**Topic: The issue of war refugees and humanitarian corridors**

**Overview:**

Although the absolute number of war deaths has declined since 1946, conflict and violence today are on the rise. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, political violence targeting civilians became not only more common but also deadlier in 2022. And, according to the United Nations, civilians account for approximately 90 percent of wartime casualties, and millions of people living in war zones are displaced by conflict.

In the face of deadly conflicts, leaders often call for warring parties to change their behavior for humanitarian reasons, especially to allow safe passage of civilians and aid. Those calls often arise alongside efforts to enforce international humanitarian war law and the laws of war and to stem human suffering. Sometimes those efforts succeed in helping spare human lives, but they often face hurdles.

The Geneva conventions of 1949 laid down protocols to ensure civilians’ access to critical goods such as medicine during times of war.  But the United Nations did not pass a resolution formally recognizing the concept of relief corridors (another term for humanitarian corridors) for strictly humanitarian purposes until 1990.

## **What are humanitarian corridors?**

The United Nations considers humanitarian corridors to be one of several possible forms of a temporary pause of armed conflict.

They are demilitarized zones, in a specific area and for a specific time — and both sides of an armed conflict agree to them.

## **What are they for?**

Via these corridors, either food and medical aid can be brought to areas of conflict, or civilians can be evacuated.

The corridors are necessary when cities are under siege and the population is cut off from basic food supplies, electricity and water.

In cases where a humanitarian catastrophe unfolds because the international law of war is being violated — for example through large-scale bombing of civilian targets — humanitarian corridors can provide crucial relief.

## **Who sets them up?**

In most cases, humanitarian corridors are negotiated by the United Nations. Sometimes they're also set up by local groups. Since all sides need to agree to set up the corridors, there is a risk of military or political abuse. For example, the corridors can be used to smuggle weapons and fuel into besieged cities.

On the other hand, they can also be used by UN observers, NGOs and journalists to gain access to contested areas where war crimes are being committed.

## **Who gets access?**

Access to humanitarian corridors is determined by the parties to the conflict. It's usually limited to neutral actors, the UN or aid organizations such as the Red Cross. They also determine the length of time, the area and which means of transport — trucks, buses or planes — are allowed to use the corridor.

In rare cases, humanitarian corridors are only organized by one of the parties to the conflict. This happened with the American airlift after the Berlin Blockade by the Soviet Union in 1948-1949.

## **Where else have they been used?**

Humanitarian corridors were also created during the 1992-1995 siege of Sarajevo, Bosnia and the 2018 evacuation of Ghouta, Syria.

However, there are many wars and conflicts where calls for civilian corridors or a pause in fighting have been made in vain. In the ongoing war in Yemen, for instance, the UN has so far failed in its negotiations.

**Are safe passages risky for those involved?**

Notwithstanding the agreement of the parties, humanitarian corridors remain hazardous operations. They encompass major risks for the affected populations, the humanitarian personnel involved, and the belligerents concerned. These risks must be managed in a way to minimize the potential damages for all the stakeholders.

Over the past few decades, humanitarian corridors have saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

**Key Definitions:**

* **Cease-fire:** A cease-fire is **an agreement to suspend fighting made by parties to a conflict**. Sometimes also understood as a formal truce, a cease-fire stops military activity in a given area for a given amount of time. Still, a cease-fire does not mean war is over. Hostilities may restart if negotiations between parties do not result in a peace agreement.
* **Humanitarian Pause:** A humanitarian pause is similar to a cease-fire. However, a pause**halts violence in the short-term for the distribution of humanitarian aid**. Unlike a cease-fire, which more often enables dialogue between conflict parties or even steps toward a peace agreement, a pause focuses purely on humanitarian relief. Humanitarian pauses often pertain to a certain area within hostilities to facilitate a specific humanitarian action. Pauses can allow individuals to flee to safety or needed aid to come through.

**Questions To Be Answered:**

* What are the long-term solutions for war refugees beyond humanitarian corridors?
* How to solve political challenges associated with creating and maintaining humanitarian corridors?
* How to solve the challenges that refugees face when trying to flee war zones?
* How to protect civilians from the physical and psychological risks associated with fleeing a war zone?

**Sources:**

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* <https://education.cfr.org/learn/reading/how-do-humanitarian-corridors-cease-fires-and-pauses-address-violence-conflict>