of war, but due to security constraints and a lack of safe access for mine action expert staff, it is very difficult to assess levels of contamination where active hostilities are ongoing, which in turns, creates additional risks for humanitarian workers and the delivery of humanitarian assistance.
 - Specialised equipment is essential for clearance; yet it can be logistically (and bureaucratically) difficult to bring it into conflict or newly post-conflict areas. These difficulties are exacerbated by the fact that some of the technology can be considered dual-use, and so may fall under embargo.
 - Explosive ordnance risk education for those at the front-line and who are most affected by unexploded ordnance contamination – including civilians and humanitarian workers – is especially challenging. This means that the most at-risk populations lack access to EORE as they are also the most difficult to reach due to security constraints and a lack of safe access.
- *Challenges in adapting security management strategies to local partners:*
 - Local partners and organisations are often key actors in negotiating or securing access with armed groups, especially non-state armed groups and de facto authorities. This is because increasingly, and especially in EWIPA contexts, international staff cannot reach affected communities due to bureaucratic and administrative impediments, imposed restriction of movements, armed groups’ distrust towards aid organisations with foreign affiliation, or internal security policies. Due to their existing trust and relationship in the communities, local actors are often able to negotiate access. However, this also brings its own set of challenges, including ethical dilemmas, when local actors are being more exposed and at protection risks, especially due to the absence of capacity building and oversight that accompanies negotiation practices. In addition, local responders that operate independently, for example in Sudan, have also had to become more [adaptive and innovative](#) in bypassing barriers impeding effective aid delivery and effort coordination, and by doing so, exposing themselves to additional security risks.

There are examples of humanitarian agencies successfully adapting their ways of working, including in Afghanistan and Syria where EWIPA have been widely used and which were discussed during the workshop. Those **good practices** include:

- Innovative approaches to risk education to improve humanitarian access and better protect affected populations:
 - Using digital sessions, social media campaigns, SMS, and engaging with diaspora communities and community leaders in order to share messages on explosive ordnance contamination allowed humanitarian agencies to implement EORE in hard-to-reach environments and improve humanitarian access.

A renewed focus on EORE training for humanitarian workers and local EORE trainers (often as part of broader field security training for local and international staff) meant that risk education could reach those who had previously been overlooked.

How is the use of EWIPA challenging civil-military coordination systems for safer humanitarian access?

The increasing and widespread use of EWIPA severely amplifies security risks for humanitarians but also challenges the relevancy and effectiveness of existing humanitarian civil-military mechanisms and [arrangements](#), including notifications systems, humanitarian corridors, evacuations, humanitarian ceasefire, among others, especially when [IHL is being ignored by parties to the conflict, including by state and non-state actors](#). The use of mitigation tactics by humanitarians in EWIPA settings to deliver aid, including operating “under the radar” of armed actors, could also lead to riskier situations.

The distinct pattern of harm caused by EWIPA – both in terms of its significant direct and indirect effects during and after conflict - has also led actors engaged in the planning and delivery of humanitarian aid to reconsider and assess the way they work individually and collectively (e.g. inter-agency security coordination and cooperation) to address the specific safety and risk related challenges EWIPA contexts pose. This includes how they engage and negotiate with conflict parties while assessing how the type and level of engagement can affect or be perceived as jeopardising their neutrality, impartiality and independence.

What has however been less considered in the context of notification systems in particular, is the [experiences of the States that receive notifications](#), which limits humanitarians’ understanding of how conflict parties using EWIPA “use the information they receive, and their views of how existing arrangements could be improved, are key to making the systems as effective as possible,”¹⁰ including by improving how the information received is shared with relevant actors carrying out military operations.

“As the March 2024 strike by the Israel Defense Forces on the World Central Kitchen vehicles in Gaza demonstrated, flowing down the information received is particularly important when humanitarian movements have been notified and authorization for them to proceed has been

¹⁰ Chatham House. Gillard, E. (April 2024). [‘Enhancing the security of civilians in conflict: Notifications, evacuations, humanitarian corridors, suspensions of hostilities and other humanitarian arrangements’](#).

granted. If the information received is not passed to all the forces conducting operations, the consequences can be tragic, and trust in the system may be undermined.”¹¹

Participants in the workshop highlighted the importance of humanitarian and civil-military relations and coordination mechanisms, in particular the need for humanitarian notification systems to evolve and adapt to the new realities of urban warfare, going beyond merely notifying military units and, instead, encouraging open lines of two-way communication with the goal of actively focusing on the safety of humanitarian actors and operations. This shift, however, entails better military command and control systems and real-time communication channels between humanitarian actors and military forces. It also requires adaptive risk assessments and context-specific mitigation strategies on the part of armed actors to better safeguard humanitarian personnel, noting in particular the vulnerability of local humanitarian and health workers who more often than not, work as frontline first responders. The need for better accountability mechanisms for militaries that fail to protect humanitarian workers, such as internal and external independent investigations for alleged war crimes or the halting of arms sales by partner States was also repeated. Several ongoing **challenges** were identified during the discussions:

- *Delegation of decision-making powers and differing procedures by militaries and other armed actors:*
 - Military commanders in states experiencing active conflict often delegate decision-making authority to subordinates, especially in contexts where continual communication is difficult. As a result, central military authorities may, for example, conduct military operations or make decisions along very different lines to frontline commanders. This in turn can create a large degree of uncertainty and difficulties in effective communication between armed actors and humanitarian actors.
 - Similarly, non-state armed groups often operate in a very decentralized or deconcentrated way, leading to unreliable or unstable lines of communications.
- *The impact of sanctions and counter-terrorism measures on the delivery of principled humanitarian action:*
 - Sanctions and counter terrorism measures were repeatedly identified as a challenge to safe humanitarian access and effective humanitarian/civil-military coordination. The impartiality of humanitarian actors can often be poor or misunderstood, with humanitarian and health workers seen as supporting or collaborating with designated terrorist entities or individuals. This can result in the shutting down of lines of communication with state militaries and, at worst, those humanitarians being viewed as legitimate targets.
- *Limits of existing humanitarian-military coordination/notification mechanisms:*
 - Current conflicts are characterised not only by the use of EWIPA but also, due often to a lack of communication and information-sharing between military and humanitarian

¹¹ Chatham House. Gillard, E. (April 2024). [‘Enhancing the security of civilians in conflict: Notifications, evacuations, humanitarian corridors, suspensions of hostilities and other humanitarian arrangements’](#).

actors, by a lack of certainty in terms of level and nature of hostilities in specific locations, of munitions being used and of the dynamics of moving frontlines. This situation could lead to blurry security assessment and planning of operations putting humanitarian actors at risk and access on hold.

- Humanitarian arrangements or systems aimed at better protecting civilians may, in fact, unintentionally do more harm in EWIPA settings. For example, Arrangements, such as “safe zones”, may result in belligerents believing that any civilian or humanitarian actors outside of those areas can no longer legitimately claim protection and safety. This can, in turn, effectively constrict humanitarian access in places outside of designated “safe zones”.

In response to these challenges, participants referenced several examples of what could be considered **good practices**:

- *Localisation approach*:
 - Negotiating access with armed groups varies a lot between different contexts and requires time to research and analyse to inform how to choose and adapt humanitarian modalities. Local partners can be vital in understanding of specific contexts. Increased delegation to local partners may also allow access to areas that international staff cannot reach due to various limitations, including internal security policies. This was noted as vitally useful in some cases, although its limitations were also highlighted, in particular the potential transfer of risk from international staff to local staff rather than genuine risk mitigation.
- *Increased channels of communication and coordination with armed actors and parties to the conflict*:
 - Coordinated interaction between armed actors and humanitarians in EWIPA contexts is vital – talking to all sides of a conflict can open doors, build trust and acceptance, and foster meaningful access. The success of humanitarian–conflict parties communication often hinges on finding the right entry point or people to talk to, and ensuring humanitarians and military actors are ‘speaking the same language’. Yet, one important point highlighted during the workshop was the need to ensure a robust coordination mechanism among humanitarians themselves to ensure this common language and positions, prior to engagement with militaries. How engagement with military actors is organised then needs to be coordinated, in some contexts, with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) being the main interlocutor. However, what is key in all circumstances is that engagement strategies are agreed on across humanitarian actors, notably via Access Working Group (WG) and the Humanitarian Coordination Team (HCT).
 - There is a need to foster open dialogue between militaries, humanitarians, and civilian authorities including diplomats, religious and community leaders, or other relevant intermediaries. Such dialogue and engagement are essential to building trust, encouraging a clear understanding of roles and fostering acceptance of humanitarian activities by parties to the conflict in EWIPA contexts.

Recommendations

Several initiatives led by the European Union (EU) and the UN have explored how to better protect humanitarian and health workers and reinforce the application of international humanitarian law. Crucially, as the UN Security Council already condemned attacks against medical facilities and personnel in 2016 with Resolution 2286, it adopted Resolution 2730 on 24th May 2024 (14 votes in favour; Russia abstaining; 98 co-sponsors). The resolution calls for independent investigations into violations of IHL against humanitarian and UN personnel. It requests the Secretary-General to provide recommendations within six months and to brief the council annually. For example, in 2021, the EU Delegation to the UN in New York convened a [Discussion Series](#) on “Ensuring the protection, safety and security of humanitarian workers and medical personnel in armed conflicts”, while a joint-NGOs [report](#) published in April 2023 provided the first in-depth and critical analysis of the challenges faced by humanitarian and health actors. During the 2024 Protection of Civilians Week, OCHA also convened a special event focused on [advancing the protection of humanitarian and health workers](#), as well as a panel on addressing the [special challenges to humanitarian access in the context of EWIPA](#) during the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Weeks. The “[Protect Humanitarians](#)” campaign founded by Olivier van de Castele is also contributing to amplifying the visibility of the issue. One notable result of discussions and growing concern around the safety of humanitarian workers has been the establishment of the EU’s ‘Protect Aid Workers’ rapid response mechanism – an initiative that supports ECHO certified NGOs’ humanitarian workers that have experienced a critical incident or are under threat due to their duty. The [Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition](#) or the [Researching the Impact of Attacks on Healthcare \(RIAH\)](#) project are also contributing to the work on the specific protection of health workers, services, and infrastructure in armed conflict settings.

However, the specific impacts of the use of EWIPA on humanitarian access and safety remain largely unaddressed and inadequately acknowledged in EWIPA related advocacy and policy, including in relation to the implementation of the Political Declaration.

At a time when the use of EWIPA and the toll of explosive weapons on humanitarian workers is visibly high, critical actions need to be taken by all relevant actors across sectors and functions to ensure that humanitarian actors are protected from EWIPA related harm, and able to deliver lifesaving and longer-term assistance and support to conflict-affected communities.

The growing collective effort and the increased recognition of the need for multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral action to deliver on the commitments related to humanitarian access, assistance and cooperation of the Political Declaration must be a catalyst for addressing three key priority action areas.¹²

¹² The recommendations set out in this report are primarily informed by the workshop’s discussions, and existing and relevant recommendations, in particular Humanity & Inclusion, Action Against Hunger and Médecins du Monde (2023) ‘[The risks we face are beyond human comprehension: Advancing the protection of humanitarian and health workers](#)’, and Chatham House (April 2024) ‘[Enhancing the security of civilians in conflict: Notifications, evacuations, humanitarian corridors, suspensions of hostilities and other humanitarian arrangements](#)’.

Visibility, understanding and advocacy on the specific risks and impact of EWIPA on principled and safe humanitarian access

Increase and improve awareness, understanding and collective advocacy for a safer environment for health and humanitarian workers in EWIPA contexts, as part of the Political Declaration and in relevant national, regional and global policy processes.

- Invest in funding and resources to support security risk management measures and personnel safety initiatives (including back-up communication systems and robust evacuation plans) geared towards allowing humanitarian organisations, including local ones, to operate as safely and effectively as possible in conflict-affected settings where explosive weapons have been widely used.
- Convene international and national dialogue platforms to support coordinated approaches and common guidelines among donors to ensure systematic funding of adapted security risk management costs for all actors operating in EWIPA settings, including common understanding of terms associated with security costs, training and capacity strengthening, including for local operators.
- Create awareness of existing data collection mechanisms on EWIPA impact and risks and advocate for enhanced data sharing between operational NGOs, other NGOs or platforms and UN-led working groups or initiatives as well as the inclusion of LNGOs in data collection.
- Explicitly include EWIPA in emerging advocacy and policy efforts on the protection of humanitarian workers, including as part of the promotion of the 2024 United Nations Security Council's Resolution 2730 calling on States to uphold their obligations under international law to respect and protect humanitarian personnel. Available data should be used to highlight and call for the prioritisation of humanitarian and health workers' protection in EWIPA contexts, as part of ongoing advocacy efforts on active conflicts.
- Ensure that the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)'s forthcoming paper on the protection of aid workers includes a focus on EWIPA and that the specific impacts of EWIPA on aid workers' protection and delivery of humanitarian assistance are adequately addressed in the IASC's communications on relevant conflicts.
- Include a specific thematic session on humanitarian workers' protection and humanitarian access at the 2025 EWIPA Conference.
- Strengthen accountability mechanisms and documentation practices to ensure the effective documentation of explosive weapons attacks on health care services and humanitarian personnel.

Local humanitarian and health workers' security and safety for increased humanitarian access in EWIPA settings

Better include and prioritise the security challenges and meet the specific needs of national and local humanitarian and health workers - in their diversity.

- Increase adequate, systematic and effective funding for robust security risk management mechanisms, training and equipment for all humanitarian operators (both INGOs and LNGOs), local civil protection operators and local health actors in EWIPA contexts.
- Further develop and scale up comprehensive field humanitarian negotiations training, security training, capacity-building and Explosive Ordnance Risk Education initiatives for local staff and partners, emphasising EWIPA context-specific risk mitigation strategies. Where possible, training and capacity building should be more practical, adapted to the local context and less theoretical. Where relevant, this should include capacity building and training on improving tools for communication, with adequate equipment, to prevent and monitor incidents. Enhance training and capacity-building initiatives for local humanitarian and health workers, would empower them with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate risks and challenges in EWIPA environments more effectively.
- Adapt the duty of care and security risk management policies to incorporate EWIPA's specific safety and security risks and integrate the specific protection threats that local partners are exposed to, ensuring that the lived experiences of local and national staff and partners are heard and listened to.
- Convene a donor-NGO-UN hosted dialogue (and inclusive of a wide range of actors such as those from the mine action sector) to support the development of coordinated approaches and common guidelines among donors and implementers to ensure systematic funding of EWIPA specific security risk management costs for all actors, including common understanding of terms associated with security costs, training and capacity strengthening.
- Better support coordination platforms between humanitarian and health workers, security risk management and mine action actors to foster dialogue, exchange good practices, and capture and learn from the experiences of local workers in EWIPA settings.

Communication and coordination across sectors and stakeholders for a more principled and safe humanitarian access in EWIPA settings

Foster coordination and communication between and among national authorities, armed actors and security forces, humanitarian and mine action sectors, and civil society actors, to enhance acceptance of humanitarian actors and operations, information-sharing and joint risk management efforts in contexts where explosive weapons are widely used.

- Develop private dialogue between States (military and diplomacy services) that have endorsed the Political Declaration, as well as non-endorsing states and non-states armed groups, to explore challenges and opportunities to better protect humanitarian and health workers in EWIPA contexts.
- Elaborate policies and guidance on establishing and implementing humanitarian arrangements in EWIPA contexts, in consultation with the armed forces and humanitarian actors, and drawing on lessons learned in EWIPA contexts where such arrangements were established. The limits of such arrangements and a 'do no harm' approach should always be considered, through strong analysis, preparation and understanding of their potential risks. The continued applicability of IHL and the protection of civilians outside of such arrangements – which are often *ad hoc* and temporary – should be acknowledged and promoted.
- Foster and strengthen, where possible in EWIPA contexts, a coordinated space for dialogue with armed actors for safe humanitarian access, with all actors acting in necessary good faith and towards humanitarian objectives. The importance of trusted and efficient neutral intermediaries to facilitate and negotiate humanitarian arrangements should also be acknowledged by States and their role strengthened, including through funding. Improve the lines of communication (formal and informal) between armed actors and humanitarian operators could provide humanitarian actors with timely and relevant information on changes in security risks on the ground that could impact their operations, such as dynamic frontlines or other relevant military activities.
- Ensure coordination and engagement across all relevant actors in EWIPA contexts is funded and strengthened, with the specific impacts of EWIPA on humanitarian safety and access explicitly considered in humanitarian coordination mechanisms such as Access Working Groups, United Nations Civil-Military Coordination (UN CMCoord) platforms, Humanitarian Coordination Teams, and amplified in the Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator's private and public advocacy.
- Support data collection, analysis and sharing efforts that occurs between operational NGOs, UN entities and other humanitarian stakeholders, including via NGO coordination forums, NGO security platforms, UN led working groups (CMCoord, Access WG) and the Saving Lives Together initiative, notably at field level and adapted to local EWIPA contexts, and inclusive of local actors.
- Increase common understanding and efficient use of available data for operational safety in EWIPA contexts between all relevant stakeholders - and sectors. Also, ensure that risk

management and operational staff share information with advocacy colleagues to enable them to strengthen advocacy of aid workers' protection and humanitarian assistance in EWIPA context.

- Reaffirm and promote the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence and work to build trust with States and other armed actors, encouraging proper understanding of and respect for humanitarian principles, including in EWIPA contexts.
- Increase collective advocacy efforts within the humanitarian community and across sectors – including disarmament and mine action and security management - to bring one targeted and strategic voice adapted to EWIPA specific humanitarian needs and situations, towards state and non-state armed actors and parties to the conflict.

Published by Handicap International – Humanity & Inclusion

Website: <http://www.hi.org>

This document was produced with the financial assistances of the European Union and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect their official opinion. First published in July 2024, © Handicap International.

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Cover photo: © Tom Shelton / HI Caption: Buildings in Shejaiya, Gaza, Palestinian Territories - an area largely destroyed during Operation Protective Edge in Summer 2014.